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## **NIGERIA, A GIANT WITH NO FUTURE**

Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world, ranked 144<sup>th</sup> out of 177 by Transparency International, where almost 70 percent of the people live below the poverty line. Corruption is so voracious that an estimated 400 billion dollars of public funds have vanished since independence. The security forces, politicians and magistrates are corrupt, but the top prize for the most corrupt official of all times goes to Sani Abacha. During his presidency, he systematically embezzled between 2 to 3 percent of Nigeria's GDP. But all military rulers have behaved along the same lines, regardless of their religion or ethnic group.

### **Corruption in power**

Current Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, first elected in 2011, is also going down the same path with the active participation of some of his ministers. But no one investigates. The latest episode of corruption is dated February 2014 when the Nigerian Parliament annulled the sale of the exploitation rights over oil block OPL 245, whose estimated reserves top 9 billion barrels. Originally assigned to a local company called Malabu Oil, owned by one of Abacha's sons and by the Minister of Petroleum Resources of the time, the oil block was sold, with the help of Shell, for 1.1 billion dollars to the Italian oil company Eni and its local subsidiary Agip. The exorbitant amount of money paid was filtered first by Nigerian authorities and then by Malabu Oil whom, in turn, distributed the sum to a series of nameless bank accounts. The allegation floating in the air is that President Jonathan may be among the concealed beneficiaries. And now that the deal has been canceled, it is unclear whether the Italian oil company will ever see any of the money it paid.

Corruption is systematic in Nigeria. Anyone with power will demand a bribe. It is so rooted that it has become a means of survival and a source of subsistence. It is the basis on which the entire economic system lies on. And it is so widespread that it hardly makes the news anymore. Corruption is just part of the rules of the game in Nigeria.

What makes the African country special, or terribly banal, is its enormous oil wealth which could, at least in theory, feed Africa's most populated nation. Oil and gas reserves, in fact, amount to 95% of foreign currency income and fuel the entire corruption pipeline. A yearly influx of about 100 billion dollars satiating the hunger of a few selected individuals, while the masses starve.

## **Some have it all**

25 percent of Nigerians are unemployed; 70 percent of the population works in agriculture; 40 percent are illiterate. The oil industry alone could potentially absorb all the unemployed, but it accounts for a mere 10% of the country's workforce. If the average pro-capita income is of about 2.700 USD per year, there are a few people who eat four chickens and way more that eat none. There is no other industry, infrastructures are in decay and oil is the typical African word that rhymes with doom. Not for everyone, of course. Nigeria is one of the major importers of luxury vehicles in the continent: Porsche, Ferrari and Mercedes roam freely on the roads of Lagos or Abuja. Among the 40 wealthiest Africans, 11 are Nigerians.

The result of such an uneven distribution of wealth is social instability, growing discontent and endemic forms of uprising and terrorism. Radical Islamic groups, like Boko Haram, gain supporters not only on religious grounds, but mainly for economic reasons. Islam has been capable of channeling the resentment of the people of northern Nigeria, who are majority Muslim and also among the poorest in the country.

The State of Sokoto, among the 36 Federal States composing Nigeria, is home to the Hausa and its unemployment rate is over 80 percent. In the south of Nigeria, where most oil reserves are located, those without a job are half as much.

## **From discontent to terrorism**

The social divide between Muslims and Christians has become the excuse to provide a religious angle to an economic issue.

If Boko Haram represents the people's dissatisfaction in the north of Nigeria, the same role is played by MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of Niger's Delta) down south. MEND's official logo contains the motto "non violent, progress, freedom" when the group has gone to war against central authorities to achieve its political goals. MEND does not have a religious agenda, even though the threats of attacking Boko Haram to revenge its attacks against churches hints to the fact that most of its members may be Christian.

What MEND and Boko Haram have in common is their fight against the government. The Movement claims a greater share of oil revenues for its people and fights against the environmental pollution that is destroying any alternative to oil, such as fishing or agriculture. The Nigerian authorities have tried to negotiate with MEND, in 2009 an amnesty was signed for 26 thousand of its combatants, who were promised a series of economic incentives that were never delivered. The outcome of the government's broken promises was the return of MEND on the scene in 2013. Their main sources of funding remain the same: the kidnapping of oil workers (better if foreign), the contraband of oil and weapons. Their return to arms coincided with the 24 years jail term for terrorism related charges handed in South Africa to its historic leader, Henry Okah.

