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WHO'S GOING TO CARRY OUT THE DIRTY WORK IN LIBYA?

Between 250 to 300 armed militias, two governments – one in Tobruk and one in Tripoli –, two Parliaments/Congresses, a caliphate in Derna and one in-the-making in Sirte, islamic radical groups scattered across the country, tribal wars like the one between Misrata and Zintan, the south of the country in the hands of the Tebou or the Tuareg, Al Qaeda roaming along the southern borders with Niger and Algeria, oil production having been brought to a halt, armed conflicts everywhere, arms and human trafficking that have become one of the main sources of income. This is the picture of Libya today. A lawless nation where the strongest prevail over the weak and where no authority is capable of enforcing any rule of law. The boundaries between criminals, terrorists or clan militias have progressively faded into an all-out conflict in a “somalized” and disintegrated country.

Amid this chaos, the United Nations' attempt, lead by Spaniard Bernardino Leon, doesn't have the slightest chance of success. The parties have been summoned in Geneva, Morocco has tried to mediate and so has the African Union, with the creation of an International Contact Group for Libya, but it is virtually impossible to put around the same table all of the actors that can have an impact on what happens on the ground. The armed souls of the Libyan disaster are at war against each other. This implies that any deal that could potentially be brokered by the UN would have a hard time being applied. And this would happen regardless of the vetoes that still block the start of any constructive dialogue between the parties.

The “legitimate” government

As a matter of fact, there are two armies on the field today in Libya, The first one is the “legitimate” one lead by the internationally recognized government based in Tobruk. It comprises those militias – who label themselves as the Libyan National Army – whose allegiance goes to the executive lead by PM Abdullah al Thani. These troops are under the command of General Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, a man with a shady past who first worked for Muammar Gaddafi and then fled into exile abroad. The legitimate Parliament in Tobruk has appointed Haftar the Supreme Commander of their army. Among his most efficient units is the Al Saiqa (Lightning) Brigade, made up of elite troops. The LNA can also count on the use of the Benina airport near Benghazi, where his aviation is based following an agreement with a local powerful tribal leader.

Khalifa Belqasim Haftar appeared on the Libyan military scene in June 2014 during the so-called “Operation Dignity”, an offensive aimed at ousting islamic militias from Benghazi. Since then his political and military role has grown. Haftar can now count on the Egyptian military support, Saudi funding and the more or less occult aerial support of the United Arab Emirates. And since the institutions in Tobruk are considered immune from radical islamic infiltrations, Haftar and his Parliament also benefit from international support, with the United States in the forefront – the Libyan general has lived in exile in the US for years before resurfacing, well-armed, in Libya with the likely support of the CIA – followed by Russia.

On Libyan soil, the Tobruk government is helped by the Military Revolutionary Council in Zintan, that can count on around 20 tribal militias in the area of the Nafusa mountains. The support from Zintan is inversely proportional to the in-fighting between Zintan and Misrata. Other units supporting Haftar used to be the Al-Qaqa and Al-Sawaq Brigades whom, before being defeated, used to control Tripoli's international airport on behalf of Zintan.

And the one in Tripoli

On the opposite front there is another government in Tripoli, another Prime Minister, Omar al Hassi, another Parliament, called General National Congress, and another army lead by the Revolutionary Brigades from Misrata – estimated in around 40 thousand men and with over 800 tanks seized following Gaddafi's downfall – and other local islamic militias. Behind this fundamentally islamic-centered coalition that in August 2014 took over Tripoli and most of Tripolitania stand Turkey and Qatar.

If the entire Libyan conflict revolved around these two factions a negotiated solution to the crisis would be possible. Even though, please take note, none of these two groups has a real control over its territories, nor over the militias it is allied with.

The islamist drift

Furthermore, there are also a number of supporting actors in this conflict: they are the clan-based tribal militias, but foremost the radical factions with ties to the ISIS and, hence, to international terrorism.

A caliphate run by a Shura Council was founded in Derna in 2014 and has declared its allegiance to the ISIS lead by al-Baghdadi. ISIS affiliated armed groups also surfaced in Sirte for the first time in February 2015. There are also the militants from Ansar al Sharia – those responsible for the September 2012 attack against the US Consulate in Benghazi during which Ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed – and the ones from the Martyrs February 17 Brigade, a group that was originally funded by the Libyan government, then officially dissolved, before joining the ranks of the ISIS in Derna. The Martyrs of Abu Salim Brigade, whose name refers to the 1200 detainees killed during the Gaddafi era following an uprising in the prison bearing the same name, followed a similar path, even though they are closely linked to Al Qaeda.

