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## **GAMBIA'S CASE, AN ORDINARY AFRICAN STORY**

In a continent like Africa, the fact that Gambia's President refuses to relinquish power after 22 years despite losing elections; that he is protected by the military; that he decide to leave the country only when Senegal's troops begin to invade; that he finally chooses to escape to another country as a last resort, is no news.

Unfortunately, Africa is plagued with dictatorships, poverty, aggrieved human rights and corruption. Yahya Jammeh, the former President of Gambia, is the rule, not the exception. In Africa, it is easier to remember the few existing democracies than the long list of corrupt regimes.

Almost all African leaders take power through force or through elections that are more or less manipulated; more or less "democratic". Inevitably, when their mandate expires, they relinquish the helm. Sometimes, when it is necessary to find a legitimate form to their claim to power, constitutions are changed.

If the people disagree, the army and/or security services are ready to imprison or kill the opposition, and the insurrection is inevitably drowned in blood.

But Gambia's case is even more emblematic, well beyond fervid imagination.

### **Jammeh's ousting**

Jammeh lost the December 1st elections last year and immediately refused to step down. After all, he'd only been in power for 22 years. He soon began enacting the usual repression. The country risked being plunged amid a civil war? It wasn't an ethical problem for Jammeh. In fact, his power was in the force of weapons, so if he couldn't have consensus, he'd gladly have war. The army and his 'Praetorians' would legitimate his claim to power.

Jammeh also had a clear design for the country's future: he wanted to create an Islamic republic (he probably thought that giving religious connotations to the debate could create consensus); and he wanted to drop out of the Commonwealth (the UK was not in good terms with him).

But Gambia is a small and poor country, completely encircled by its neighbor, Senegal. So the authorities in Dakar, who supported the winner of the elections, Adama Barrow (who fled to Senegal in order to save his life), told Jammeh that he had to step down. Adama

Barrow had already been assigned as President in Dakar, seen that he could not go to Banjul for fear of being killed by Jammeh.

Convincing Jammeh was no easy task. He tried to resist with the military at his side, but was forced to bow when faced with Senegal's army. Jammeh's 1000 men, plus a few African mercenaries, were no match for the 19000 men of the cumbersome neighbor.

### **The mediation**

But in Africa, even when faced with blatant abuses of power on the part of autocratic and corrupt individuals – although Jammah was just a small fish compared to other dictators – people try to mediate. The corrupt dictator doesn't get the boot, instead, there are negotiations, attempts to find a painless solution, especially with regards to the ousted satrap.

The mediator in this case was Guinea-Conakry's Alpha Condè, who is one of the few legitimate presidents in Africa. He won the elections in 2010 after a long dictatorship, he underwent an attempt on his life during a failed coup and came back to win the elections again in 2015. He was accused of manipulating the electoral results, but in Africa it is a venial sin. Actually, it is not even a sin but a mere habit. Condè was the mediator because Guinea is one of the most important countries (after Senegal) in Western Africa. Did he do it for humanitarian reasons? Or maybe to avoid the latest social catastrophe? Maybe for both. Either way, he mediated.

Another mediator was Mauritania's President/General Ould Abdel Aziz. Aziz is somewhat of an expert in coup d'états. He participated in his first coup in 2015 when he supported Sidi Mohammed Ould Cheyeh Adballahi against a preceding dictator. Then the relationship between the two turned sour. But in August 2008, Aziz had his very own coup. After all, in Mauritania, power is historically passed on from one coup to the next. Shortly after the coup, Abdel Aziz received the dissent of the African Union, which didn't seem to appreciate turbulent changes in power, but he soon found a powerful ally in Gheddafi, who was rotating president of the AU at the time. With the blessing and complacency of the Libyan dictator, the Mauritanian dictator was rehabilitated. Perhaps that's why he wanted to spend his efforts in the mediation for his Gambian colleague Jammeh.

But these were not the only mediators. Everyone in Western Africa seemed to feel the need to find a peaceful solution to the Gambian problem, even ECOWAS (the Economic Community of Western Africa, whose members are the 15 countries in that region). But even they didn't ask Jammeh to just get up and leave. Instead, they proposed bargains to convince him; they offered to find an 'honorable' exit strategy for him without harming the country.