## **A giant resting on feet of clay**

Statistical data implies Nigeria is a fast growing and emerging economy rising 6-8% every year. But there are also other figures to look at. Demographical data, for instance, shows population is growing at a 3.8 percent rate. This means that the current 300 million Nigerians will double over the next 20 years. Without a policy of wealth redistribution, that 40 percent of people who now have less than 14 years of age, summed with the 19 percent below 24, will equal chaos and social violence. If we project this data in the future, the social turmoil affecting Nigeria today will be nothing compared to what we should expect of tomorrow. The only factors mitigating such a scenario are a low life expectancy rate, a mere 52 years at birth, and a high infant mortality rate, 14% of the world's total according to the WHO.

Nigeria has also always been in the spotlight for human rights abuses. Freedom of the press is written in the Constitution, but the arrests and disappearances of journalists, especially of those writing against the powerful, are recurrent. The judiciary is also allegedly independent, but corruption often dictates the outcome of a sentence. Police will investigate if you pay, will arrest or free you if you pay, will convict or acquit you if you pay.

If Boko Haram are accused of crimes against humanity, and for this reason blacklisted among the terrorist groups (since September 2013 by the UK and November 2013 by the US), the Nigerian security forces cannot show off a better human rights record. Ever since May 2013, when Nigerian President Jonathan decreed the state of emergency in some of the northern States, the abuses inflicted on the civilian population by both Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces have become systematic. These include attacks, suicide bombings, kidnappings, extortions, rapes and extra-judicial killings. The self defense militias authorized by the government have also joined the parade and contributed to the violations. The civilian population is caught in the middle and, especially the weakest among them, the women, have become the primary targets of violence.

The issue is, hence, what priorities does a country, or an international community, have. You'll never end up in jail for corruption in Nigeria if your friends are influential, nor will you get locked up for drug trafficking in one of the countries traffickers use to reach Europe. At the same time, you can be convicted to 14 years in prison for a gay marriage, or to 10 years behind bars if you show your homosexuality in public. These provisions have come into force on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and were signed by president Goodluck Jonathan, whose drop in popularity lead him to pull the classic rabbit out of the hat. Nigeria will vote for a new president in 2015 and it is yet unclear whether the incumbent president will run for a new term in office.

The question could be why no one really cares about what happens in Nigeria. There is a simple reply to the query: Nigeria is a big country, it is emerging demographically and economically, it is filled with oil and natural resources, it contributes heavily to the UN's peacekeeping missions. This is more than enough to have the international community look the other way.

## **ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA: A LONG HISTORY**

Nigeria stands on the border between the Islamic influence, whose expansion came from the continent's north and east, and the Christian one, that moved its first steps in Africa along with those of the European colonizers landing on its coasts. And just like any other African country, Nigeria's map at independence reflected the interests of the colonizers, but not the characteristics of the people comprised within its boundaries.

In a context of widespread poverty and inequality affecting a large portion of the population, religious, tribal and social discontent collide to trigger uprisings and fights. In Nigeria's case, upheavals are extremely violent. Religious fueled clashes have been historically recurrent and what we witness today with Boko Haram is deeply rooted in history.

### **A long history**

Islam came to Nigeria between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was carried along with the merchandise of the Arabic merchants coming from Palestine and the Arabian peninsula who crossed the Sahara desert from coast to coast.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the empire of Kanem-Borno (north-east of present Nigeria) was the first to convert. The reign was the junction point between the north African berbers and the Bantu people. Its flourishing commercial centers stood for almost 600 years. From Kanem-Borno, Islam spread to other Hausa states in the north-west of Nigeria, the principal ones being Kano and Katsina.

By the time the first European colonizers arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic religion had already conquered the major cities in the north of the country and the highlands. Merchants were the first to convert, but were soon followed by the monarchies and their courts.

Only two centuries later will the Christian missionaries, who until then had been blocked on the coast by malaria and the tsetse flies, venture inland and make the first contact with the Muslim populations of Nigeria. The Ibo tribes living on the coast were the first ones to be evangelized by the Catholics, while the Yoruba were converted by the Anglicans.