The Al Battar Brigade, the Shura Council's main operational arm, has just returned from Syria and is obviously affiliated with the ISIS. Such a listing could go on forever: the Libya Shield N.1 and the Rafallah al Sahati Brigade, based in Benghazi and Derna, the Omar Mokhtar Brigade located in the oasis of Kufra and so on. As already mentioned above, AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) is also present in the south of Libya. In this specific case we're dealing with a splinter faction lead by Mokhtar Benmokhtar and that calls itself Muwaqin bi Dam, those who sign with blood.

Currently, islamic radical factions, regardless of their allegiance to the ISIS or Al Qaeda, are scattered across the whole of Libya even though the attention of the media is focusing solely on Sirte and Derna.

Pre-conditions for negotiations

In such a deteriorated context, there are basically two questions those nations menaced by islamic terrorism should pose themselves: how to pacify Libya and who should be tasked with doing it.

At this time, to think that the United Nations would be capable of convincing the parties to adopt a series of so-called “confidence build up” measures and to then deploy a peace-

enforcement force on the ground is very unlikely. As things stand, there isn't much room for diplomacy, be it international or regional, at least until all those terrorist groups against peace and in favor of chaos are either marginalized or eliminated tout court.

The aim should be that of putting around a table only the two main actors of the conflict: the governments in Tobruk and Tripoli. Reaching such a target requires that someone, possibly with the blessing or the mandate of the international community, carry out the "dirty work". That is, fight the terrorist militias and reduce or eliminate their influence.

The dirty work

Let's move on to the second question: if the UN fails to broker a negotiated solution and diplomacy makes way for war, who would be interested in going down this path and capable of going all the way?

The spread of islamic terrorism in a no-man's land has become a source of concern for most of Libya's neighboring countries like Egypt, worried about the potential synergies between Libyan extremists and its internal opposition following the repression against the Muslim Brotherhood, Algeria, who has been facing islamic terrorists for decades, and Tunisia, statistically the most represented country amidst the volunteers filling the ranks of the ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

The worries of those next to Libya are similar to those of the European countries across the Mediterranean from Tripoli. Italy is, with respect to other countries, geographically in the front line and suffers from the flow of illegal migrants departing from Libyan coasts. In the year 2014 about 171.000 migrants left Libya to go ashore in Italy. This was a 277% increase if compared to the year before that and there are good chances 2015 might be just as bad. Despite the historical ties between Rome and Tripoli, any Italian role in Libyan affairs could be played solely within the framework of a UN lead initiative or resolution.

This means that the issue of dealing with islamic terrorism in Libya will have to be dealt with by Arab countries, both for religious and practical reasons. The leadership of such an initiative should be with those nations that fear Libyan spill-over effects the most.

A friend in Cairo

In such a framework, Egypt appears as the natural candidate to intervene in Libya: it has the military strength to carry out the task, it has to deal with the potential islamist contagion on the domestic front and because any military intervention would help legitimize the new ruler in town, General Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. The killing by the ISIS of 21 Christian copts on January 8, 2015 paved the way for the first Egyptian air strikes against the jihadists. Egypt also hosts on its soil a number of former Libyan regime elements and could therefore, if need be, open up a line of dialogue with Libyan clans as well. There is also an economic side to this issue: during the days of Muammar Gaddafi there were about 2 million Egyptians working in Libya. In a country of 85 million people restoring such an opportunity would mean a lot in economic terms.

The chances of a direct or indirect Egyptian military intervention in Libya taking place in the short term have recently lead the ISIS's forces in Derna to leave the city for the mountainous area of Jebel Akhdar. Overall, an indirect role by Cairo would definitely be less dangerous. All Egypt will have to do is increase its military support to Khalifa Belqasim Haftar in terms of weapons, ammo, aerial support, elite units and military advisors. Haftar, in turn, will carry out the dirty work.

The Libyan general will definitely work with al Sisi to eliminate the islamic terrorists from Libyan soil and to re-unite the country, but will also follow his own personal agenda. Libya,

like several other Arab nations, is not mature for democracy and power will end in the hands of the strongest, regardless of how popular he is. And if this is going to happen, the southern shores of the Mediterranean will witness again the historical axis between a general at the helm in Egypt, one in Libya and the immutable "pouvoir" of the army ruling over Algeria for the past 50 years. Tunisia is the exception that proves the rule. In this part of the world democracy can still wait.