He had to leave, of course, but he could come back to the country without any restriction if he wished. He could, if only he wanted to, run as a candidate in the next presidential election. ECOWAS guaranteed, as did the African Union, and in a way the UN, which supports the ECOWAS' political initiatives with a resolution.

### **Jammeh's guarantees**

At that point, Jammeh was appeased by such guarantees, but still skeptical. His real guarantee was the money that he would take with him. He began by cleaning out the country's safes of about 11 million dollars in local currency, gold and foreign currency. It's a small sum of money, but Gambia is a very poor country and there was nothing left to steal. It was enough, however, to create the basis for the country's bankruptcy, but that didn't bother Jammeh. What really bothered him was the volume of the stuff that he wanted to take with him. He would be needing a special transport for it.

So there came along the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, who sent a special cargo plane so that Jammeh could load his personal provisions on it.

Deby reached power in Chad in 1990 by toppling another dictator, Hissene Habré. Habré was a tough cookie; he was even condemned for crimes against humanity. So is Deby a dictator? No, because he wins the presidential elections every 5 years. Granted, in his country corruption is rampant and there is a system of political patronage to find work in the public sector that fuels further corruption. Every now and then Deby launches campaigns against corruption (which strike at the opposition, not at his friends). His human rights record is not the cleanest around, but Deby is supported by the French and the US; he has a gift for snuggling himself into other African crises (Chad fights alongside the French in Mali against Islamic terrorists, they help the Central African Republic against the rebels, they fight Boko Haram by providing troops to the African Union). After all, Idriss Deby is useful and his abuses are easily forgiven.

So Deby sent the cargo plane and Jammeh jumped at the opportunity. He didn't just carry money, jewels, gold and all that is needed for a golden exile on the airplane; he also loaded luxury cars (the limited room on the airplane did not allow him to carry all of them) and the presidential palace's furniture, including the statues. All of the things that could remind him of the splendor of the days past.

As Chad provided the airplane to carry the loot, Alpha Condé sent another airplane to escort the exiled dictator out of Gambia.

### **Where to find refuge?**

At this point it would be fair to ask oneself where an individual like Jammeh could find hospitality. After all, he could be indicted by any international court at any given time.

But in Africa, the opportunities offered to individuals such as the former Gambian president are endless. The hospitality, or better, the political exile, was readily offered by the President of Equatorial Guinea, who is notoriously one of the continent's most ruthless dictators.

Obiang has ruled Equatorial Guinea since August 1979. He took power in a rather grisly military coup against President Macias Nguema, his uncle, who was later sentenced to death and executed. Macias himself was no boy-scout. He had carried out his own mass executions and indiscriminate massacres. In his time, Equatorial Guinea was called the Dachau of Africa.

After all, the rise of Obiang and the killing of Macias were positive turns for the country. Unfortunately for Guineans, under his uncle's rule, Obiang had experienced the violation of human rights as he served as head of Black Beach prison, where torture and murder were the routine, and the teachings had stuck. Obiang had either been consensual or acquiescent with his uncle's violence, that's for sure.

Now that Omar Bongo from Gabon (the bordering country) and Gheddafi from Libya are dead, Obiang is the longest-lasting dictator on the continent. Second best goes to the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, who is in power since 1987. But Obiang breaks yet another record, apart from those of Royal descent, he is the world's longest-lasting president.

If one were to ask him how a president can stay in office that long, Obiang would probably say that one just needs to obtain popular consensus from time to time, in whatever way, peaceful or violent. Every 7 years Obiang's presidential mandate is reconfirmed. He is voted by no less than 93% of voters in any election. Although there is a multi-party system in place since 1992 in Equatorial Guinea, when Obiang runs for elections, nobody from the opposition feels the need to do the same. Of course, the security forces of Equatorial Guinea are renown for extra-judicial executions, kidnappings, torture and arbitrary detention. But these are just irrelevant details. Sometimes – it is said – the President presides the tortures in person.

In short, Obiang is a megalomaniac who thinks he is a deity with supernatural powers. He likes to be called "boss" and at times likes to use the power of witchcraft against his enemies. Despite his penchant for the paranormal, Obiang exercises absolute power over what goes on in his country and over the lives of its inhabitants.

