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BIRTH OF THE ISIS

It all began on March 19, 2003, the day the United States decided to attack Saddam Hussein's Iraq. A brief war that ended in the defeat of the Iraqi dictator and of his Baath party. As usual, the US was more worried about the immediate aspects of the conflict rather than its possible aftermaths. The war destroyed the country's main infrastructures; there followed situations of extreme want, with the population left without water, electricity, fuel and, for the former members of the Baath party, without the minimum means of survival. The US thought that they would be welcome, after all, they had ousted a bloodthirsty autocrat; they thought that they had exported democracy.

A fertile ground

Only the Shiite population saw a possible profit to be derived from the ousting of the dictator. Although they represented the majority of Iraq's population, Iraqi Shiites had always been outcasts, persecuted by the Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein. After the conflict, their liking for the US was immediately invalidated by two elements: one of a practical nature (the worsening conditions after the war had nullified the people's liking for the "liberators") and the other of a political nature (all of the main Shiite groups opposing Saddam had found refuge and assistance in Iran, where they had knitted a very tight network).

During the social upheaval caused by the conflict, the Shiites took over the scepter of power and the Sunni were marginalized. Surprisingly, this counter-discrimination found fertile ground in the choices of the person called in by the US to administer the post-war transition, Paul Bremer. His first directive, on May 16, 2003, stated that former members of the Baath party would not be allowed to hold public office. The directive number 2 of the Coalition Provisional Authority (the US-propelled international group that was supposed to lead the transition), dated May 23, 2003, dismantled the army and the Iraqi intelligence agencies.

In Saddam's days the Armed Forces, made up almost exclusively of Sunnis, counted roughly 500 thousand men in their ranks. Additionally, Baath party supporters in Ministries and other public structures were in the millions. Bremer's directives landed a few million Iraqi families on the sidewalk and – this is the dangerous part – forced many to join the ranks of the opposition while the ones with military know-how tried to find a military solution to the social conflict. These are the premises for the birth of the warfare against the new Shiite leadership in Baghdad.

The seed of terrorism

It is this context that sees the rise of Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaileh, also known by his battle name of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, from Zarqa, Jordan, already known to the local prisons as a common criminal turned extremist while sojourning up the river. Once released, around the years 1989-1992, Zarqawi traveled to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets, there, he commanded his own fighting group called "Jund al Sham" (The army of Syria). Upon his return to Jordan, Zarqawi actively supported subversive activities against the Hashemite reign. In 1994, he was arrested for plotting against King Hussein (weapons and explosives were found in his house). Zarqawi was released five years later thanks to the amnesty that followed the rise to the throne of King Abdullah II. Soon after his release, Zarqawi was accused again of carrying out subversive activity against the Jordanian reign but, by then, he had fled to Afghanistan. Zarqawi remained in Afghanistan until, after 9/11, the US decided to wage war against the Taliban.

Abu Musab al Zarqawi moved to Iraq after the second Gulf War and was able to use the Sunni resentment against the Shiites in Baghdad to fuel terrorist activities since April 2003, just a month after the US invasion took place. During the war, Zarqawi teamed up first with a Kurd separatist militia called "Ansar al Islam" (The partisans of Islam), then formed his own group. In 2004, the US Department of State placed a bounty on Zarqawi's head worth 10 million dollars.

Around that same time, Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai, aka Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, was captured and detained in the Camp Bucca prison by the US authorities. The US arrested al Baghdadi because of his connections to Al Qaeda. Inside the prison of Bucca, however, al Baghdadi made friends with other terrorists, whom he will later recruit to found the ISIS. Additionally, al Baghdadi got to know a number of Baathist officials who would later support him during his military campaign.

In virtue of his Afghan experience, Abu Musab al Zarqawi led his war with the blessing of Ayman al Zawahiri and of Al Qaeda. He did so by lending an umbrella organization to a number of terrorist factions, the "Jama'at al Tawhid wal Jihad" (Association for the unity and Jihad), later renamed "Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn" (Organization of the Jihad of al Qaeda in the country of the two rivers, i.e. Mesopotamia). The US had since raised the bounty on Zarqawi's head to 25 million dollars, as much as Osama bin Laden and his mentor Ayman al Zawahiri, and added the acronym AQI (al Qaeda in Iraq) to the terror list.

