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THE MIDDLE EAST CHANGES, BUT FOREIGN POLICY DOES NOT FOLLOW

The Arab Spring has forced several countries to face an arab world in turmoil, where old alliances and rivalries have been modified by events. All those countries whose foreign policy had been crystallized between friends and foes have been forced to modify their attitude. They had to change their approach and decide, on the wave of social pressure, which horse to bet on, whether to support new leaderships or to refuse them and whether to opt for the benefits of a revolution or to settle for the comfort of restoration. All those alliances and rivalries sedimented over time suddenly crumbled and all foreign policy decision-makers were faced with unexpected choices, maybe painful one, sometimes opportunistic and definitely based more on the emotion of events rather than rationality.

We are all brothers

The Muslim Brotherhood takes over in Egypt? The United States opt to support the liberal and democratic wave across the country. They do so despite the decades long alliance between Washington and the military elite in Cairo. They abandon an isolated, sick and exhausted Hosni Mubarak to his destiny. And, without the necessary question marks such an issue would have required, the U.S. side with the Brotherhood, regardless of their traditional hostility to the American presence in the the region and to the existence of Israel, Washington's historical ally.

Saudi Arabia faces the same problem. The Saudi regime finds itself in the uncomfortable position of having to accept an islamic leadership under the guidance of a group, the Muslim Brotherhood, that is not particularly appreciated by the followers of Wahabism and despite the traditional support the Saudi reign has granted to the Egyptian military. But, with respect to the United States, the Saudis do not open handedly embrace the new Egyptian leadership. They keep themselves at the margin of a formal relationship. Saudi Arabia does not like revolutions and especially those revolts tainted with religious motivations and lead by politicized Islam. In other words: they don't like the Muslim Brotherhood.

Instead, the Brotherhood's takeover is greeted with cheers by Ankara. The events in Cairo resemble those in Turkey: a military elite has been replaced by an islamic party. Mohamed Morsi is perceived as Egypt's Recep Erdogan. The Egyptian Justice and Freedom Party as the Turkish AKP.

It is then for Qatar, a small country with great ambitions. The fall of the Egyptian regime provides Doha with the room to play its own ruthless foreign policy. And the reason is not

the alleged affinity between the Brotherhood and the emirate. It is rather the creeping competition with the Saudis. Ryad fears all those radical Islamic organizations proliferating in the Middle East? This is not an issue for Qatar. It actually offers unchartered territories to develop and consolidate a series of Islamic flavored options in support to everything, both new and old, that is not appreciated by the Saudis.

The North-African springs

The events in Tunisia pose the same sort of issues: a military regime, a revolution, an Islamic party taking over. The United States have once again the same attitude and immediately embrace the alleged wailing of a nascent Tunisian democracy (without thinking too much about the lack of affinity between the U.S. and Rachid Ghannouchi's Salafi Islam). On the other hand, the Saudis hesitate, while Turks and Qatar rejoice. Ryad goes a step further: they offer refuge to Ben Ali.

Rachid Ghannouchi, the exiled Tunisian leader whom for decades had been looked upon with suspicion by the West for the alleged ties between his Ennahda movement and Islamic terrorism, suddenly turns into the icon of an Arab world seeking social justice, democracy and freedom. No one pays any marginal attention to his troubled past. Ben Ali was a convenient dictator for many. Now he is not an autocrat despised by the international community for, together with the Trabelsi family, the systematic embezzlement of the State funds and for human rights violations.

And we now come to Libya. Muammar Gaddafi was not loved by the West, nor by the Arabs. An international military intervention is necessary to oust him. Qatar first pledges and then contributes to the military operations. Saudi Arabia keeps a neutral stance. The United States are pulled in by French activism and concur to the final victory on the ground. Turkey, initially against the intervention because of its good relationship with Gaddafi, moves to a neutral position. Algeria is also against the attack fearing – rightfully – that the defenestration of the Rais will lead to instability and offer room to Islamic terrorism.

Algiers does not look favorably upon Hosni Mubarak's fall in Cairo, nor Ben Ali's demise in Tunis. Algeria has always been ruled by the military, even though through a third person like current president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Algiers has always had a higher degree of empathy for those leaderships more similar to theirs. And it has constantly adversed any radical Islamic faction and terrorism. After all, Algeria has been fighting internal terrorism for over 20 years, thousands of people have been killed and it fears there could be a further contagion from countries with which it had started anti-terrorism cooperation.