And giving refuge to Jammeh won't create a case of conscience for Obiang. After all, the two have similar ideals and conducts. Obiang is the luckier of the two because his country is rich in oil. He has accumulated such wealth that Jammeh's 11 millions look ridiculous in comparison. Obiang passed a decree so that the money of the nation of Equatorial Guinea would be transferred to an account in his and his family's name. There exists no difference between his money and that of the State; he IS the State. Unsurprisingly, his son has been recently placed on trial in France for corruption and theft of public funds and the USA and Spain are investigating Obiang and his son for the same crimes.

The wealth of petrol allowed Obiang's regime to cruise unscathed past the accusations of human rights violations that are raised cyclically internationally. He has the protection of Spain (of which EG was a colony), the acquiescence of the US and the guilty negligence of many other nations. Even the Pope received Obiang in grand style in 2013.

### **A quiet future for Jammeh**

By moving to Equatorial Guinea, Yahya Jammeh has won a quiet and peaceful future for himself. He's 52, with a quite long life expectancy, during which life he can count on the stability of the Guinean regime. Obiang is 75 years old but, as per dictatorial tradition, his power will be passed on to his children.

By the way, if ever an international court should decide to put the former Gambia President on the stand for his crimes, Guinea provides a simple solution: it has not accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

Jammeh can be severely criticized for his thieving habits, for his scarce sense of democracy and for his even scarcer sensibility for human rights, but one must admit that settling in Equatorial Guinea was a good move. Nigeria was also willing to give him asylum, but Jammeh had better vibes about Malabo.

Any regrets left in Banjul? Yes, having to abandon the army that supported him and that fled at the site of the new president and of Senegal's troops. Even the Liberian and Ivory Coast mercenaries turned and scuttled away.

Unfortunately for the continent and its future perspectives, the story of Yahya Jammeh is not the exception that proves the rule, but the rule itself. Is it part of the inheritance of a colonialism that taught no ethical or democratic values to the subjugated populations? Maybe in the past. Today Africa should accept responsibility for and learn to fight its inner social injustice and authoritarian abuses. In addition, Africa should also learn to pursue legality and frown on theft, illegal wealth and corruption.

Examples like that of Yahya Jammeh are not helping the cause.

## **DIRTY GAME IN LIBYA**

On December 17, 2015, in Skhirat, Morocco, a peace deal was signed to pacify Libya. It was hailed by UN's representative, Martin Kobler, and other politicians as a "historical day for Libya" and "the beginning of a long road to peace". Several signatories attended the ceremony: 80 out of 188 MPs from the Parliament in Tobruk, 50 out of 136 of parliamentarians from Tripoli.

The agreement was the result of lengthy negotiations abroad which had overcome a series of obstacles. The two governments in Tripoli and Tobruk did not share the same vision as to how to solve the Libyan stand-off. A number of international mediators had to intervene: Arab countries, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. The United Nations and the Security Council blessed the signature of the deal and promised to support the Libyan military in the fight against terrorism, lift the arms embargo once a government of national unity was formed and aid other key sectors.

Two years on, nothing has been done to reunify the country. Euphoria has been replaced by frustration. In addition to the two governments ruling over the country, the international community has sponsored a third. The Government of National Accord led by PM Fayez Mustafa al Sarraj co-exists with the ones in Tripoli and Tobruk. And since March 30, 2016 al Sarraj is confined to the Abu Sitta naval base after a coup attempt tried to oust him. The internationally sponsored government is now without any political, economic or military power. Even the Libyan Central Bank and the National Oil Company have taken a step back after their initial support to al Sarraj. And without resources, oil or an army, failure is just around the corner. Meanwhile, Libya's security deteriorates.

### **Shared responsibilities**

Are the Libyans to blame? Definitely yes. Five years on, the civil war and the internal strife have led the country to collapse. The social texture of Libyan tribal and beduin society has fallen apart. The Kabyles, or tribes, through which Muammar Khadafi used to control power and territory, have lost their influence. Armed militias have taken over and they have their own agenda. Weapons talk more than traditional assemblies. The economy has also collapsed. There is no difference between legal and illegal activities, trade or smuggling as several militias behave more like criminal gangs. The fact that they have found a way to enrich themselves and that these sources of income could disappear if rule of law is re-established poses a huge challenge for the future of Libya.