The newcomers

Zarqawi's terrorist experience ended on June 7, 2006, when a US airplane targeted his refuge in Baquba, north of Baghdad. Together with him died his fourth wife and some of his lieutenants. The killing of Abu Musab al Zarqawi would not, however, remove the founding element of the Jihadist rebellion: the resentment of the Sunni, who were by then united under a Salafite flag against the Shiite administration in Baghdad. This is why in 2006 the ISI (Islamic State in Iraq) was born. Only later, in April 2013, will the final "S" be added; the "S" that stands for Syria or "Sham": Damascus.

The ISI was initially headed by Abu Omar al Baghdadi, aka Hamid Dawud Mohamed Khalil al Zawi. His vice was an Egyptian national, Abu Ayyub al Masri, who also went by a pseudonym, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. The ISI was not made up of Zarqawi's group alone, it had absorbed several smaller factions, such as the "Council of the Shura of the Mujaheddin" and the "Jund al Sahaba" (The army of the companions of the Prophet). Abu Bakr al Baghdadi became a member of the ISI in virtue of his militancy in the Coordination Committee of the Council of the Shura of the Mujaheddin and thanks to the people he had met in Camp Bucca. Al Baghdadi's strengths were an in-depth knowledge of the Islamic doctrine, which he had studied in a doctorate at the Islamic University of Baghdad, and a strong background in Jihadist theory, which was the fruit of his mingling with the Muslim Brothers and of his reading the works of the "bad teachers" of the holy war: Abu Mohammed al Maqdisi, Sayyid Qubt, Abu Mohammed al Mufti al Aali.

Not much is known about Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's personal life. He has two wives, Asma Fawzi Mohammed al-Dulaimi and Israa Rajab Mahal Al-Qaisi. The former, a direct cousin of al Baghdadi's, gave him 5 children, the latter only one. The present location of al Baghdadi's family is not known, although it is possible that they followed him to Raqqa, the capital of the Caliphate of Syria and the ancient capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Al Baghdadi, now self-proclaimed Caliph, also has three brothers: Jomaa, his bodyguard and counsellor, Shamsi, who is locked up in an Iraqi prison and Ahmad, who has a long history of financial fraud and has recently been released from one. The father of Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai was an Imam in a Samarra Mosque and that is probably where the theological indoctrination of his son began.

On April 18, 2010, a joint US-Iraqi operation in the region of Anbar put an end to the lives and times of the leaders of the ISI, Abu Omar and Abu Ayyub. It is then that Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who went by the name of Abu Dua, took over. Not everyone was agreeable with his promotion, but then again, he did descend from the tribe of Quraish, just like the Prophet.

A step up in class

Abu Musab al Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi had allegedly spent some time together on the Afghan front, in the region of Herat; their common traits are a series of homicides, beheadings and killings of hostages that have kept the international media very busy. Apart from those, there are no similarities between the two.

Zarqawi fought against the US occupation and, on a second level, against the Shiites. He had no ambitions for the creation of an Islamic State. Zarqawi saw himself as an affiliate of al Qaeda in virtue of his past and mingled with the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. Al Baghdadi's ambition, on the other hand, goes well beyond that of his predecessor. He aims to lead the "Umma", the entire world's Muslim community. Also, he wants to replace al Qaeda at the helm of international terrorism, as stated by Osama bin Laden in his last written words. It is for this reason that the ISIS uses an unusual vigor against its enemies within the Islamic world, such as the Salafite groups in Syria.

When compared to other terrorist groups, ISIS is much bigger and more dangerous. It started off with 5000 men and now has roughly 30-40 thousand of them. Al Baghdadi's military venture is mantled with religious overtones more-so than Zarqawi's. The latter had no theological background, if not that which he had obtained from the sermons of Osama bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri. The goal of the ISIS is the founding of a Caliphate and they intend to found it on their own ideological background.

