



IS ISLAM THE SOLUTION?

It is notorious that in North Africa and the Middle East there are currently no forms of participatory democracy with the exception of Israel. Such a statement is true even if we define – possibly erroneously – the concept of democracy according to universal and absolute values, regardless of what the local realities or the histories of each individual country are.

In other words, what happens in those geographical areas, sometimes in positive terms, but mainly in negative terms, is none other but the result of a historical course that has been greatly influenced by a colonial past. Such past has been incapable of creating sufficiently trained cadres that would be capable of developing and/or transmitting the concept of democracy, respect for human rights and civil liberties. Seldom, even among the former colonial powers, authoritarian solutions were favored, thus bartering principles with interests.

For all of these reasons, as previously stated, in North Africa and in the Middle East authoritarian regimes with different degrees of cruelty prevail. They all share responsibility in the permanent violation of those fundamental values that should prevail in any civil society.

The so-called Arab Spring, if we choose to accept the term, should have produced considerable results in the field of democracy. At least in part – if we consider what the starting point was and the presumable end results – this has happened. Yet several social cycles are still not over (as in Egypt or Libya), others still have to develop (Syria), or haven't produced any significant results (as in Yemen). Others yet haven't begun at all (as in Algeria or in the Arabian peninsula). Tunisia instead is still under observation.

Furthermore, if we refer to the term “spring”, we etymologically refer to a season of awakening of nature as opposed to a prolonged winter and to a summer whose outcome is uncertain and that may not bear the expected fruits. From the “Arab Spring” we could now face, as the Israeli press states, an “islamic winter”.

AT THE CENTER OF SOCIETY

There is an underlying issue: why is it that every time an authoritarian regime falls in that part of the world, the prevailing force is always a political-religious entity?

There are several explanations for this:

First of all, where the previous flourished there was an absolute lack of democracy and of transmission of consensus. The only structure that could compete against the predominance of the

single-party system was mosques' network. This is where dissidence began and the origin for its' spread in other countries. It also partly explains why those monarchies legitimized by a religious title (such as the Alawite dynasty in Morocco or the Ibarite sultan in Oman) were spared by this wave of social uprisings. On the other hand, this also clearly explains why the riots in Algeria have been led by Madani's F.I.S. or why in other countries political-religious movements were born.

Among the three monotheistic religions, Islam is the one with the stronger social impact, regulating behaviors (the five daily prayers), rituals (the month of Ramadan) and the administration of justice (Sharia law). Traditionally, Islam does not draw a line between the management of the soul and the politics of the body. Often the term “umma” (the community of all muslims) is confused with that of society;

Even in the presence of cruel dictatorships, muslim religious organizations have played a crucial social and humanitarian role. It is enough to recall what the Muslim Brotherhood has done in the management of hospitals, clinics, schools and in the assistance of the poor and disabled. All this has gained the sympathies and consensus of populations that, with the right timing, has been transformed into political support.

The difference with other parts of the world is that in the Middle East and North Africa marxist ideology – or even capitalism as a matter of fact – has never been particularly popular. The small communist groups in the Middle East were mainly Christian. Without such a cultural background, any social request could not find an ideologic justification if not in the social justice as preached by the Koran. Nasser's Arab nationalism and baathism in Syria and Iraq were nothing but facade pseudo-ideologies (with no content) used to legitimize the taking over of power;

Several times opposition to regimes has come from the religious groups within Arab societies. This was the case with Rashid Gannouchi in Tunisia or with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. And this also explains why these forces have prevailed during the last elections. The same could happen in the future in Syria where the Muslim Brothers could be legitimized by the Hama massacres in 1982.

Then there is the issue of the struggle for hegemony among the countries in the region. A war that is fought through the financing of religious organisms and structures in neighboring countries. Saudi and Qatari Wahabisms are considered the major backers of Salafist groups in the region. They preach a radical view of Islam where the precepts of Sharia law prevail over any democratic notion. These factors accentuate the role of religion in the social upheavals running through the region.

Other times the various views of Islam compete against one another: Wahabism against Sufism, Sunnis against Shiites. These divisions are brought down into the political arena, thus making Islam even more central in the political affairs of the Middle East and North Africa.