Is the UN to blame? The United Nations pays the price of its operational limits. They are very active when it comes to negotiating and extremely passive when deals have to be put into practice. They always lack the force to impose what was agreed upon. The UN's mission in Libya, UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya), is political and not military. A wagon-load of good intentions (restoration of public security and rule of law, promotion of national reconciliation, political dialogue and the electoral process, protection of human rights etc.), but no tools to implement them. In a country in the hands of armed factions such as Libya is, the UN's goodwill will not go very far. This is because the negotiations in Skhirat were flawed because only the parties willing to talk in the first place

ended up signing the agreement. As expected, those against the talks are now in the frontline to sabotage that peace process.

Those most responsible for the ongoing crisis in Libya are the members of the UN Security Council. They all sponsored the peace deal, but then chose a local ally to side with. With the exception of China, who shows little or not strategic interest in the Middle East and North Africa, the remaining members of the Security Council favored their national agenda and undermined those same negotiations they initially had sponsored and supported.

### **Russian manoeuvrings**

Russia is going all in on General Khalifa Haftar, the ruler of the Cyrenaica and the main opponent of the reconciliation efforts led by al Sarraj's government. Haftar was received in Moscow in November – a month later, another opponent to the Skhirat deal, the Speaker of the Parliament in Tobruk, Aguila Saleh Issa, also received a warm welcome in Russia – he granted the Russian fleet the right to exercise in Libyan national waters and boarded the Kuznetsov aircraft carrier, hosted in Tobruk the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, Valerj Gerasimov, and had a video-conference with the Russian Minister of Defense, Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoigu. All of the above happened in broad daylight, in a show of open political support. Although Moscow has officially denied supplying weapons to Haftar, Aguila Saleh underlined that Russia is ready to support and train the “Libyan army”. And by “Libyan army” he meant the “National Libyan Army” led by Haftar.

Russia's policy in Libya is part of Vladimir Putin's wider Middle East's agenda. Haftar is now Libya's strong man. During Khadafi's days he went for military training in Moscow and could turn out to be a useful pawn in Putin's strategy in the Mediterranean Sea. In Libya, military might dictates politics, and Khalifa Haftar is among the mightiest. And he could build on his strength with Russian support. After Tartous and Latakia in Syria, a Libyan regime in good terms with Moscow could allow the Russian fleet a foothold in another port in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, by siding with Haftar, Russia is now on the same side as Egyptian General Abdel Fattah al Sisi. Egypt supports Khalifa Haftar against the Islamic militias that are active in Eastern Libya, along the Egyptian border. Cairo's supplies of weapons and support is a waiver of UN sanctions.

Can Russia sponsor the talks in Skhirat and then side with the biggest opponent to the government of national unity? Vladimir Putin has never put ethics nor fair play at the top of his political action, especially now that he's gained such a prominent role on the Middle Eastern chessboard. Putin's rise is directly proportional to the US's retreat from the region. The election of Donald Trump could favor a rapprochement with Moscow. And from what the President-elect has said in his first foreign policy statements, Libya appears nowhere close to the top of his list of priorities. According to Trump, this is a European problem. And if this approach is confirmed, Russia would definitely end up playing a lead role in the future of Libya.

### **The other players**

Russia isn't the sole actor playing dirty in Libya. France has deployed its special forces in the Benina airport in Benghazi and, although not blatantly, supports Khalifa Haftar. The Brits do the same: they sponsored Skhirat and now side with the General. Both countries target Libyan oil, as 70% of Libya's national production is concentrated in Cyrenaica, under Haftar's control. He has even started using the oil terminals to sell gas and oil on his own.

The US, at least while Barack Obama was still at the helm, has not played an intrusive role in Libya. They supported and carried out bombardments in favor of the Misrata militias in their fight against ISIS in Sirte, thus offering an indirect support to Fayeze al Sarraj. In fact, the United States were probably the only members of the Security Council to advance the peace deal signed in Morocco. However, there were two drawbacks in the American intervention: the aerial missions – over 500 of them – targeted ISIS alone and were not a show of support for al Sarraj; any future initiatives will have to be decided by the new administration in Washington DC.

The United States can withstand a politically correct attitude in Libya and can decide when and how to talk to Khalifa Haftar. After all, the Libyan General is a US citizen and was (and might as well still be) on the CIA's payroll for his role in fueling the uprising against Khadafi. He basically showed up out of nowhere in Libya in 2011, with a lot of money in his pockets and the likely approval and support of US intelligence. Trump's lack of consideration for the United Nations could easily push the United States towards abandoning the UN-backed government of al Sarraj for Haftar.