The brutality, the refusal to take prisoners, the unscrupulous use of the media are all parts of a well-planned strategy that was started by al Zarqawi and brought to new heights by al Baghdadi. The brutality and ferociousness serve to scare the enemy and make the population flee (thus easing the administration of the "conquered" territories) and to render the war a one-way street for all those that take part in it. You win or you die; in no case will the enemy forgive you. This has emerged during the re-conquest of Tikrit on the part of the Iraqi army. ISIS prisoners were given the same treatment as that which they had dispensed on the army.

The recent story of the ISIS and of al Baghdadi is no secret: he sends two lieutenants to Syria to found Jabhat al Nusra; the military defeats; the dissociation from al Qaeda and the disagreement with al Zawahiri. It is difficult to foresee a conclusion to al Baghdadi's military adventure. His predecessors have always been defeated. Al Baghdadi himself came close to being killed on November 8, 2014, while in Iraq. He was wounded but managed nonetheless to escape to Syria. He lives below the radar ever since; he doesn't show himself in public and his movements are secreted. The days of the sermons in the Musol Mosque are now long gone.

YEMEN: A PROXY WAR

As was easily predictable (Invisible Dog anticipated these events back in [October](#)), Yemen has become the nth piece of the puzzle of the instability in the Middle East. A number of factors have favored the outburst of a civil war. The State has dissolved together with the government and the Houthis have taken over portions of the country and of the capital Sana'a, amid growing tribal struggles and the presence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). On March 26, 2015 the start of Saudi aerial raids and the military operation launched by Arab and regional States has added a new dimension to the Yemeni conflict, pushing its boundaries to both a regional and international level. As often happens, the tensions and frustrations running through the Middle East are now concentrated on a socially backward and archaic country like Yemen.

The main actors

A first hint on who the actors of this conflict are can be extrapolated from the countries participating in the coalition fighting the Houthis in the so-called Operation "Decisive Storm", Asifat al Hazm:

- Saudi Arabia is running the show, they are the country whose interests are at stake and that is largely affected by the insecurity along its southern borders;
- the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council were taken for granted, but it is important to notice how Oman has pulled out of the coalition. Although bordering with Yemen, it did not take part in the military operations. There are two main reasons for this: Sultan Qaboos has always abided to a policy of non-interference, secondly the boundary zones are riddled with terrorists and any decay in the security of bordering areas would simply leave more space for Al Qaeda's militias;
- Jordan and Morocco, although not from the gulf, have asked to join the Cooperation Council and often benefit from the financial generosity of the countries in the Arabian Peninsula;
- Egypt, following the restoration of the military regime lead by Abdel Fattah al Sisi, can now count on a privileged relationship with Riyadh. Al Sisi is desperate for international credibility and is leading a country of 80 million people. Cairo hopes the military adventure in Yemen will allow it to play a guiding role in Arab affairs. Egypt also needs to grant the security of the naval traffic floating through the Suez Canal. It thus needs that the Bab el-Mandeb strait fall not in hostile hands. Whoever is in control of Yemen controls the access to both the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and oil routes.
- Pakistan, fearing the Shia expansionism of the Hazara in Afghanistan, and Sudan, whose participation is solely symbolic and in the name of pan-Sunni solidarity and of Saudi financing, are also part of this war.

As it is pretty clear, each of these actors has its own agenda; the internal struggle in Yemen is simply a pretext.

The Saudi motives

Saudi Arabia is the driving force behind the intervention in the Yemeni civil war. Apart from the threat to its security, the Saudis fight against growing Iranian influence in the region. The struggle between Shia and Sunnis is simply the smoke screen of a conflict between two of the biggest countries in the area.

The fact that Yemen is 40% Shia and 60% Sunni should have suggested that a negotiated solution was far more desirable than a war. But the al Saud reign fears that the deal on Iran's nuclear

program will pave the way, after decades of isolation, to Tehran's return on the international scene. The warning signals for Saudi Arabia of a growing Iranian influence are all around them: the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the support for the Alawite regime in Damascus, the role played in Iraqi political and military affairs and, finally, the support to the Zaidis in Yemen.