THE SAUDI GERONTOCRACY IN A COUNTRY WITHOUT SPRING

In Saudi Arabia power is a synonym for stability. The issue arises solely when a ruler dies. The criteria for succession is relatively simple: he has to be a direct descendant of the founder of the reign. Despite this, the matter can become extremely complicated due to a series of unwritten rules and of the briar patch of a royal court where, between legitimate and illegitimate siblings, weddings and concubines, there are, according to some estimates, between 4 to 7 thousand members. This is the reason why the next in line, picked among the males of course, is designated following a tribal and family negotiation whose prevailing criteria is age. This makes of Saudi Arabia a self-referential monarchy and a country without a Constitution, embodied in the Koran and the Sunna, and with a basic law, the Sharia.

King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, with a decree dated March 1, 1992, decided that his successor should not be chosen only based on his age, but that, at the same time, a family consensus would also be required. The decree also stated that the nephews of the founder could also be added to the line of succession and that the king only could decide whether to dismiss an heir apparent regardless of his age if he was deemed inappropriate. By adding the nephews to the order of succession, king Fahd made the designation of a successor more complicated and contentious.

His successor, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, established the so-called Allegiance Council tasked with determining the line of succession. The king nominates three potential heir princes before the Council, which then decides which one to select. This organism includes the sons of the founder of the reign, Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al Saud, the sons of the deceased brothers/half-brothers of the founder that cannot aspire to the throne, the sons of the king – for one, king Abdullah had four wives, 7 sons and 15 daughters – and the crown prince.

King Abdullah died on January 23, 2015 at the age of 90 following a long illness. He had been on the Saudi throne since 2006 after he had taken over his half-brother Fahd, who died at 75 after a year of ill health and inability to rule. Abdullah has now been replaced by another half-brother, Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, who is almost 80 years old and presumably affected by the Alzheimer's disease. Salman suffered from an ictus in the past, for which he was treated in the United States and that left him to deal with some problems with one of his arms.

This is the picture of the Saudi political system where age prevails regardless of the health of the ruler or of that of his heir and where the legitimacy of he who rises to the throne is solely determined by a political intrigue within the court. The health factor is relevant because, in the Saudi system, the king is also the de-facto Prime Minister.

The return of the Sudairi

Salman's ascension to the throne brings along the resurgence of the Sudairi clan, this is the family name of one of the most influential wives of the founder of the reign. The family had already contributed a king to the reign in the person of the now defunct Fahd. Salman has had three wives and rises on the Saudi political scene with a large family: five sons and a daughter from his first wedding, a son from his second one, five more sons from his third marriage. All male siblings are automatically nominated into the Allegiance Council.

The designated heir to the throne has now become crown prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who has become second in the line of succession and was nominated First Deputy Prime Minister. The prince is one of Salman's half-brothers, his mother is a Yemeni woman

who, before becoming the 18th wife of the founder, was a waitress in court. His humble origins somehow affect his role as crown prince.

King Salman has also appointed as his second potential heir the son of a defunct half-brother of his, prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Nayef is also a Sudairi just like his father, Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, who would have become king in stead of Salman had he not suddenly perished in 2012. In a sort of posthumous compensation, Nayef's son now enters the line of succession. The new Saudi ruler has also underlined how the Sudairi family remains the most influential among the founder's families. Mohammed bin Nayef has now been appointed Second Deputy Prime Minister and, at the same time, is still in charge of the Ministry of Interior, allowing him to cultivate his reputation of indomitable fighter in the war on terrorism.

At a first glance this succession mechanism might seem to work without any hitches. Nonetheless, it is striking how fast the new king decided to fill in the gaps in the order of succession by nominating his nephew Mohammed. King Salman's choice, apart from sending a signal to his court, has also been dictated by his ailing condition.

A new generation

There is a shadow lingering over the succession system. If Muqrin will take over at Salman's death, he will be the last of the founder's sons to rise to the throne. After him it will be the nephews' turn. A new generation of individuals, whatever that means in terms of behaviors and mindsets. With the advent of the third generation from the founder, reigns will suddenly become longer. Muqrin is 70 years old, while his nephew Mohammed is only 54.

Will the court's tradition be capable of holding back the vain desires of those aspiring to the throne when reigns abruptly last longer? Furthermore, Abdulaziz's line of succession had 26 potential crown princes and, despite the setbacks, age criteria prevailed. The nephews, instead, are a lot more and Mohammed's appointment as crown prince does not respect the age criteria linked to the seniority of the respective parents. This circumstance could potentially spark a series of litigations in the future.