It is around that time that the divide between Christians in the south and Muslims in the north first appeared in Nigeria. In between stood a buffer zone of animist and syncretic religious beliefs that are part of Africa anywhere you go.

### **Ethnic groups and their religion**

There are over 200 ethnic groups or clans (but some sources estimate twice as much) in Nigeria; they, in turn, are divided into subgroups. Each of these groups, besides from its peculiar culture and tribal characteristics, also has its specific religion.

The main groups are the Hausa and the Fulani in the north (mainly muslim), the Ibo in the south-east (majority Christian and/or animist), the Yoruba in the south-west and central Nigeria (equally split between Muslims, Christians and animists) and the Kanuri from

Borno (predominantly muslims). The traditional Nigerian religious beliefs are pantheistic, meaning they worship a supreme God and other deities, including elements from their environment, animals and objects.

Numerically speaking, Christians and Muslims are equally represented, even though the Islamic portion of the population accounts for 50 percent of Nigerians against the 40 percent of Christians. Some data claims the exact opposite. The reader should bear in mind that all these figures refer to the last census carried out in Nigeria and which dates back to 1963. The central government has avoided releasing any recent data to restrain from fueling further unrest.

Nigerian muslims are predominantly Sunni, the Shiites are a minority of 4 to 6 million people and also embed some syncretic rituals. All major Sufi confraternities, such as the Qadiryah, Mouridyah and Tijanyah, are also present in Nigeria. They historically competed against one another to prevail over their opponents. Salafist radical groups, such as Boko Haram, are limited. Currently, out of 36 Nigerian States, nine fully apply the Islamic Sharia law, while three of them use it only partially.

The Christians, on the other hand, are mainly Protestants (and 75 percent of them are Anglicans), while the Catholics are a 25 percent minority, concentrated among the Yoruba and the Ibo.

The distinction between a Muslim north and a Christian south, or the labeling of an ethnic group with a specific creed, are not as rigid as they might seem. For instance, five percent of the Hausa are Christians, while several Yoruba are Muslims.

### **The spreading of radical Islam**

Boko Haram were not the first ones to wage a war against the central government, but are just the last on a long list. Every time there was an upheaval, it carried along a mixture of religious, social and inter-ethnic elements. Since independence on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960, Nigeria has witnessed brief periods of democracy, interspersed with long years of military rule and, in between, the Biafra civil war at the end of the 60s.

The history of radical Islam in the north of the country dates back to the deeds of Osman Dan Fodio at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his fight against the British colonizers and the local monarchies, Fodio waved the flag of pure Islam and refused all Western habits.

Two centuries later, in 1977, the reformist movement known as Yan Izala (Jama'at izalat al-bidd'a wal iqamat al sunna, i.e. community for the elimination of the heresies and the affirmation of the Sunna) fought against the Sufis and their moderate vision of Islam. The followers of this movement attacked and occupied the mosques founded by the different confraternities.

This first radical movement was soon followed by the anti-modernists from Maitatsine (Yan Tatsine, or 'refusal of the status quo' in Hausa), who waged an armed combat. The movement refused and labeled as "non-Islamic innovations" the use of watches, bicycles

and Western clothing. Covertly financed by Nigerians living in Saudi Arabia, the group was erased by a series of military operations that caused over four thousand deaths.

Then Boko Haram came about (whose full name is "Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunna li-da'wa wal Jihād", i.e. Association for the Sunna, the religious message and the jihad, whose abbreviation in Hausa is Boko Haram, meaning 'Western education is a sin') together with the theories proposed by its leader, Mohamed Yusuf. Yusuf continued the fight against Western influence carried out by the Maitatsine and, at the same time, refused the reformist and innovatory approach of the Yan Izala. Since 2009, Yusuf's theories have sparked a series of terrorist attacks not only against Christians, but also against fellow moderate Muslims.