The Saudi interventionism and the huge deployment of both men and units (150 thousand troops, airplanes and warships) is also driven factors within the monarchy. This is the first official act by the new king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who rose to the throne in January, and a strong signal of the new strategic role the kingdom wishes to play in regional affairs. His predecessor, king Abdullah, was far more prudent and was more inclined to mediation than to action. In 2011 in Bahrain was the only time he moved his troops, about a thousand men, to reinstate on the throne a Sunni Emir in a majority Shia country. Salman, instead, has opted for a more active role. It may also not be a coincidence that the new Minister of Defense is the ruler's son, Mohammad bin Salman. This is a chance for him to prove his worth and to gain a certain degree of credibility in a future competition for the throne. He is a very young and ambitious man.

The world has taken a stance

Also other actors on the international scene have taken their stance in this proxy war against the Houthis. The United States have immediately shown their support for Salman, providing both logistical and intelligence assistance. France and the United Kingdom have also given their political support. Turkey has exploited the circumstance for yet another foreign policy turnaround and have decided to stand by the Saudis. By doing so, Ankara has let go of its good-neighbor policy with Iran to side with a Sunni coalition. The fact is that they will be fighting alongside Egypt, that has just sentenced to death the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose deep ties with Recep Tayyip Erdogan are both political and religious. Hamas' position is also surprising, given their support for Saudi Arabia alongside with Abdel Fattah al Sisi, who has recently added their organization to the black list of terrorist groups. The Palestinian radical group is now on opposite sides with Iran, that has always helped Hamas through the Hezbollah in its fight against Israel.

Through the statements of their leader Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah, just like Iran, Syria and Iraq, have expressed their hostility against the Saudi-lead intervention. In the final stages of their deal with the US, the Iranians have shown a limited propensity to being directly involved in the Yemeni dispute. The Saudi claims about Iranian military advisors and instructors fighting alongside the Houthi militias have not been corroborated.

Russia and China have also spoken against the Saudi-lead operation. The Russians have a specific reason for this: they had one of their biggest intelligence and listening posts in Aden that controlled the traffic in the Red Sea and monitored the communications in the regions. It must have been a mere coincidence that one of the first targets of Saudi airstrikes was the Russian consulate in Aden. Moscow will now not be able to collect information in favor of Iran.

An unpredictable ending

The military adventure in Yemen, given the disproportion between the different forces on the ground, has a predictable outcome. Saudi Arabia has total control of the airspace and the Houthi militias will not be capable of facing such a deployment of men and units. But, just like with any other war, be it civil or proxy, the ultimate result is instability and radicalization. The Houthis represent a poor and marginalized portion of Yemeni society. They have little to lose and everything to gain. During years of struggle, they have learned how to fight and how to survive regardless of persecutions against them. They could easily turn their war into a guerrilla warfare.

The Houthis can currently count on the support of the forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The deposed ruler sees this as a chance to regain the power he lost during the Yemeni Arab Spring. Saleh and the Houthis have fought against each other in the recent past – we can count at least 6 rounds of conflict – but this is now just an insignificant detail. In 2009 Saudi warplanes had intervened in Yemen in support of Saleh and against the Houthis. Now, instead, the two arch-enemies walk hand in hand. Saleh is from the north of Yemen, where the majority of the Houthis live. The deposed president who recently fled to Saudi Arabia, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, is instead from the south. This north-south struggle takes us back in time when Yemen was split in two, prior to the reunification of 1992.

Riyadh's attempt to reinstate president Hadi has nothing to do with international rule of law, but rather with the stubborn intent by Arab regimes of safeguarding the current status quo. The Houthi's fight for freedom and a better life is a bad example for countries that aim to keep their people at bay.

It is still unclear on who will profit from this war. Yet, a potential winner can already be singled out: AQAP, also fighting against the Houthis. The weaker the latter, the stronger the terrorists. We're facing once again the same paradox: a war is waged against Shia groups in the name of security, while a Sunni terrorist galaxy is given a leeway despite being just as menacing, if not more, for the Saudi reign and for the wider region. Although AQAP is split in two between those supporting the ISIS and those still loyal to Ayman al Zawahiri's Al Qaeda, they are still extremely dangerous. The recent attack against the al Mukalla penitentiary that led to the liberation of hundreds of terrorists, including some of AQAP's leaders, proves that they are still a threat to be accounted for.