The above statements explain why every time a dictatorships is divested, political religious entities emerge and prevail within Arab societies. The Muslim Brotherhood's slogan “Islam is the solution” was not ill-conceived.

WESTERN SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

Western countries tend to consider – at least on first sight – the Islamic presence in the region as

dangerous in reference to their hegemonic or economic interests. Every time a country in the region holds free elections – a parameter dear to Western democracies – and political-religious movements prevail, Western imaginary creates a short-circuit on the use of democracy between expectations and assessments. In other words, a low rate of democratic conscience is considered responsible for what is instead the true expression of will for Arab citizens. By doing so, we avoid putting those countries and their societies into context.

A first assessment can be made of what type of Islam such religious-political entities will apply in their respective civil societies. There is the Erdogan and Turkish view of Islam and there is the Saudi or Iranian one. The first one is more respectful of secular civil society, while the latter much less, if not at all. What we do find in every Arab population is the thirst for civil justice and for a peaceful living. This, whether we like it or not, is identified in the Middle East and in North Africa through the predominant religious creed.

Democracy, as viewed in the West, is considered a universal value enfranchised from religious limitations. In Arabic countries it is instead put into a religious context.

These two different concepts of civil society fuel a dormant conflict between two worlds and mainly between two different cultures that lead to radically different societies. It's as if one civilization attempted to prevail over the other. These two worlds apart will re-approach with the spread of mass-media and the internet. Differences will be leveled. Presently, the confirmation of the great influence of mass media in the world comes from the Arab countries. The Arab Spring spread, with a domino effect, thanks to the globalization of world affairs. The only endogenous element in each country was the spark that lit the various revolutions. As a matter of fact, there is no common denominator capable of linking – politically – an uprising with the next one, if not a common search for social justice. In the same way as we are informed of the ruthless behavior of the regime in Syria.

The religious element turning into a political force has infected Israel too, where the structure of the State and the prevailing orthodox parties have led the country to seem more like a theocracy, even though a liberal one.

IRAN AND THE GREEN WAVE (PART II)

The years 2010-2011 were not characterized only by an intestine clash in Iran's leadership. The country was touched by events that could effectively influence its future: the nuclear program and the consequent sanctions by the UN.

The Iranian nuclear program

It dates back to the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi; it was suspended following the Israeli bombing

of the Osirak nuclear plant in Iraq in 1981 and then re-started.

Iran has had nuclear know-how and technology for over 20 years thanks to the direct help of Russia and Pakistan and to the indirect help of China and north Korea.

In August 2002 during a conference in Washington, the "People's Mujahedeen" (MEK), an armed faction opposing the regime, announced that Iran was about to complete the construction of a site for the enrichment of uranium in Natanz, where in 2003 tens of centrifuges would have been operational; the enrichment would have been of modest proportions, solely for the medical sector; after Natanz a number of other "key" sites would be built: Isfahan, Arak and lastly Fordow, near Qom.

In nature, uranium contains about 0,7% "fissile uranium" (uranium-235); the rest is uranium-238, "non fissile": the number defines its atomic weight.

Enrichment is the process through which fissile uranium is separated - through the use of a centrifuge - from non-fissile uranium.

Inspections by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) in Natanz did not find any traces of "highly enriched" uranium. It is helpful to note that uranium: Is enriched by 3,5% for use in electric plants; by 20% for medical use; by at least 90% for military use.

We must also note that IAEA's inspectors operate on the basis of a specific "Treaty of non-proliferation" (TNP) and an adjunct protocol signed by the adhering nations (the "adjunct" treaty allows for inspections of sites that are not listed in the original Treaty). Singularly, while Israel never signed the TNP, Iran did. The countries that fall short of respecting the TNP are proposed for sanctions by inspectors and other adhering nations to the UN Security Council (15 members) for approval.

Iran's nuclear program was also the object of several meetings of the so-called "5+1 club" (the five members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), which has invited Iran to suspend the enrichment of uranium in order to avoid negative consequences, namely the sanctions.

In the past Russia had proposed that Iran transfer on Russian ground all activities related to the production cycle of fissile nuclear material: the offer was refused. Iran - which is now facing the 4th round of sanctions - has declared that the sanctions are illegitimate and anticipated its pulling out from TNP accords in case of further international pressure about its nuclear program. In the meanwhile Iran has installed 6000 centrifuges in Natanz (enrichment 2-4%) that should be increased to 50.000 by 2013.