It is not by coincidence that one of the king's first decisions has been to favor his own family: prince Mohammed bin Salman, the first male sibling of his third wife, has been appointed, at the age of 34, Minister of Defense and General Secretary of the Royal Court. Both positions could pave the way to higher goals. Along with his cousin Mohammed bin Nayef, Mohammed bin Salman shares the responsibility over the reign's security, the Armed Forces and the Royal Guard. Another unspoken rule for the ascension to the Saudi throne is, in fact, having been involved in the country's security apparatus.

A third individual who deals with similar tasks is prince Mutaib bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, 62, presently Minister of the National Guard. He is hence another potential candidate to the throne.

The stability of the Saudi regime depends on this game of chess, the truce will hold as long as the players respect the rules of the game. Mohammed bin Salman is described as an ambitious and aggressive character. We'll see whether he is going to abide by the age-rules given his young age. If a conflict will erupt, it will be with his cousin Mohammed bin Nayef because both of them control organizations that have a direct impact on the daily lives of the Saudis. The son of Nayef is at the helm of the Council of Political and Security Affairs, while Salman's son is at the head of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs.

Inevitable reforms

In the background to the alternation of the sovereigns and of their personal data are the different political scenarios that could develop.

Saudi Arabia is a country where changes, if any, are socially irrelevant. It is thus a mere academic exercise to debate whether king Abdullah was a reformist – for having opened the doors of the Consultative Council or Shura to women, granted them voting rights in local elections and having loosened the grip over the access to the internet – or whether the current monarch Salman is a conservative. It is pretty evident that the geriatric succession system is of little help.

The Arab Spring did not affect the world of the Saud family. The only difference between Salman and his predecessor is the fact that the latter has deeper ties with the Wahabi clergy and to the religious radicalism this interpretation of Islam spreads across the world. It is worthwhile to remember that it is exactly the indissoluble relationship between the Saudi royal family and the Wahabi clergy that grants the survival of the reign in a regime of reciprocity. However, the closeness to Wahabism also affects the relationship with the Shia. In this respect, Abdullah was more open minded than what Salman appears to be. Furthermore, we should never forget that Wahabi culture was the breeding ground for Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden and that it still inspires several islamic extremist movements. If Wahabism ensures the stability and the legitimacy of the monarchy at home, it fuels terrorism abroad.

The future challenges facing the Saudi sovereign – and in this uphill path he will not be helped by his age, nor by his culture – are those of a constantly mutating world that will not allow for the paralysis in the evolution of Saudi society to last any longer. The young princes would be definitely more adequate for this task. They are the bearers of instances of change and are not as tied up in tribal bonds as their parents were. The founder Abdulaziz forced his siblings to spend part of their time together with the different tribes. The new generations, instead, have studied abroad and tasted the concepts of democracy and its freedoms.

If compared to the rest of the world, Saudi Arabia is still a country without political parties or political freedom, with a limited freedom of the press and where the condition of women and the respect of human rights are worthy of the fourth world. All of these political and social reforms will have to be addressed, sooner or later. And this is likely to happen with a progressive ruler. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world where women are under the rule of a legal guardian – be it their father, husband or son – that decides over their entire life, from their wedding to the vacations, from their work to their studies. The reign is the same nation where two women have been charged in court for terrorism for having driven a car. It is the combination of a radical religious doctrine and a tribal legacy that still determines the way social relations are managed.

Exterior relations

Saudi Arabia should also rethink its foreign policy. The Arabian Peninsula is going through a lot of tensions. There are threats piling up along the borders of the country, in north with Iraq and in the south with Yemen. On the background there is the competition with Qatar over the guidance of the Sunnis and in the fight against the Shia and Iran. Several challenges and just as many threats. And if the surrounding areas are ebullient, the Saudi paralysis is not a viable strategy.

The now defunct king Abdullah, apart from the shy social reforms aiming at avoiding an arab spring in his reign, had also tried, when his health allowed him to, to play a foreign

policy role. He had proposed a peace plan to Israelis and Palestinians and had understood the menaces looming over Saudi Arabia from the spread of religious radicalism and the consequent Islamic terrorism. As stated above, Salman doesn't seem to be as susceptible to these topics.