From Syria to Palestine

Then Syria comes into the picture. This is not really an issue for the United States: the Alawite regime has always been an enemy for its stance against Israel and its traditional relationship with the Soviet Union yesterday and with Russia today. The issue facing the U.S. is, on a political level, the Russian support to Bashar al Assad (that has prevented any decision being taken at the U.N. and blocked any diplomatic option to get rid of the Syrian dictator) and, on practical terms, how to help the rebellion trying to overthrow the

regime. Washington has encountered a series of difficulties in identifying a credible leadership capable of uniting the rebels. They also have still not decided which types weapons and to whom they should be handed out to. There is the reasonable fear they could fall in the wrong hands.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar face the very same issues. They both politically support the rebellion. But Ryad fears the weapons could be supplied to radical islamic groups and that these, once the war is over, could return home and affect the reign's stability. In fact, there are way too many Saudis among the islamic "volunteers". And many of them receive funding (and thus the possibility of purchasing weapons) from Saudi wahabi charitable organizations. Thus, Syria is for Ryad both a foreign policy issue and a national security one.

Qatar's ruthless behavior allows the gulf state to provide weapons to the rebels regardless of their potential dangerousness. If, as is probable, the Alawite regime were to be replaced by its most credible opposition – the Muslim Brotherhood in this case – Doha has a lot to gain from this change. This is also because, in the course of the different arab springs, Qatar has always taken the sides of the Brotherhood and of all other islamic movements or parties. As opposed to Ryad, Doha's foreign policy is not affected by the Sunni-Shiite competition. It does not host a Shiite community on its territory, does not have any pending issues with Iran and is not linked, as opposed to the Saudis, to the politics of religion.

Positions spread apart also with regard to Palestine. Mohamed Morsi's Egypt had immediately found consonance with Hamas' policies. It couldn't have been otherwise given that Khaled Mashal's movement was a political and religious offspring of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The same was for Qatar: it sided with the movement based in Gaza. Saudi Arabia instead decided to support the PLO. The United States were, once again, floored. They supported Morsi, but were in great difficulty with Mashal's extremism and intemperance. Washington decided to "wait and see" and allowed the words of diplomacy to take the floor: we want peace between Israelis and Palestinians, we hope Mohamed Morsi's influence will lead Hamas to moderate and negotiating terms and we condemn all forms of violence.

A change of situation

This was basically the picture of how foreign policy relationships changed following the Arab springs. A capsizing of ties, alliances and connivances crystallized over time. A series of hard choices, often against nature, but definitely necessary to limit the damages that the new context could have caused to individual national interests.

The assumption was always the same one: people want democracy and social justice, the arab springs represent a yearning for freedom in a region for too long dominated by abuses and prevarications. It is hence right to ride these aspirations. But things were not as clear-cut as they seemed: behind the social upheavals there wasn't only the yearning for democracy, but also requests for social compensation, dire economic conditions and desire for revenge.

So different from what had been imagined, the truth revealed itself for what it really was: when a regime fell social anarchy took over (Libya), once a military dictatorship was chased out pseudo-democracies replaced it together with their Islamic and regressive interpretation of social freedoms (Egypt and Tunisia), the battles for democratic revolutions turned into magnets for jihadists from all over (Syria). There are a few common elements: chaos, deaths, protests, growth of Islamic terrorism. Attacks in Libya, attacks in Syria, attacks in Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia on the brink of civil war.

No exportation of democracy, a phrase dear to the hardly mourned U.S. president George W. Bush. The actors of each national drama changed, but their methods of handling power remained the same. There was then one last evolution: restoration. The first to start were the Egyptians on June 30 2013 with the arrest of president elect Mohamed Morsi. In Tunisia the Islamist-lead democracy is in crisis with way too many opposition deaths in search of an author. In Syria, Bashar al Assad's regime has not fallen, but is now militarily regaining ground.

Historical twists and turns overlap. Everything changes, but, in the end, nothing really does. The issue is now how all those countries that supported the Arab Springs are going to reposition themselves. The United States initially supported Hosni Mubarak and his military elite, they then immediately converted to Mohamed Morsi's ideas and now that General Abdel Fattah al Sissi has taken over what are they going to do? Will they go from supporting the revolution to siding with restoration in a dramatic foreign policy u-turn?