Besides from Boko Haram, a myriad of other radical Islamic sects have proliferated in Nigeria during the last few years. Groups like "Atadjit" (of anti-US inspiration), financed by the Wahabis and linked to another extremist organization as the "Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs", the "Al Sunna Wal Jamma" ("The followers of the Sunna"), better known as the Nigerian talebans, and the "Hijra" aka "Muhajirun" ("Migration"), tied to similar groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Lately another sect has surfaced in north-eastern Nigeria, the 'Vanguard for the protection of the Muslims in the lands of the blacks', also known with the acronym of Ansaru (from the name of its founder, Abu Osmatul Ansari); the group is none other than a splinter faction of Boko Haram and is allegedly in contact with AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb).

Along the Islamic sects, there are also a number of Nigerian political parties that seek consensus and votes on religious grounds (not forcibly only from radical stances) such as the All People's Salvation Party, the Islamic Democratic Progressive Party, the National Party of Nigeria and the Arewa People's Congress.

On the opposite front of the Christians, there are also a series of sects or, better defined, African churches assimilated to local cultural aspects (such as the Cherubim and the Serafin), while other groups simply pop up when an alleged prophet comes to town. Some of these churches are also radical.

### **The outcome of a war**

Since the start of the 80s, it is estimated that inter-religious clashes have caused more than 25 thousand deaths in Nigeria. The fact that there was a conspicuous external funding for these groups, mainly from the Saudis and the Libyans (when Khadafi was still alive), added an additional economic motivation to the activities of the radical groups. A factor one necessarily has to account for in a country with a disastrous economy as Nigeria is.

According to data from the UN, Boko Haram are responsible for 550 deaths in 2011, 750 in 2012, 1300 since May 2013 and until the end of that year. Over 50 churches have been set on fire or attacked. At the same time, around 60 moderate Islamic preachers have also been assassinated.

The Nigerian army has tried to intervene to eliminate the menace coming from Boko Haram. Following the killing of Mohamed Yusuf (2009), his successor, Abubakr Shekau, was also allegedly wounded and killed together with his right hand man, Momodu Bama (aka Abu Saad). Nevertheless, the decapitation of the group's leaders did not stop the killings, nor Boko Haram's activities, as the recent kidnapping of about 200 girls in north-eastern Nigeria proves.

Whether the attempts to eliminate the radical sect will succeed or not, there is an underlying fact that has emerged: the fracture between Nigerian Christians and Muslims and the ethnic clashes that followed between Hausa and Fulani on one side and Ibo and Yoruba on the other. And it will be extremely difficult to overcome this spiral of hatred.

## **ISRAEL, TECHNIQUES FOR TARGETED KILLINGS**

On April 16, 1988, Israel decided to eliminate the individual who was considered to be the main responsible for the first Palestinian Intifada, which had started four months before. The target was Khalil al Wazir, also known with his 'battle' name of Abu Jihad, one of the top members of Fatah. Abu Jihad was a comrade of Yasser Arafat from the very start and considered by Israel their number one enemy. Abu Jihad was to become but the first of a long list of individuals whose physical elimination was meant to decapitate the Intifada. A commando of 26 men arrived by submarine off the coast of Tunisia, reached the shore by means of inflatable vessels and landed on the beach near Tunis. The 26, who wore civilian clothes and Tunisian police uniforms, silently neared the villa where Abu Jihad was sleeping and took out the security guards before entering Abu Jihad's room and murdering him with silenced firearms. The men then returned to the beach where they had landed, climbed back on board their boats and made their way back to the submarine. In the meantime, an airplane was busy flying over the Tunisian airspace with the intent of scrambling electronic signals and the telephone network. Once the 26 men were safe on the submarine, they were taken back to their base; the entire operation, which had lasted 30 minutes, had been carried out successfully without any of the 26 being wounded or killed.

Likewise, on December 2013, a motorboat neared the beaches south of Beirut. The time was close to midnight and the city was quiet. The commando that disembarked from the motorboat was picked up by a car that was waiting for them. They were driven to the home of an important member of the military wing of Hezbollah, Haj Hassan Hilu Al Laqis, who was very close to the leader of the Shiite movement, Hassan Nasrallah. The men sat waiting for Al Laqis' return in the parking lot underneath his home and, when the target drove in on board his armoured vehicle, they sprang into action. Al Laqis was killed by five bullets to the head and neck, all of them fired by silenced firearms. Just a few minutes had elapsed from their arrival and the commando had already carried out its task, returned to the beach, boarded their motorboat, and disappeared.