The United States have abandoned all attempts to find an accord and press for sanctions which - if applied to petrol exports - could compromise the economy and the survival of the Iranian regime. That is why the US have abandoned the Turkish/Brasilian initiative to enrich Iranian uranium in one of the two countries; some analysts say that if Iran pulls out of the TNP, it could be able to build an atomic weapon within a year!

These events has marked the years 2010-2011, with a worsening of Iran's condition by the end of 2011 with the application of the 4th round of sanctions for not suspending the enrichment of uranium.

Once again, Iran has signed the TNP while Israel refuses to do so: the paradox is that "those who secretly have the supreme weapon refuse to sign a treaty that would prohibit them from having it while they accuse another country that has signed the treaty (and that doesn't have the weapon) of wanting to build one", as stated by the publication "Limes", n.1/12 page. 26.

The 4th round of sanctions

The 4th round of sanctions against Iran was approved with resolution n.1929 of June 2nd, 2010 by the UN Security Council. It includes:

A ban on Iranian investments abroad in the nuclear field;

A ban on all sales to Iran of heavy military equipment (tanks, airplanes, warships);

A ban on all activity by Iran regarding ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads;

The reinforcing of inspections in harbors and at sea of all cargo ships suspected of transporting prohibited materials;

The ban on all countries to participate financially with Iran in the nuclear field;

The ban on the opening by Iran of any financial structure abroad (be it single-party or joint-venture) that could contribute to the development of its nuclear program;

The resolution was approved with 12 favorable votes, 2 against (Turkey and Brazil), and 1 abstained (Lebanon).

On November 21st 2011 the US, UK, Canada and other western countries have announced - on top of resolution 1929 - a number of "unilateral" sanctions against Iran in the financial and energy sectors.

France is also looking to implement similar measures, among which is the freezing of capitals of the Central Iranian Bank and the suspension of oil imports from Iran.

Despite denials by Iran, the 4th round of sanctions plus the "unilateral" ones have taken a toll on Iran's economy.

The pull-outs of Shell and Total have dealt a blow to the oil sector, especially in economic and technological terms.

The sanctions on several Iranian companies (the lists of which - privates, companies and banks - are attached to the resolution) have had a negative impact on commerce. The sanctions aim at the country's financial system, which is largely dependent on oil-money.

Iran, the world's n.2 OPEC oil-producing country - with the 4th round of sanctions - has had to limit its imports of "distilled" fuel, the availability of which depends on imports (from India, China, Venezuela, etc.) by 30%. This has forced Iran to re-structure some of the oil-dependent production cycles and to raise the price of fuel at home.

The 4th round of sanctions is just the last regarding Iran's nuclear program. It was preceded by the following resolutions:

N. 1737 of December 2006, approved unanimously by the UN Security Council, which bans the sale to Iran of technologies for the enrichment of uranium. Also, the same resolution banned some of the regime dignitaries from traveling abroad and froze their assets;

N. 1747 of March 2007, also approved unanimously, which introduces the prohibition to sell Iran military airplanes, assault helicopters, missiles and armored vehicles. The resolution also prohibited government figures from traveling abroad, including members of the Pasdaran, froze their assets and those of the Iranian institutions, including the Central Bank of Teheran;

N. 1803 of March 2008 (14 favourable, 1 abstained - Lebanon) which not only bans those involved in the nuclear program from traveling abroad, but also imposes inspections on suspicious Iranian ships.

Regarding the sale of refined petrol to Iran for internal use (the country does not have the technology nor the plants for refining at home), Iran still has good relations with Venezuela (as seen last January during Ahmadinejad's visit to Venezuela, which the White House dubbed "tour of tyrants"). In 2010, Iran's import of refined petrol reached an average of 20.000 barrels/day, not mentioning the considerable imports in chemical components for the treatment of oil.