Will Washington support the Tunisian Islamic leadership that has proven incapable of answering to the people's demands, while allowing extremist Salafist groups to proliferate and physically eliminate opponents?

If Bashar al Assad's regime does not fall, but strengthens its position, will it be better to favor the dialogue with Russia or is it really worth supporting a rebellion that has gradually fallen in the hands of groups linked with Al Qaeda?

The issue of where to stand in an Arab and Islamic world in continuous social turmoil and that easily confounds the spring of ideas with the autumn of reality concerns not only the United States. With Morsi in jail Qatar's choices are also penalized, as is Erdogan's imaginary hardly hit, while there are new chances for Riyadh's foreign policy.

While in Tunisia protesters take the streets, does the U.S. have time to rethink its position, for Qatar to withdraw its support to Ennahda or did Saudi prudence prove right once again?

These are all questions that have still not found adequate replies. But one thing is for certain: events within each country now set the agenda of foreign policy decision-makers and not vice-versa. Events anticipate and determine intentions. And after decades of sclerotic immobility, foreign policy in the Middle East – both for the countries in the region and for the West – has a hard time understanding and adapting to a mutating world whose future is still difficult to predict. We are witnessing a series of national stories still without

an ending, but, above all, on whose final outcome external actors' foreign policy will have little or no impact.

WHY THE NIGERGATE

The curious episode that world media have tagged Nigergate refers to an report on the presumed acquisition of uranium for a presumed Iraqi nuclear program. The Nigergate papers became one of the cornerstones in the building of a foundation for the war in Iraq, one of the “smoking guns” regarding the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Baghdad. On January 28, 2003, the then-US President George W Bush stated that Saddam Hussein had recently sought to buy large amounts of uranium from Africa. It was a lie, but within two months' time, that lie would serve to justify the US invasion of the country. In order to understand how the Nigergate files were fabricated, one must contextualize the episode first.

The Axis of evil

After the terrorist attack against the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the USA decided to strike back against the organizations and nations that they deemed to be involved in international terrorism. Apart from Osama bin Laden, self-proclaimed mastermind of the attack, Washington set its aims on Afghanistan, because it harbored the leader of Al Qaeda, and on Iraq, without a real reason.

Saddam Hussein immediately became the emblem of the Axis of evil and was accused – wrongly – of being implicated in international terrorism. Saddam, in fact, for decades at the helm of a secular dictatorship, did not see the religious world with a good eye. He was on the one side countered by a Shiite opposition supported by Iran, and on the other he faced the hostility of the Sunni religious world, supported by Saudi Arabia. Saddam had never had any business with Osama bin Laden or with Al Qaeda. These were things that did not belong to his world or to his way of thinking or acting.

Yet Saddam had become evil incarnate. He was accused of involvement in a nuclear program. The claims were that he was seeking to build a nuclear weapon. There were requests for international inspections, threats and sanctions. To these Saddam Hussein often answered negatively, not because he wanted to hide his WMD's (which nobody ever even saw), but because of national pride and because of his brutal and nationalistic approach to all things. Another character flaw of Saddam's derived from the scarce understanding of the surrounding world, from the influence that international public opinion had on him to the need to make international friends or to wage media battles against his enemies.

His first mistake was that of attacking and invading Kuwait in August 1990. He could have obtained control over the Emirate with more subtle means – a coup d'etat or by giving weapons and money to the opposition – rather than sending his tanks on a full blown invasion. The power relationship between Iraq and Kuwait was so disproportionately in favor of Iraq, that any other alternative to the military invasion could have been easily applied.

The Kuwaiti Emir Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah did not have a good reputation in the Arab world, he was thought to be rich and arrogant. So much that during the invasion, the populations of Palestine and Jordan began celebrating the Emir's ousting in the streets.

In 2001-2003 Saddam Hussein's only fault was that of having held on to power after the first Gulf war. He had lost the war in 1991 against the USA and its allies, his country was occupied by the allied troops, but George Bush Sr. (or rather, George Herbert Walker Bush) had prevented the troops from invading Baghdad. A strategic blunder. Perhaps he thought that such a sound defeat would have automatically caused the downfall of Saddam.

Saddam Hussein thus remained in power, while George Bush Sr., also because of his error in judgment on Iraq, lost the 1993 presidential elections.