Other countries, instead of adhering to the international deal, have chosen to side with one of the Libyan factions. Qatar and Turkey both support the former Islamist Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell in Tripoli. Ghwell tried twice to oust al Sarraj in October 2016 and January 2017. The UAE instead backs the government in Tobruk and its airplanes are deployed in an airbase in the Marji area, in Cyrenaica. Jordan has offered training to Khalifa Haftar's officers. During the training sessions in Amman Haftar's two sons, Saddam and Khalid, also joined in. The General's children hold ranks in the military and, in the consolidated tradition of Arab regimes, already pose as the heirs of their father's power.

The country that has more openly supported al Sarraj is Italy. Official statements, the deployment of a military hospital in Misrata during the attack on ISIS, the re-opening – a first among European countries – of the embassy in Tripoli and the signature of a cooperation and assistance deal with al Sarraj to fight against organized crime and illegal immigration are clear indications of Rome's strategy. The Italian attitude has been met with opposition from those hostile to al Sarraj. Khalifa Ghwell has labeled the Italian moves as a form of "neocolonialism". Haftar warned Italy to keep away from domestic Libyan affairs.

However, Italy runs with the hare and hunts with the hound. Haftar has frequent and direct contacts with the heads of the AISE, the Italian intelligence agency tasked with external threats, as they keep their options open in case al Sarraj fails and the Libyan General takes over.

## **Outlook**

It is now clear that Libya, a country that has no historical experience with democratic institutions, is having a hard time in implementing a national reconciliation agreement based on popular consensus. The main protagonists of the stand off share a similar attitude towards democracy. The “consensus” they seek will have to come through a show of force. The fact of the matter is that, among the three contenders, al Sarraj is the weakest from a military point of view. This implies that he is not receiving the international backing he was supposed to obtain. And this is ultimately due to the foul play by the international community, whose members have pursued national objectives to the detriment of peace in Libya.

If a civil war breaks out, al Sarraj would be defeated twice. For one, the Misrata militias that support him are weaker than Haftar’s. They’ve lost three thousand men during the fight against ISIS in Sirte. Secondly, al Sarraj’s demise would mean the international peace process has failed in another blow to the UN’s conflict resolution “model”. A peaceful transition to democracy would be the next victim.

Currently Khalifa Haftar can count on an “army” – a vaguely abusive term used to refer to a heterogeneous grouping of unqualified militants – of 30 thousand men, although he claims twice this figure. He’s also obtained the support of some Khadafi loyalists. When he asks Italy to stay out of the picture, Haftar is looking for enough room to act freely. The open or veiled support of Russia and Egypt exponentially increase his arrogance. The General’s air force has recently targeted an airport in the South of Libya where Misrata’s jets were stationing. This is the prodrome of a direct military confrontation between Haftar and his opponents.

The strong man in Misrata is Fayed al Sarraj’s deputy, Ahmed Maitiq. He’s the only one who can possibly counter Haftar. Maitiq can count on an alleged force of 35 thousand men, split among 200 or so militias that fight for different reasons. Presently Libya is home to 200 thousand armed men and militants.

The struggle between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, Haftar vs al Sarraj, is just one of many. As mentioned earlier, Khalifa Ghwell has tried twice to overthrow al Sarraj. Despite the failed coup attempts, he is still capable of roaming freely between Tripoli and Misrata. This shows the ultimate irrelevance of al Sarraj and the Government of National Accord.

### **A new Skhirat?**

Diplomats have probably realized that the peace deal has failed and have begun a new round of talks. In October 2016 Paris hosted a conference on Libya and no representative from al Sarraj’s government was invited to attend. The UN is holding negotiations in Hammamet, while the US – that is until Trump steps in – seem willing to discuss the Libyan case. The African Union also met in Brazzaville, Congo, a few weeks ago. In front of delegates from the Arab League and the UN envoy Martin Kobler, Fayeze al Sarraj asked that the sanctions be lifted. The meeting also underlined a necessary truth: a new political deal is needed, a new “compromise” must be found.

The only way to prevent a bloodbath and a return to normal would be the signing of a deal between all three parties. If Russia were to put pressure on Tobruk, the US on al Sarraj and Turkey on Ghwell, a deal would be within reach in weeks. A new, internationally-backed government would be formed to include all parties. Fayed al Sarraj could maintain his political role, Khalifa Haftar oversee the reconstruction of the armed forces, and the militias would be gradually absorbed into the national army. Easier said than done. However, a fresh international attitude could convert a dirty game into a clean one.