The possible war against Iran

Regardless of the evaluation of sanctions imposed against Iran for its nuclear program and of the intestine clashes among its governing elite due to the downfall of its economy (brought about by the sanctions), the year 2012 seems to be another troublesome year for the middle-east:

Iran doesn't seem ready to yield on its nuclear program;

Israel sees its supremacy over the middle-eastern region, that was already scathed by the strong rise of concurrent countries in the area like Turkey, in peril in view of Teheran's nuclear proliferation;

There has been talk (and there still is) about a possible "surgical" Israeli raid against Iranian nuclear sites, with or without the support of the United States;

The US are nearing elections in November, where the outgoing Democratic President Barack Obama will run against the Republicans that stand, in case of victory, by Israel's side. Some are even favorable to the "raid" against Iran.

The bombing of nuclear sites (Israel would have put its hands on bombs that could hit even the underground site of Fordow, near Qom) would not be supported by the UN (Russia and China would veto it). The Iranian regime could use the raids to find new cohesiveness, strength and national dignity, especially if the raids are against its nuclear program.

In such a scenario there could be a possible counter-attack against US military structures in the Persian gulf (Kuwait, Baharain, Qatar, U.A.E, Oman and Saudi Arabia) and against those same countries. A last resort measure could also be to stage a blockade in the strait of Hormuz, through which 17 million barrels of petrol (a third of the world's commercial exchanges in oil) transit each day.

Here is a short list of possible scenarios determined by an attack on Iran by Israel (with or without the support of the United States):

A limited attack against Iranian nuclear sites by Israel with the support of the United States would cause a loss of international consensus by the US with negative repercussions for President Obama in the November elections. For Iran it would mean a strengthening of the regime. The blocking of the strait of Hormuz would have to be carefully evaluated because of the fallback on Iranian economy and on the international public opinion.

A generalized attack on all nuclear sites by the US-Israel coalition would also mean a loss of consensus during the November elections. The Iranian regime would be reinforced and would probably close the Hormuz strait - as a retaliation for those responsible for the attacks (US, Israel). In this scenario Iran would also attack objectives in the middle-eastern region, both directly and indirectly (through mobilization of Hezbollah and other extremist organizations).

An attack by Israel without the support of the United States would - regardless of the end results - provoke a wave of Islamic terrorism: Israel would become the main destabilizing factor in the region, for the delight of Iranian propaganda. The US interests in the region would still be a target for Islamic terrorism, which would still see the US responsible for the Israeli attacks.

Despite President Netanyahu's stance in favor of a military attack against Iran, the above scenarios show that the military solution is not convenient for both Iran and Israel (with or without the involvement of the US). An option could be to shift the situation to a generalized conflict following non-deliberate actions by one of the contenders (Iran, Israel). Iran has shown no will to suspend their nuclear program, even after a possible attack. It is backed by its population's nationalism and by an increase of its credibility in the region. The more recent news speak of terrorist attacks against Iran's nuclear scientists, the dynamics and financiers of which are not clear (Teheran says that it is the Mossad). The motives and financiers of the failed assassination attempt against the Saudi ambassador in Washington by a presumed Iranian terrorist cell are also unclear as of yet. This latest attempt would have risen the tension between United States, Iran and between Iran and Saudi Arabia (SA has always accused Iran of supporting Shiite minorities against the leading Sunnis in the Gulf countries).

In conclusion, the middle-eastern situation, with the clash among Iran's leaders Khamenei and Ahmadinejad, the 4th round of sanctions against the country and the possibility of further talks of the "5+1 group" about Iran's nuclear program, contains extremely unstable elements, so much so that the situation could get out of control even because of minor events or non-deliberate ones. There could, however, be factors that would alleviate the tension. One could be the outcome of the November elections in the US (the republican candidates are openly in favor of Israel). Another could be the upcoming elections in Iran (2013): expectations are high on the candidate Qalibaf, present mayor of Teheran with high intellectual and humane characteristics.

The aforementioned considerations thus qualify the military solution as one that would harm both contenders (Israel and Iran). Diplomacy and the rigorous application of the sanctions still seems the most viable solution, despite the discomfiting outcomes of previous attempts (from Obama's hand of friendship to the mediation of the 5+1 group in an attempt to "de-locate" the enrichment of uranium).

A.I.S.E. WHO ARE THE SECRET SERVICES SERVING?