The Saudi military intervention has also had the nefarious effect of turning a civil war into a regional conflict between Sunnis and Shia. Abdul Malik al Houthi, the Zaidi militias, the political party Ansar Allah and the Houthis' struggle to overturn centuries of marginalization have become pawns in a larger game. The Sunnis, as has recently emerged during a summit in Sharm el Sheikh, are trying to create a pan-Arabic military force that is there to stay. Yemen is simply the dress rehearsal of the future to come. A show of solidarity that finds a common ground in the money poured by both the Saudis and the other emirates.

IRAN, NUCLEAR DISCORD

There is always a certain degree of hypocrisy each time we debate about nuclear weapons, the limits to their use or acquisition and over the right to develop their technology. The entire sector is regulated by a Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, signed in July 1968 by three countries that already had the atomic bomb: the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain. In 1992 France and China joined the signatories. The treaty is based on the assumption that those who already owned nuclear weapons could keep them, while the rest of the world was banned from obtaining them. An asymmetric dictate of 11 articles that states in article 1 that the owners of atomic bombs cannot move their weapons to another country, or provide assistance in building them. Article 2 forces the non-owners to sign a declaration whereby they give up the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

The result of this disparity in treatment has led some of the non-signatories, like India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel, to supply themselves with atomic weapons disregarding international controls. Other countries, instead, like Iraq and Libya, have been barred from the nuclear club. Now it's Iran's turn. If the ultimate aim is to prevent Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons for the sake of world peace, then this is definitely a worthy initiative. Instead, if we look at how the international community has acted in similar cases, it is unacceptable that some countries got away with it, while a veto has been imposed over Iran.

A controversial veto

It is largely debatable that a country that is a non-signatory to the Treaty of Nonproliferation act as the referee in the Middle East. In 1981 the Israelis claimed the right to bomb the Iraqi nuclear facility of Osirak, similar raids took place in Syria over the decades. Tel Aviv is ready to judge its neighbors, while no one can ever judge them. It is also worthwhile to bring the clock back to when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was at the helm in Iran. In those days the Israelis, and in particular Shimon Peres, offered the Iranians their nuclear know-how, both for civilian and military purposes. Israel did exactly the same thing with South Africa during the apartheid.

Israel believes that it is its right to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons or technology. Despite not being part of international treaties, they claim their safety and survival are at stake. But what is more menacing for Tel Aviv: a nuclear bomb in the hands of the Ayatollah or a potential Islamist drift taking over Pakistan? The basic concept behind the Treaty of Nonproliferation is pretty logical: the less the atomic bombs the world owns, the better. However, the fact that only a limited group of nations can rely on nuclear weapons and use them as a deterrent in their foreign policy is also pretty disturbing.

The Israeli atomic bomb definitely grants the survival of Israel. At the same time it prevents, or slows down, any peace process involving other regional actors. By making Tel Aviv tougher than the rest, it leaves no room for negotiations. Benjamin Netanyahu personifies the intransigence of he who feels the strongest, a show of force that affects any attempt to mediate. No concessions are granted to the counterpart in the illusion, a wrong one indeed, that Israel can continue to survive without any deal over the

cohabitation with neighboring countries or with the Palestinians simply because they are the bullies of the class.

If this is the picture we're looking at, the deal between Iran and the United States is a defeat for Israel. It is not an issue of what is inside the deal, but of the political consequences that come along a negotiated solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Firstly, the deal accepts the idea that Tehran will be able to develop its nuclear technology for civilian purposes. Secondly, Iran will be welcomed back on the international stage and will be able to play the regional role it deserves in the Middle East. Ancient Persia, a country of over 77 million people, the fourth world producer of oil, home to 16% of the globe's gas reserves, will soon shine again.

In other words, the deal will radically reshape the geo-strategic physiognomy of the region. Israel is hence not as worried about the Iranians obtaining a nuclear weapon, but rather of the influence Iran will be able to exert on the balance of power in the Middle East. The Israelis are particularly wary of the Lebanese Hezbollah, the only credible military force operating along the borders of the Jewish State.