Dreams of glory

Back to 2001: On January 20 of that year George Bush Sr.'s son, George W. Bush, aka George Bush Jr., was elected President of the USA. The World Trade Center was destroyed and Bush Jr. would spend his entire presidential mandate waging what he called the war on terror. He again pointed his finger at Saddam Hussein, saying that Saddam was involved in international terrorism. Emotionally speaking (behind a country's policies there is a man, with weaknesses and resentment) Bush probably acted mainly because Saddam had contributed to the downfall of his father's career.

It is at this point that the work to build a framework of evidence and hints that could help the US President justify a war against Iraq began. And it is in this context that Italy came into the picture with the Nigergate story. At that time Italy was closely tied to the United States, also because of the friendship – a well documented and publicized one - between President Bush Jr. and the Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi, whom had just been re-elected in 2001.

Here came into play a third person, the new head of the SISMI, the Italian intelligence service that operates abroad, Niccolo' Pollari.

Pollari was designated at the head of the Italian military intelligence service by Berlusconi – whom was not thoroughly convinced of his loyalty – on October 15, 2001. He was given full powers to fight international terrorism. The SISMI (which has now been renamed AISE after a reform) was an organization that operated under the responsibility of the Prime Minister and that generally designated and delegated, for all issues of control and coordination, an undersecretary.

The good reputation of the head of the Italian secret services depended largely on the positive notes that the other foreign services dispense during political bilateral contacts. This is true especially of the CIA and the Mossad. General Niccolo' Pollari knew it well and was willing to exploit the circumstance. His goal was not just to head the SISMI, he wanted to become the first Commander of the Financial Police to have actually served in that corp (the Italian law said that the office of vice-commander is as high as it gets for a member of the Financial Police, the Commanders usually come from the army). To do this

the law had to be changed and Pollari was working towards this objective by supporting the election of Roberto Speciale as the new Commander of the Financial Police.

Pollari and Speciale had met when the latter was army chief of staff (1999) while the former was vice-director of the CESIS (The organization that monitored and coordinated the two branches of the Italian secret services). Their friendship will be consolidated in October 2003, when Roberto Speciale will be elected Commander of the Financial Guards contrary to the advice of the Army. Niccolo' Pollari, through his relationship with Berlusconi, had gotten Speciale in. Several exchanges of favors followed, both on a professional level (about 850 members of the Financial Police entered the SISMI) and on a personal, or rather familial one.

The “smoking gun”

Back to the events of the years 2001-2003. Berlusconi was Bush Jr.'s friend and Niccolo' Pollari wanted to become Commander and was willing to do anything to achieve his goal. This is when it becomes imperative for Pollari to please the CIA. If he helps the CIA, Berlusconi will be pleased and his career will gain momentum.

After the September 2001 attack, the US are dedicating all of their energies in the fight against terror. The CIA is allowed to carry out dirty operations such as the “extraordinary renditions”, torture and secret prisons. Everything is allowed while pursuing the goal of fighting terror. This policy is supported by other countries that share the US worries over Islamic terrorism (The case of Abu Omar, aka Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr, kidnapped in Milan of February 17, 2003, is an example).

Afghanistan was no doubt implicated since they harbored Osama bin Laden (whom was immediately targeted), not so Iraq. In order to find (or create) all of the circumstances that could justify an American military attack against Saddam Hussein there needed to be a perfect synergy of intelligence. The problem touched the SISMI as well, although indirectly. One had to find the so-called “smoking gun”, the incontrovertible evidence of the Iraqi nuclear aims.

This is when a series of individuals began to spread disinformation, as was later shown in the journalistic investigation carried out by journalists Carlo Bonini and Giuseppe D'Avanzo on the pages of the daily “La Repubblica” in 2005.

The actors of this thriller are an unreliable source, an informer at the Nigerien Embassy in Rome, news and denials that overlap on the newspapers and in the cooperation between various foreign intelligence services (the British MI-6, the French DGRE and, of course, the CIA), but the real protagonist of it all, with its activism, first paraded then denied (when the facts proved without doubt that it was all a lie), was the SISMI led by Niccolo' Pollari.

The recital of an international comedy – or rather, spy-story – the development of which weighed on the individual interests of the players rather than on the object of the controversy.