### **History repeats itself**

Twenty-five years have elapsed between the two murders, but the technique has not changed, as has the disinformation that follows the act; a Sunni group immediately claimed responsibility for the murder of Al Laqis, fueling suspicion that the murder had occurred as a consequence of the feud between Sunni and Shiites, which did not see eye-to-eye on the Syrian situation.

The Sunni group published its message on the same website on which, a month earlier, the so-called "Brigade Abdullah Azzam" had claimed responsibility for the attack against the Iranian embassy in Beirut where 23 people had died (Nasrallah had blamed the Saudis for the attack). The Israelis immediately denied their involvement in the killing through the statements of their minister of Strategic Affairs and Intelligence, Yuval Steinitz, and their minister of Energy, Silvan Shalom.

In the past, Al Laqis had been the target of at least nine elimination attempts by the Mossad; all of them had failed. On July 20, 2006, an Israeli F-16 had fired missiles against

his apartment in Beirut but he was not in. Then, as he was staying in Tyre and Sidon, in the south of Lebanon, one of his telephone conversations with his father had been tapped. Within minutes, a missile had hit the car in which the Israelis thought that he was traveling. On that occasion, just a few seconds had passed between the telephone conversation and the airstrike, during which time Al Laqis had managed to climb out of the car. Al Laqis had become a symbol for Israel because he was deemed to be the inventor of the defense system that had cost Israel their defeat in the 2006 war against Hezbollah. Al Laqis was also a close friend of Imad Mughnyeh, another target and victim of the Israeli 'kill list'.

The several attempts to end Al Laqis' life demonstrate his importance in the eyes of the Israelis. Al Laqis was instrumental in the re-arming of the Hezbollah, in the smuggling of arms into Gaza, in the technological development of their weapons, in the overall organization of the group and was a member of the council of the Jihad, the group that planned operations against Israel. He was also personally implicated in the Syrian war and represented the main contact with Iran and the Shiite movement. His killing was a clear message to Teheran.

Haji Hassan Hilu Al Laqis was wanted by the FBI and by the Canadian intelligence because he was accused of introducing, during the 90's, a number of clandestine individuals into the US and Canada who used illegal financing (through counterfeit documents, credit cards, etc.) to buy equipment and technology used in the re-armament of the Hezbollah. These individuals had also planned a number of attacks against Jewish targets. The group was apprehended by police but, even then, Al Laqis had managed to save himself by deciding not to travel to the US on that occasion.

### **From one black list to the next**

The war between Israel and its enemies has never ceased. It is a conflict riddled with killings, some well known and others anonymous, which has seen, along the years, the strong involvement of the Mossad and other components of the Israeli army.

Israel's black list changes according to the priority of the targets within it. In the past, the first positions of the list were occupied by the heads of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), including Arafat himself. Later, these slots were filled by other Palestinian factions that were more active in the armed fight against Israel. Lately, the top positions are occupied by the military heads of Hamas in Gaza, those of the Islamic Jihad, the Iranian scientists working on the nuclear program in Teheran and, finally, by the Hezbollah; the Shiite organization is considered today the main military threat against the Hebrew State and this justifies the obstinacy with which Israel pursues the elimination of its members.

The elimination operations carried out by Israel have assumed different configurations, depending on the environmental circumstances and on the targets involved.

For the killing of Iranian scientists, Israel used several methods: magnetic bombs attached to their cars, (On November 29, 2010, in Teheran, against Madjed Shariari who was killed and, on the same day, against Fereidoun Abbassi Davani, who managed to escape the attack unscathed; on January 11, 2012, against Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan; on January 20, 2012, against Mohammad Esmail Kosari) pistol shots from motorbikes (In July 2011, in

Teheran, against Darius Rezaeineja, who was waiting for his son outside school), bombs placed on parked bikes, (January 12, 2010, against Massoud Ali Mohammadi) and, finally, the explosion of a missile warehouse (On November 12, 2011, against General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam). This wave of killings clearly suggests that there exists or existed an operative group of individuals piloted by the Israeli intelligence in the Iranian capital.