The credibility of any Information Service dedicated to the gathering of intelligence abroad, as is the Italian Agency for Information and External Security (A.I.S.E.), is both linked to the efficiency of its operational capacity and to the bilateral/multilateral relationships it is able to produce in the cooperation with its foreign counterparts.

Ours is a globalized world where events and situations intertwine without territorial boundaries, where the parameters through which national security objectives can be attained have become more

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

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

difficult to identify, where it is not possible to know everything quickly and accurately anymore, where causes and effects are often unforeseeable and correlate in ridiculous time spans, where information has immediately a global dimension. It is in such a scenario that trustworthy relationships with foreign Services have become a crucial means for getting to know both the deeds and the misdeeds.

Such a requirement is obviously felt more by those intelligence organisms that work with limited financial and human resources and within a regional geo-strategic context as is the case of the A.I.S.E.. The Service would not be capable of facing information requests regarding areas outside its operational reach abroad without a collaboration with foreign Services.

In the intelligence world there are no love marriages, but only marriages of interest. No free lunches. The sovereign rule is “do ut des” and hence, if you want to receive information, you have to be able to provide information in exchange, seldom in other sectors or areas. In fact, this is the “commercial” side of intelligence cooperation. Furthermore, the availability to give information is directly proportional to the trust a Service has in its counterpart. No trust, no information. And this goes along with the concept of credibility. Let us analyze the case of Franco Lamolinara.

THE DEATH OF FRANCO LAMOLINARA

Civil engineer Franco Lamolinara was kidnapped along with a British citizen, Christopher McManus, on May 12th 2011 in Birkin Kebin in Nigeria. On March 8th 2012 the Nigerian and British special forces attempted a raid to free the hostages. During the operation both hostages were killed. The Italian authorities, intelligence services included, were not informed. British Prime Minister David Cameron called the Italian PM Mario Monti once the raid had already started.

It is fair enough to wonder why the operation took place without a previous consultation or communication with Italy. Both the United Kingdom and Nigeria are concerned.

Such a question is of tantamount relevance if we consider that an A.I.S.E. representative is based in Abuja and a couple of his colleagues are in London. Plus there is a British intelligence representative in Rome. It wasn't a communication problem, but rather a precise willingness not to inform the Italians about the imminent operation.

As for the British, be they MI-5 or MI-6, they have hardly ever interfaced with other Services if not with the Americans (with whom they cooperate in symbiosis) or other intelligence agencies from their former colonies (with whom they safeguard a preferential track). The nature of this relationship could have led the Nigerians to keep quiet about the oncoming military operation.

Be it as it may, unmistakable signals were out there waiting to be interpreted. One of them was the landing in Nigeria of a team of British Special Forces. It was easy to deduce, but this wasn't the case, that a military operation was on its way. Being on Nigerian ground would have meant that the local security forces were also part of it.

An attentive bureau chief with some experience and intuition would have surely gathered some information on the issue. Not from the British, but from the Nigerians through a combination of shrewdness and targeted presents.

The fall of credibility of the A.I.S.E. was determined by both lack of skill and on an undeniable truth in international affairs: in the case of kidnappings Italy will always prefer negotiations, the outcome of which is surely enough the payment of a ransom.

Had Italian authorities known about the military operation through official channels, they would have surely denied their consent. This has been the case in Iraq, Afghanistan and in other similar situations in Africa. Such a modus operandi is not greatly appreciated, especially by the Americans and the British, nor by those countries facing endogenous terrorism such as Algeria or Mauritania.

Surrendering to blackmail will increase the probability of getting your hostage released unharmed. The downside is that by paying a ransom you are feeding a criminal and/or terrorist organization thereby bearing out that any blackmail will pay in the long run. In this specific case the ransom would have gone to the Boko Haram extremists. And in that specific market Italy is by now rated as a good client.

OTHER RECENT DEBACLES

An Agency report was requested on the situation in the Maldives. Reply: everything is ok. Two days later there comes a coup d'etat. The geographical area is not among the Agency's priorities, nor is it continuously monitored. A typical example of influence peddling combined with unskillfulness.