On a geo-strategic level, there are other mutations taking place. Now that the United States have become self-sufficient in terms of energy needs, they are less dependent on Saudi oil supplies and thus the ties between the US and Saudi Arabia are not as indissoluble as they once were. The negotiations between Washington and Tehran over its nuclear program are the first symptom of this change of mood. At the end of the day, we return to the basic issue affecting a regional and Islamic world in turmoil and a country ruled by a gerontocracy that is immune to change. The latter is a source of stability on one side, but also a symptom of extreme frailty.

The outcome of the struggle between tradition and modernity, absolutism and democracy, tribal societies vs libertarian societies, female segregation and human rights will determine the future of Saudi Arabia. It is unlikely that this conflict will be solved by Salman, seventh king of the house of Saud, or by his half-brother Muqrin, the last direct descendant of the founder Abdulaziz. But when these changes will eventually occur we will have to wait and see which impact they'll have on the country.

THE SILENT WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HEZBOLLAH

Because of the latest happenings in Iraq and Syria, the birth of the ISIS, the chaos in Libya and the internal ordeals of the Palestinians, the secret war that is being fought between Israel and the Hezbollah has been neglected by the media. Nevertheless, it is a war that is ongoing and that is being fought with the same ruthlessness as in the past, on both the military and the espionage front.

The events since 2006

Since the war in 2006, which left 1500 dead on the ground, there have been recurrent attempts to eliminate, in any way possible, the Secretary General of the Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah: in 2008 with poison, in 2013 by circulating rumours of an illness (which was apparently 'procured') and last November with an attempt (which was later blocked because the target was amid a large crowd) to eliminate him with a missile during the Ashura celebrations.

In addition, Israeli bombings hit several military targets belonging to the Hezbollah both in Lebanon and in Syria, as is the case with a load of missiles, destroyed on December 7, 2014, destined for the Shiite organization.

On the part of the Hezbollah, there was the killing of 5 Israeli citizens in Burgas, Bulgaria, in July 2012, and the attack, in October 2014, against an Israeli patrol along the border with Lebanon which caused the wounding of two soldiers.

The arrest of Mohammed Shawraba

But the latest, and perhaps the most resounding blow in the war was the arrest, last December, of an exponent of the military wing of the Hezbollah who was accused of spying on the organization on behalf of Israel.

The man, named Mohammed Shawraba, was vice-chief of "external operations" and had been the head of security of Hassan Nasrallah himself. Shawraba was a man who knew all of the internal and external structures of the Shiite group.

It seems that Shawraba is now being accused by his captors of the killing of Hassan Laqees, who was murdered in Beirut on December 4, 2013, by two killers as he returned home from work in his car.

Laqees was involved in the procurement of arms and in cyber activity against Israel. He was the middle-man between the Hezbollah and Iran. His killing, due to the secrecy that surrounded his activities, had immediately given way to suspicions that there might be a rat inside the organization. Around that same time, there were other attacks against the Iranian embassy and against Hezbollah structures and officials involved in the Syrian conflict. In addition to these, various weapon transports that Iran and Russia were sending to Syria and to the Hezbollah were targeted by Israeli air strikes.

Shawraba operated abroad, especially in Europe (particularly in Italy and Spain). He was in charge – through a cover company – of the procurement of weapons, the laundering of funds and the acquisition of the equipment needed for the operative activity of the organization.

The style of life that Shawraba led from 2005 until his arrest had allowed him to savour the more pleasurable and mundane aspects of espionage abroad; a much different existence from that of his colleagues in Lebanon and Syria.

As often happens in spy films, Shawraba had fallen in love with a woman, had married her and shared both love and secrets with her. Shawraba had failed to inform the organizations about his wife. The woman, whose name and nationality is not known, managed to disappear after Shawraba's arrest, despite the attempts by the Hezbollah to capture her. Women, money; a story as old as the world itself within the milieu of espionage.

The damage procured by Shawraba's betrayal is yet to be quantified, but for a secret organization such as the Hezbollah, where the risk of the elimination of its members or of the destruction of its military capacity by Israel is always looming, a leak of information is a serious circumstance indeed.

The Hezbollah and Syria

All of this occurs at a time of weakness for the Shiite movement, which dedicates much of its efforts to the military support of the regime of Bashar Assad and which, at the same time, due to its involvement in Syria, is having difficulties in coping with internal dissent in Lebanon. In fact, the support of the Shiite militias to Assad's Syria, a country that has a long history of interfering with Lebanon's sovereignty, is perceived by the Muslim, Christian and in part by the Druse population as an intervention which is in contrast with the interests of the Lebanese nation itself. The image of the 'party of god' as the only military stronghold against Israel is now being damaged by their involvement in the neighbouring country. Yet in the eyes of Nasrallah's organization, the downfall of the Syrian regime would imply a risk for the survival of the organization itself, which would lose the contiguity that, through Syria, they have with Iran, their main source of military support.