The media have also played their part by becoming the instrument of diffusion of this disinformation. They worked to accredit truths that were unproven but especially to spread doubts, suspicions and accusations that were also unfounded. It suffices to mention the investigation published in September 2002 by The New York Times in which journalist Judith Miller wrote of aluminum tubes that Saddam would have acquired in order to build his atomic weapon. Or the story published by monthly magazine Panorama about the presumed sale of raw uranium (yellowcake) by Niger to Iraq.

Much disinformation was also of a political nature and was geared at accusing Iraq: the US Ambassador John Negroponte during a speech at the UN, the President George Bush during the State of the Union address on January 2003 and the Secretary of State Colin Powell. Powell was in charge, during a memorable speech before the UN on February 5, 2003, of showing the world the irrefutable evidence of the involvement of Iraq in a weapons of mass destruction program.

Yet despite the gross unreliability of the files on the Nigerian uranium, all parties wanted to believe the story. Especially the two main players: the USA that want to wage war against Iraq, and Pollari, who wants to cash in as much as possible from the operation. Pollari's aim was not the CIA itself, but rather the political management that circles around President Bush and that can spend a good word for Pollari in Italy as well. Niccolò Pollari had several options: not only the Nigergate files but also some good connections with powerful Italian and US media organizations. He is helped in this by the secret services. Pollari does not speak a word of English so he could not make use of the sophistry that support his deceitfulness alone.

The Nigergate files got Pollari in touch with high-ranked Pentagon officials and with the staff of the Secretary of National Security Condoleezza Rice. Pollari also received the support of influent US journalists. In September 2002, the head of the SISMI met with Stephen Hadley, Condi Rice's vice. Everyone was seeking the "smoking gun" and he provided it. Pollari was also supported by the then-head of the CIA, George Tenet, whom was losing consensus after the attack on the World Trade Center and needed to provide his superiors with what they wanted. The research was now totally subordinated to the private interest of the parties involved.

A house of cards

Not everything was to turn out the way Pollari wanted. There is a voice that is contrary to the accusations against Saddam. The US administration had employed a former ambassador, Joseph Wilson, to investigate on the Iraqi-Nigerien lead. In February 2002 the diplomat filed a report in which he incontrovertibly denies the allegations on the acquisition of uranium on the part of Saddam. Yet this report does not change the mind of President George W. Bush and those that follow his lead. Soon the Department of Justice would also investigate a breach of secrecy because the name of a CIA operative had been mistakenly revealed. That operative was none other than Ambassador Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame. Many think that the breach was knowingly caused by the US administration.

Niccolo' Pollari is a quite astute man: he does things but does not let it show. He moves prudently because, like all gold bricks, the Nigergate papers hide an unacceptable factor of risk to them. It is in Pollari's precise interest that the source of the papers remain uncertain. He is helped in his task by the various media outlets and foreign services that bounce the Niger story back and forth. When he is called to testify on the Niger story before the Parliamentary Committee for the Control of the Secret Services (COPASIR) he does not mention – at least in the first session – any written evidence, but only informal voices. As if to speak of rumors, unconfirmed hearsay. In other words, he shields his actions behind a barrier of semantic caution. Later, he will be more self-assured because, in his words, he will have the documented proof of the Iraqi acquisition of material for missile systems. Aluminum tubes. It's called “dual use” material. But for Pollari it has but one use: war.

Pollari's shrewdness goes well beyond words. When he does not feel secure he hides behind the tacit condescension of his superiors. He will do the same this time around and his superiors will defend him once again. When he will realize that the whole Nigergate story has become a grotesque charade that can seriously damage his dreams of glory – especially if he is accredited with the fake paperwork that triggered a war – he will feel the need to bolt. And he will do so once again by invoking the secret of state – as in the trial for the kidnapping of Abu Omar – thanks to the usual compliance of the undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the uncle of Italy's present PM, Gianni Letta. Yet Pollari goes even one step further. He states, during an interview in 2004, that the French secret services are responsible for fabricating the Nigergate evidence.

This was a rather clumsy move, as it was the French DGSE (Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur) that had doubted the authenticity of the Nigergate papers first. The French knew well that the Nigerien mines, where the French acquire 26% of the uranium to run their nuclear power plants, is administered by a French company, AREVA, and that it would be impossible for them to provide such an incredibly large amount (500 tons) of yellowcake, as hypothesized by the Nigergate papers. Furthermore, if someone had tried to transport the uranium from the Arlit or Akouta mines, someone would have surely noticed.