A wrong strategy

During the past years cyber-attacks, computer bugs and viruses, attacks against infrastructures or scientists and espionage have all contributed to the monitoring and the slowing down of Iranian research activities. This has not prevented Netanyahu from using apocalyptic tones and from thinking about a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear sites, the latter was blocked at the last minute following a US veto. The Israeli PM has exploited the Iranian scare during the recent political campaign to confirm him in office. In the heat of the moment Benjamin Netanyahu has taken the alleged Iranian threat all the way to the General Assembly of the United Nations, where he has shown a number of slides indicating the progress made towards an atomic bomb. However, his claims were refuted by Mossad and by other influential members of the security apparatus, including Meir Dagan.

Israel, or more precisely Netanyahu, has gotten it all wrong when it comes to conveying its message about an Iranian nuclear threat to the US public opinion. In an open challenge to president Barack Obama, the Israeli PM accepted an invitation from the Republicans to speak before Congress on March 3, 2015. In an inappropriate setting, Netanyahu has spoken against the deal with Iran. The fact that the Mossad was spying on the negotiations and that the information that was collected was passed on to the pro-Israeli Republican members of the Senate, is just another clumsy attempt to block the reaching of a deal. It is also yet another episode in the ongoing dispute between Washington and Tel Aviv. Despite all of this, Israel will simply have to bite the bullet: no Iranian nuclear facility shall be destroyed, Iran will be allowed to continue to invest in nuclear technology for civilian use.

The rise of Iran threatens also other countries in the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia in the forefront. This is one of the reasons that has lead president Obama to call for a meeting with Arabic countries in Camp David to illustrate the contents of the deal sealed in Lausanne. However, a question we should pose ourselves is: why did the United States

put so much effort in reaching a deal with Iran when they knew that two of their traditional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, would have been unhappy?

Obama the negotiator

The answer is both ideological and practical. The Obama administration has tried to put an end to the legacy of military adventures, some of which a total disaster, initiated by George W. Bush. Becoming involved in a proxy war, possibly lead by Israel, against Tehran would have nullified this principle and paved the way for more instability in the region. The practical side of the deal has to do with the number one priority at the moment: the defeat of the ISIS lead by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. And in this struggle Iran is a precious ally. To date they are the sole Muslim country to have acted on this issue. Had Iran supported the ISIS, the eradication of islamic terrorism would have been a hard to solve issue.

At this time, the details of the deal have yet to be defined and will be signed by June. Benjamin Netanyahu will definitely continue to do his best to block or modify the deal against Tehran. The Jewish lobbies like AIPAC (American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) will lend a helping hand. After all, both houses in Congress are held by Republicans. Yet, this is a dangerous game, it implies a lack of respect for president Barack Obama and for US sovereignty. Both factors could backfire for the Israeli PM.

Whether the deal his “historic” or a “mistake”, the negotiations go well beyond the mere nuclear nonproliferation issue and embrace the prospect of a pacified Middle East that has been rid of the ISIS. At the same time, a domino effect could lead other countries in the Arabian Peninsula to seek nuclear weapons. There are rumors Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have begun discussing about nuclear technologies.

Unlike his predecessors, Barack Obama, has introduced an innovative concept when it comes to foreign policy: you should negotiate with your enemy, measure its goodwill, leave any judgements or prejudices aside. A negotiated solution is sought to avoid going to war. A radical approach if compared to the ideas waged by George Bush Jr. and Benjamin Netanyahu.

It was since 1979 that the United States and Iran had no diplomatic ties. On one side a “rogue state”, the US definition, the “Great Satan”, the Iranian definition, on the other. In between the Israeli PM that has labelled Tehran “the greatest terrorist state in the world”. The standoff lasted a good 35 years and has lead to nowhere, it didn't solve the nuclear issue, nor the instability in the Middle East.

The same pragmatic approach was adopted by Barack Obama with Cuba. His way of acting in foreign policy has no winners, nor losers. Common sense prevails while ideological extremisms are set aside. The sanctions against Iran have also lent a helping hand. Initially imposed by the United Nations in 2006 and confirmed in 2008, they were also enacted by the European Union since 2008. They definitely played a role in breaking a stall that had been lasting for 12 years.

But we have to give credit to the boldness of the US president, a Nobel Peace Prize, who has tried to break the vicious circles of tensions, misunderstandings and wars.