The most important elimination against the Hezbollah were that of Abbas al Musawi on February 16, 1992. Musawi, the leader of the Hezbollah, the 'party of God', was killed in the south of Lebanon by a missile that was launched against his car by an Israeli army Apache helicopter. His wife, a son of five and several bodyguards of his were also killed in the explosion. With Musawi dead, the 'party of God' was taken over by Hassan Nasrallah, who immediately became the new target on Israel's radar. Immediately, the Israelis tried to take him out like they had done with his predecessor, by launching a missile from a helicopter, but missed.

From that day on, the leader of the Hezbollah has become more prudent. He avoids appearing in public most of the time and keeps his movements secret. During his latest appearances he wore a bullet-proof vest and was always shielded by a so-called "ballistic blanket" to protect himself against explosions. His security service is comprised of family members that employ canine units for protection. When Nasrallah does appear in public, he does so only if the area is monitored by video-cameras. All of these precautions have not, however, deterred Israel from trying to murder him.

In October 2008 there were rumors of an attempt to poison Nasrallah – which he denied – that was allegedly thwarted by the intervention of Iranian medics. In July and August 2011, Israel had launched rockets against a location in Beirut where they thought that Nasrallah was holding a meeting with other members of the Hezbollah; both attempts failed. In November 2013, a Lebanese Sunni leader called Sheykh Saeddin, who was very close to the Hezbollah, was murdered by shots fired from a moving motorbike in Beirut (the same technique used with some of the Iranian scientists).

Imad Mughniyeh, the head of the military arm of the Hezbollah, whom both Israel and the USA had tried to capture for 20 years, was killed in Damascus on February 12, 2008, by a car-bomb as he was taking a stroll in the streets of the Syrian capital. Mughniyeh was a difficult target to hit because he was very cautious. He had gone to the extent of having facial surgery carried out on himself in order to pass unrecognized. Before the advent of Osama Bin Laden, Mughniyeh topped the Mossad's and the CIA's international terrorists' most wanted list. The Americans had placed a five million dollar prize on his head because of his alleged participation in some of the most deadly terrorist attacks of the 80's and 90's: the attack against the US Embassy in Beirut in April 1983; the Beirut barracks bombings in 1983; the hijacking of the TWA flight in 1985; the murder of the CIA station chief in Beirut in 1985; the attack against the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992; the attack in Khobar (Saudi Arabia) in 1996. Mughniyeh was also implicated in several kidnappings. As was the case with Al Laqis, the Mossad, with a lot of patience and after a number of failed attempts, finally managed to achieve his elimination.

### **From Iran to Hezbollah and to Hamas**

As we have mentioned, the heads of Hamas were placed at the top of Israel's kill list a long time ago. Yahya Abdul Latif Ayyash, a man involved in the preparation of bombs used in suicide attacks, was eliminated in January 1996 by the explosion of a rigged telephone. The telephone had been given to him by a relative who had sided with the Israeli Shin Bet. When Yahya called his father, the mobile phone that he used was detonated from a distance by the Israeli intelligence and he was blown to bits.

Salaheddin Mustafa Ali Shehada, the head of the Ezzedin al Qassem brigades – the armed wing of the movement – was eliminated in July 2003 by an F-16 which dropped a bomb on the building where he was lodged. Ahmad al Ghul, also an artificer of Hamas, was killed in October 2004 by a missile launched from an Apache helicopter against his car (another member of Hamas, Imad Abbas, was killed together with Salaheddin).

But not all of Israel's attacks against Hamas were successful. The leader of the organization, Khaled Meshal, is an example of this. There have been numerous attempts at his life since his designation at the head of Hamas in 1996. In September 1997, for instance, as he walked the streets of Amman, Khaled was attacked by a commando comprised of five Mossad agents who, posing as Canadian tourists, tried to inject poison in his ear.

Some of the members of the group were arrested while others found refuge inside the Israeli embassy. In order to free its agents, Israel was allegedly forced to give Jordan the antidote to save the life of Meshal. Since that day, Khaled Meshal saved himself from being killed by moving to Qatar, then to Syria and finally, when the civil war in Syria began, back to Qatar. His fleeting appearance in Gaza in December 2012 was on occasion of a public event for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Hamas, but he could not be hit then because he was surrounded by a huge crowd and in the presence of foreign delegations.