A deadly lie

Yet all of these apparently macroscopic doubts that should have suggested caution to all those people who came in touch with the paperwork never found a listening ear.

The Nigergate story promoted the war in Iraq and a number of other consequences: a useless, wrong war that created anarchy and instability in Iraq. Even now, after 10-year's time, Iraq is a destroyed country overrun by sectary violence. There have been 4.400 American casualties, 35 Italian casualties and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi casualties, the majority of which were civilians. There remains a region caressed by the wind of a social revolt characterized by religion and Islamic terrorism that has spread exponentially.

All of this did not even export that democracy so dear to the rhetoric of the US President George W. Bush.

It was not the Nigergate papers that convinced Bush to wage war on Saddam Hussein. He had already decided. It was, however, one of the pieces used to build a framework of lies to justify the military intervention.

Yet there are those that have gained much from this intelligence scam: the person that prepared the fake papers is now a high-ranked director of the AISE; the person who provided Pollari with his contacts withing the US establishment and among Italian and foreign journalists is also an important director of the AISE.

So although Saddam Hussein paid with his life and Pollari paid with his career, there are others whom have benefited from the scam and continue to benefit from it.

A FORGOTTEN COUNTRY: THE COMOROS

The Comoros islands belong to that part of the globe no one really worries about. They are distant from global main routes, have little or no strategic value, no valuable resources or raw materials and are substantially of no use to anybody. They live their history and their social and economic marginalization in the world's indifference. In Africa, to which they geographically belong to, the Comoros are not an exception: they are a poor country with a prestigious ranking (163rd out of the 187 poorest countries in the world). These islands in the Indian Ocean live off international subsidies and its former colonial power – France – that favored Mayotte's secession in 1974 does not deem the Comoros as strategically valuable anymore.

The Comoros host a small population (734.750 inhabitants as of 2010), 98% of which are muslim and are scattered on three islands (Ngazidja or Great Comoros where 52% of the population lives; Nzwani or Anjouan inhabited by 42% of the people and Mwali or Mohéli, the smallest island) with an overall high density of people per square kilometer. The high demographic rate (2.4%) combined with low life expectancy levels result in 52% of the population of the Comoros having less than 20 years of age. A social time bomb that often produces coups. To make statistics meaningful, since independence in July 1975 there have been at least 21 putsch attempts in the Comoros (with only Ecuador doing better in the same time span), a figure no one has paid adequate attention to.

The Denard school

The latest failed coup attempt has been on April 20 2013. The event was delivered with prominence by the media because an opposition party, the Ridja (Rassemblement pour un initiative de developpement avec la jeunesse avertie), and three NGO's have accused the French government for its alleged role in the putsch. Among the 15 people arrested, there was a French mercenary, two other frenchmen (a businessman and the sister of a Congolese mercenary), some french-comorians, other congolese and chadian mercenaries and some local counterparts.

The French mercenary was Patrick Klein, a man linked to now defunct soldier of fortune icon who died in 2007 and who used to live in South Africa Bob Denard. Klein had already attempted a coup in the Comoros in 1995. Together with him were a former colonel from the congolese army now in exile in France and alumni of the Saint Cyr military academy and a chadian colonel (also a Saint Cyr alumni).

Ridja's president Said Larifou would like to shed light on this latest episode in the hope that the French investigation identifies the instigators of the coup and unveils their goals. Larifou has little or no trust in the investigation carried out by the Comorian government. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the coup d'état was conceived and organized in Paris. It is there that Klein had contacted, recruited and paid (from 10 to 20 thousand euros) his mercenaries. So there is a backer (still not known), some soldiers of fortune (all known) and an instigator (not clearly identified yet).

The suspicion, whether legitimate or not, is that the putsch was aimed at avoiding the quinquennial rotation of the presidency of the country to each of the three islands, as stated in a 2001 peace agreement that prefigured a “Unions of the Comoros” and greater autonomy for each island. This system, at least in the intentions of its proponents, should have granted a representative institutional structure (and it did do so for some time). Problems arose when in 2010 then president Ahmed Abdallah Sambu tried to extend his mandate beyond its constitutional deadline. Following negotiations between all major parties, on May 26 2011 Ikililou Dhoinine from the island of Mohéli was democratically elected president. Dhoinine's mandate expires in 2016, but maybe this detail – in a country where power is historically taken by force and rarely through elections – constituted the premise to speed up preparations for the umpteenth coup d'état.