Last March two Italian marines are put under arrest in Cochin (and are currently detained) for shooting at a presumed pirate ship in the Indian Ocean, while two other Italians are kidnapped in Orissa State, India. Between these two events the Agency's bureau chief in New Delhi retired and was not replaced. His retirement was due to old age, thus chronologically foreseeable. The bureau was left vacant because his replacement was still undergoing training. No one was hence present to open talks with the local Services on a constant and continuous basis as circumstances required. Not so much for the two Italian soldiers, whose case is being handled by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but definitely for the hostages. Even in the latter case the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to be given credit for the liberation of Paolo Bosusco on April 12th. The Agency, if not for last minute efforts, was largely inactive.

Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti lands in Libya for his first visit on January 21st 2012. He asks the Agency for information on the situation on the ground. Reply: everything is calm. Monti arrives in Tripoli and hotel is taken under siege while clashes erupt all over town. This happened because during the Arab Spring in Libya the newly designated bureau chief had been recalled home and forced to retire following new recruitment rules set out by the Agency. The bureau chief was justifiably furious.

CREBIDILITY AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONNEL

Most of the above described situations derive from the inadequate employment of personnel and the lack of professionalism of the latter when it is appointed abroad. A bureau chief's day to day activity abroad spans from espionage to anti-terrorism. It is based on the quality of the relationships with local security agencies, on the continuous analysis of events and on the capability of establishing relationships with the surrounding world, be it the Italian or international community, keeping in

mind that an agent has to act below the radar of local intelligence services. The knowledge base of any agent should allow him to identify informational objectives while keeping the pace with the evolution of the situation on the ground. None of this can be improvised or spring out from a “good word”. This is an atypical job that requires time to be assimilated, training is ongoing and certain characteristics (cultural, linguistic, show of initiative, intuition and deduction, communication skills, perception of danger, psychology as applied to human relationships, power of observation, confidentiality and many more) are not that common at all.

In the past, before being employed abroad, anyone aspiring to the post of bureau chief required 2-3 years of experience as an analyst, possibly in the future area of employment (thus gaining specific knowledge on a region that would have enhanced his evaluation skills). After that the agent would transit through the specific operational branch where he would stay for another couple of years in order to strengthen his *modus operandi* techniques – better said sensibility – through the imitation or contrast of what his colleagues were already doing on the ground. This nucleus of people, whose theoretical and practical training cycle lasted 8-9 years, was employed over time or used in emergency situations. Unfortunately today, maybe more than in the past (as circumstance have become endemic), such *excursus ad honorem* is largely disregarded.

Regretfully in an Agency where the average management period assigned to a Director General lasts from 3 to 5 years, the benefits of time for those who sow and harvest qualified personnel are often thwarted by contingent and surely less professional assessments. With some exceptions, that are not the rule, agents abroad are assigned through good words and recommendations or for personal gratification.

This is the case of the Agency's representative in Abuja, Nigeria. He was a petty officer turned civil servant who had spent his entire professional life doing other things. Without sufficient or specific background, he was assigned abroad at the end of his career to presumably obtain a salary increase. The post was surely obtained through the good offices of his former Chief, now Deputy Executive Director of the Agency, with whom he had previously worked at his unit. And, according to press articles, the officer was probably on vacation during the Lamolinara operation.

At the same time, together with a bureau chief in Abuja at the end of his career, we have the presence in London (a very attractive bureau with a high rate of solid recommendations) of a relative of a high ranking official from the Presidency of the Republic and of a young aide of a former Agency Director. Is this why the raid to free Lamolinara took place without the knowledge of the A.I.S.E.? It is hard to confirm, but surely enough these overlapping circumstances have had a negative influence on events and it is beyond doubt that had there been other better qualified officials at their post the situation would have been different.

The same can be said about the bureau chief in New Delhi. He was also at the end of his career and placed into retirement without being replaced. Could he have had an impact on the kidnapping of our nationals in Orissa? We will never know.

RECRUITMENT POLICIES

It is quite evident to affirm that throughout the different activities into which the Agency is involved the quality of personnel is a key element. Co-optation has always been the applied employment

criteria. Men were drawn from both Armed and Security forces. Over time, this system could have guaranteed, if applied correctly, a wise choice of the members of the Service. Instead it was influenced, better said polluted, by prevailing solid recommendations, political and familial patronage and by a system of favors and cross-interests. This has also been favored by an increase of recruits borne out of the civilian world.