It is a fact that the Hezbollah are, in the Lebanese context, a State within a State. They have their own military structures, they control the territory with their own police, they have their own television and even their own fibre-optics telecommunication system. Yet the Hezbollah's independence is directly proportional to their military strength and they will be able to maintain it only so long as they are able to exercise their military power against Israel, the Syrian rebels and other local communities. As a matter of fact, the Hezbollah's military involvement in Syria is not an option, but a necessity.

The killing of Imad Mughniyeh and the Hezbollah's counter-offensive

Another crucial event in the war between Israel and the Hezbollah was the killing, in January, in the Golan heights with two rockets fired from a helicopter, of 6 combatants; among them was the son of Imad Mughniyeh (who was also killed by Israel on February 12, 2008, in Damascus by means of a bomb installed in his car). Some of the other victims were a Hezbollah commander called Mohammed Issa (also known as Abu Issa) and a General of the Iranian Pasdaran, Abu Ali al Tabtabai (aka Abu Ali Reza), who was Iran's military head in the region. It was a massive blow for the Hezbollah, not only because of the importance of the people killed (including the symbolic significance of killing Jihad Mughniyeh) but also because it was a step ahead in contrasting the pro-Assad military activity along the border with Israel.

Israel's espionage, with or without the help of Shawraba, has had a hand in these killings as well. The military humiliation of the Hezbollah could not, of course, go unpunished: on January 28 an Israeli military patrol that was travelling along the border between Israel and Lebanon was attacked with anti-tank rockets and bombs, causing two dead and seven wounded. It was a predetermined attack that was carried out with care and that showed the weaknesses of Israel's security measures in the region. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth, showing that the war between Israel and the Hezbollah is destined to last because,

as of today, there exists no other military groups other than the Hezbollah that can constitute a real threat for Israel in that region.

Israel and the Hezbollah

The death of high ranking officers of the Hezbollah and of Iran lifts the veil on the importance that the Golan heights could play in the future fight against Israel. Regardless of the outcome of the Syrian civil war, the future does not look bright for Israel on this front. If Assad will manage to remain at the helm, it will be thanks to the Hezbollah and Iran; the result will be that the two factions will be granted more freedom to move and attack Israel in the future (not only from southern Lebanon, but from the Syrian-Israeli border as well). On the other hand, if Assad's regime will collapse, the presence of ISIS and Al Nusra fighters along the border will produce an even greater threat. This explains the reluctance by Israel to interfere with the Syrian war and the reason why they limit their attacks to the Hezbollah only when the latter try to transfer weapons and equipment to Lebanon.

A devious tactic

The present Israeli tactic is devious: they try to weaken the Hezbollah, especially through their fight against the Sunni Jihadists, but know full well that the Shiite militia could be helpful in the future against other foes. This is why there are rumours of contacts and/or unspoken understandings between Israel and Al Nusra. But the Golan is riddled with militias, a circumstance which makes it difficult – for Israel and the Hezbollah alike – to decide which of these militias poses a threat and which doesn't. There are Shiite volunteers from Pakistan and Afghanistan, many of them of Hazar ethnic background, that support the Syrian regime; and there are other groups that fight Assad (the “Shuhada al Yarmuk”, the katiba “Abu Mohammed al Tilawi”, the “Beit al Maqdess”, which is also present in the Sinai).

Syria as a war academy

The war in Syria may be draining for the Hezbollah's military structure – humanitarian organization have counted an esteemed 250 victims among the ranks of the organization – but, considering their military strength, these are not important losses (the war in Syria has caused over 50 thousand dead so far) for an organization that counts roughly 15 to 20 thousand combatants and over 30 thousand reservists. On the other hand, the Syrian theatre offers a chance for the militias to test their skills in urban and rural combat and to test the use of new instruments of war (such as thermal cameras that can spot an enemy at a distance and that seem to have produced significant results against the Islamic militias).

The UN is just sitting there

One could be tempted to think that the presence of the United Nations both in the south of Lebanon (UNIFIL) and in the Golan heights (UNDOF) would defuse these threats but, as everyone knows by now, the international forces have neither the possibility to ensure peace (peace keeping) nor to impose it (peace enforcing). They are nothing more than a symbolic presence.