The Abdallah dynasty

In its turbulent advance, the Comoros' political history has always encountered two main actors: the mercenaries (Bob Denard until 2007 and then his acolytes) and the Abdallah family. Besides from the soldiers of fortune who ventured into the capital Moroni in April 2013 to carry out the coup, there was the collaboration of at least 12 other military and political characters. In fact, it seems that even this latest coup attempt was undertaken by one of the several sons of now defunct president Ahmed Abdallah: Mahamoud.

Ahmed Abderamane Abdallah, the family's patriarch, was elected president of the Comoros Republic in July 1975 and was defenestrated in a putsch only a month after his appointment by Bob Denard and the men lead by Ali Solih. Three years later another coup: this time Ali Solih succumbed and was killed by the mercenaries who brought Ahmed Abdallah back in power. Once again it was Bob Denard who was playing two roles in the same comedy: once in favor of Solih, then in support of Abdallah.

In October 1979 Ahmed Abdallah won presidential elections again, but – as has often happened in this part of the world – his mercenary supported democracy turned into a dictatorship. He founded a one party system in 1982 and, two years later, was re-elected thanks to this subterfuge. After surviving a coup attempt by the Republican Guards, on November 26 1989 Abdallah was killed in a putsch. Who was behind it? The answer is always the same: Bob Denard.

From that moment onwards, with the patriarch dead, his sons took over the political scene and its turbulent subversions. In 1992 the twins Abderemane and Sheikh are arrested for a failed coup attempt together with a half-brother. The Abdallah clan resurfaces in September 1995 together with Bob Denard in the attempt of overthrowing President Djohar and of freeing the two twins (whose death penalty had been commuted to life in prison). Mission accomplished.

It is then for another brother, Mahmoud, to try to overthrow the government together with Abderemane in 2000. Both are arrested and freed a few months later. And finally, in the latest episode of the saga in April 2013, it is once again Mahmoud – even though there is still a lack of evidence to support the strong suspicions – that tried his luck together with a

bunch of mercenaries. Their aim was to get rid of Comoros' current president Ikililou Dhoinine, the army's chief of staffs Col. Yussouf Idjihadi and of another high ranking official, Col. Ibrahim Ahamada.

The Abdallah dynasty, even though at present far less than in the past, are economically relevant in the Comoros. They basically monopolize the country's import-export, have vast real estate properties and this might lead them to feel predestined to rule over the country, regardless of democracy and at all costs.

The family is extremely close and is made up of five brothers and four sisters (who are not involved in politics). In spite of them not being at the helm, the members of the Abdallah family still hold key positions in the Comoros. Sheikh is the military attaché of the Embassy in Paris. His twin brother Abderemane is an MP at the National Assembly and is in charge of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Another brother, Salim, that has not been involved in politics, presides over the board of directors of the Central Bank of the Comoros. The eldest brother, Nassuf, is an advisor to president Dhoinine. In the past, he has been deputy president of the National Assembly, ambassador to South Africa and counselor of late president Anjounan.

So why, since it seems that the current president and the members of the Abdallah family are in good terms, did Mahmoud try to remove him?

The implicit answer is that Mahmoud had strong links with former and now defunct president Mohamed Taki Abdulkarim. Successively his political star slowly eclipsed. He could have acted alone – with the support of people with ties to Taki – and in competition with his more politically competent brothers. Regardless of that, the Abdallah clan does feel destined to rule over the Comoros. And if Mahmoud lead the conspirators, the militarized system ruling over the clan lead his brothers to side with him and, after his arrest, to obtain his release.

Evaluation mistake

A country hopping from one coup to the next, where the main income comes from coconuts, a lost corner of the world where democracy is a scarcely applied option, what place does it hold in globalization?

The answer goes by the name of Fazul Mohamed Abdallah, a Comorian terrorist and member of Al Qaeda involved in the attacks against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 who then transited into the Somali al Shabaab before being killed in 2011.

Why does a country with low public spirit, unbearable poverty levels (45% of the population lives below the poverty line and average yearly income is 750 USD) and where social injustice is rampant, create the conditions for the growth of individuals who have nothing to lose and who end up embracing the sole ideology – Islam in this specific case – providing pseudo-alibis to their behavior and an aim in life?

Regardless of their size, the Comoros have given their contribution to the instability of the world thanks to the lack of attention of the globe surrounding them.