The Agency has become the mirror image of today's Italy. With the only difference that the recruitment to the Service does not come through a competitive examination. You are recruited either from other State departments or, and this is where most abuses come from, through direct calls from the civilian world. The latter is a technique that utilizes State Secret to conceal unethical and illicit behaviors. If to the lack of a competitive process we add a good salary, it is easy to understand how extended and pressing this market has become.

Notwithstanding those who have tried to enter the organization through the often publicized – but truly never put into practice – public competitive exam relying on the quality of their curricula. If someone has made it through this process, perhaps due to hard-to-find linguistic skills (and this did rarely happen), they are there to show that the rule has become a rare exception.

To this we have to add that careers moves and advancements are all left to the complete discretion of those who rule. The fact is that those who received a solid recommendation to enter the structure were the same people who had better chances of progressing in their career with respect to others. Possibly contravening professional quality assessments.

The end result is that, over time, the overall quality of personnel has plunged, thus hampering the operational capacity of the Agency.

Recently, to this state of affairs, a new system for the renewal/turn over of personnel based on a mathematical equation and not on a critical assessment of each individual has been introduced: those who in the triennium 2010-2013 will reach 40 years of contributions, exceed 20 years of stay in the Agency and have more than 57 years will be sidelined (that is forced into retirement or, on request, placed elsewhere). Such a crude selection system has led and is leading to the exit from the agency of about 400-600 people whose years of experience and professional background are difficult to replace in such a short period of time, especially in the more technical sectors.

Evidently other kinds of evaluations the reasoning of which goes beyond ordinary analytical and logical management have found their place. Maybe they find a justification if we substitute logic with practical objectives.

The first one aims at allowing the Agency to replace the organic voids through the recruitment of other people. There is more room, thus the creation of more opportunities in the work market. More room for familism, patronage, claims from politicians and high ranking State officials (to whom we have to add, for the sake of statistics, a plethora of sons/relatives of journalists, magistrates, military etc.). It is not by chance that even a close relative of a Minister of the current technical government has now been satisfied.

There is a further collateral effect for the Agency caused by the application of the mathematical equation used for the renewal of personnel: the exclusion of about 800 financial police officers,

some of whom have pending judicial issues, who have joined the agency between 2001 and 2006 when Nicolo' Pollari was at the helm and who do not meet the 20 years of work in the Agency as established by the aforementioned mathematical formula.

It could be by chance, but the person responsible for managing personnel is presently the same financial police officer who was nominated by Pollari (and who is by now unremovable because of the merits he has earned and because of the secrets he specifically holds). He is the cornerstone of the patronage system put in place by the then-Director General of the Agency who would have used it to gain the political backing that would allow him to become the first Commander of the Guardia di Finanza (the financial police) chosen from the ranks of the Guardia itself. Such aim waned away after the Pio Pompa and Abu Omar affairs. His links with the then-Commander of the Guardia di Finanza, Roberto Speciale, allowed both of them and their respective agencies to entertain special relationships, with the exchange of personnel between the two organizations and in the reciprocal assistance of the relatives hired thereof.

A VOID TO BE FILLED

This has been a historical period for the Service, now Agency, where the hirings, previously managed in a traditional and aperiodic manner, have become systemic and continuous and finally integral part of a corrupt system based on cohabitations and self-interests.

All of this has been unhampered by the so-called renewal. Actually it has been justified even further through the artificial creation of organic spaces. The paradox is that while the aging personnel has been put into retirement, a 65 year old prefect who could not find an adequate position at the Ministry of Interior has been enrolled.

It is not fair to demonize this state of things to reach the conclusion that the current cadres hired in the Agency are all unskilled for the roles and tasks they have to fill. There are still, especially among the old guard, several highly skilled individuals in the Agency. But numerically they are not enough. Some young newly employed agents will probably have the chance in the future, but not today, to become true professionals. But this is not the basis on which they were hired. The problem is the lack of ethics currently ruling over the system and that could produce in the beneficiaries the idea that any objective can be reached regardless of merit. The other issue is the time span between the hiring of personnel and the subsequent acquisition of the professional skills that such a tricky task requires. The current lack of operational capacity within the A.I.S.E. is especially due to the latter.