There are other members of Hamas who were not so lucky. Sheykh Ahmed Yassin, the historical leader of the group, was killed on March 2004, when two helicopters launched missiles against his trademark wheelchair. The nearing of the helicopters had been scrambled by the traces left by Israeli jet fighters flying over the strip at a very low altitude. His immediate successor, Abdul Aziz Rantissi, was murdered in April 2004 by means of another missile launched from an Israeli helicopter.

Another Hamas leader, Mahmoud al Mabhouh, who procured weapons for the organization, had close ties with Iran and was accused by Israel of capturing and killing two soldiers, was killed in a Dubai hotel in January 2010; he was drugged and strangled by Mossad agents who had traveled to the Emirates using false European passports. A team of agents stationed at the airport, waiting for Mabhouh's arrival, while another group was at the hotel to spy on him in his room. The last group of agents to arrive was the one tasked with his execution which they, rather clumsily, attempted to disguise as an accidental death (one of the Israeli agents had struggled with Mabhouh when trying to inject him with a paralyzing drug, thus leaving traces of his DNA on the body).

### **Israeli synergy**

The Mossad is a secret service that often recurs to the physical elimination of the enemies of the Israeli state. It's operative capability in covert and clandestine operations is very

highly considered internationally. The Mossad is supported in its operations by the special forces of the army (which are commanded by the Directorate to Military Intelligence) and is thus – in a spirit of operative synergy – often sided with the “Syaret Matkal” (“reconnaissance unit of the General Staff”), who often operate in counter-terrorism and liberation of hostages behind enemy lines. One famous case was the 1977 liberation of the Israeli hostages from an airliner hijacked by Palestinian terrorists at the airport in Entebbe, Uganda.

We will not discuss the legitimacy of the elimination operations because there are victims in every war and the war among spies is no different from a classical war fought on the terrain in this respect. Either way, whether the killing of an adversary by means of a covert or clandestine operation is called 'murder' or not doesn't change the result thereof.

It is likewise useless to dwell on the statements of the former US Federal District Court Judge Abraham David Sofaer, who was the legal assistant to the Secretary of State George Schultz during the 80's. Sofaer, apart from considering the killings to be acts of self-defense, went so far as justifying the loss of civilian lives in the process. This aspect of the operations is by far the more controversial among the global public opinion. Eliminating an enemy can sometimes make sense, but to kill his son or wife (as in the case of Abbas Mussawi) or any other innocent bystander (as in the tens of dead caused by the attack on Sleheddin Shehada – including his wife and children; or in the elimination of Sheykh Yassin, which caused just as many civilian casualties; or in that of Abdul Aziz Rantissi, where his son was killed) makes the entire operation less acceptable. This is often the problem with the aerial incursions of the Israeli helicopters in Gaza and with those of the US drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even Osama bin Laden debated the legitimacy of causing civilian casualties, as shown in a document found in his Abbottabad home (the debate was with regards to the Taliban attacks in Afghanistan and on Abu Musab al Zarqawi's operations in Iraq).

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen in the course of this article, the techniques of elimination used by the Mossad and the special forces of the Israeli army vary according to the operative opportunities (the existence of operative groups, undercover agents, or sources on the ground), the environmental context, the precautions to take or the dangerousness of the designated target. It is a tough job where the final result is the only worthy prize and where we must therefore include in the balance not only the instances when the target is eliminated, but all the other failed attempts at his/her life as well.

Technology is clearly a powerful ally in this field. With it, elimination techniques can be further refined and diversified; when there is a technological advancement, the elimination activity also develops and the risks thereof are reduced. The eliminations of Abu Jihad and of Al Laqis are surely a professional way of carrying out such operations, although they are equally dangerous. In these cases, the operations were carried out only once there was an operative network in place and when the probabilities of success were very high. In the case of Al Laqis, the structure was in place and was controlling communications, as confirmed by the recent discovery by the Lebanese authorities of a Lebanon-based network of spies employed by the Mossad.

Even though human espionage is always the best choice for covert operations, the future of the elimination trade has been traced already by the Americans with their massive use of drones in Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia. With these machines, the way of eliminating one's targets changes and the operative risks drop close to zero. That is why Israel has been using the same instruments of late in the Sinai peninsula against the terrorist groups that reside there.