Without a deal the country is doomed for war, regardless of its outcome. Any conflict, with its string of the killings, can only bring more division. The civil war in Libya has caused over 1.500 victims in 2016. It was the same in 2015 and twice as much in 2014. More deaths will only make any national reconciliation a lot harder.

## **HOW THE LEADERSHIP OF ISIS IS ELIMINATED**

The best way to defeat ISIS is through the systematic elimination of its leaders. Doing so would create problems in the chain of command of the organization, presently rigid and compartmentalized, and fuel a sense of insecurity in the top brass of the terrorist group. It would also combine both the practical outcome deriving from the death of a person, to the psychological impact of a constant threat to one's life.

To think that the menace comes from the sky, be it a silent drone or a long range missile, enhances the fear of an invisible enemy, an uncertainty that can have an impact on one's efficiency. Those who become, or think they have become, a target lose their self-confidence, spend more time trying to hide and end up spending less time with the combatants on the ground. In other words, a commander that cannot lead his men is just a dead man walking.

Some might argue that martyrdom, especially for high ranking ISIS officials, is an inevitable outcome. They know there is no redemption or forgiveness. Only the escape to some other war zone across the globe where a similar sectarian and religious struggle is ongoing could offer a chance of survival. The brutality of ISIS and its actions rule out any alternatives. You either win, or die. To die on the battlefield, facing the enemy, is acceptable. Being struck by an unknown force out of the blue is different. It finds you unprepared, helpless.

Recently, several high ranking ISIS men have been killed. This implies that Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's luck is running out. There is also always a correlation between military defeats and increased intelligence by the enemy. The debacle increases treason, defection, less attention is paid when talking over the phone or radio, panic takes over caution. This also implies your opponent has more sources at hand (greater HUMINT), more information from communications traffic (greater SIGINT), the same goes for data (ELINT) or drone/satellite/airplane imagery (IMINT). The identification of a target, be he a person or a structure, relies on all these sources of intelligence.

### **The US chain of command**

The United States have recently defined the decision-making process when dealing with the elimination of high ranking ISIS officials. A chain of command that involves both the military and political leaders in the country.

During the initial stages of the process, the military gathers inputs from various intelligence agencies, turns them into informations and then carries out a preliminary evaluation. The organism entitled to conduct these tasks is the Joint Special Operations Center (JSOC). The JSOC is under the umbrella of the Pentagon's Intelligence Surveillance, Reconnaissance Task Force and is supposed to develop the details of an operation: identify the target and how to take it out.

Once this is done, the report is passed on to the operatives. CENTCOM, the central command, whose authority spans from Egypt to Pakistan, including Central Asia and former USSR states, is responsible over the Middle East. CENTCOM is currently in charge

of the “Inherent Resolve” operation, launched in October 2014 to fight ISIS and other terrorist groups. Headquartered in Tampa, Florida, it has also a base in Qatar. Once the JSOC report is received, CENTCOM begins its evaluation of the operation and its feasibility. It basically turns it into a military operation.

The last step in the chain of command is the transmission of the new report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose role is to give the nod and offer the plan on a silver platter to the political authorities who will have to rubber-stamp the operation.

### **The political level**

There are a series of political authorities involved in offering their counsel – the National Security Council, the Counter-terrorism advisor – or advice – like the State Department and so forth. However, any political decision on this kind of operations is either approved by the Secretary of Defense or directly by the President.

The Commander-in-Chief is only involved in high profile cases, like Osama bin Laden in the past or future ops involving say Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (worth 25 million USD under the Rewards for Justice program) and Ayman al Zawahiri (another 25 million). In these cases the President personally follows the operation. In other circumstances he simply grants the authorization to eliminate the terrorists. Where, when and how is left to CENTCOM and reports are to be filed to the Secretary of Defense.

If this were not the case, if indeed this was the procedure to follow every time an ISIS official was identified, if the lengthy bureaucracy in the chain of command was followed to the letter, any operation would be destined to fail. Especially when you’re dealing with terrorists on the run. The only variable to be taken into account are the political consequences of an operation, whether it could provoke reactions in the local government. But this is definitely not the case in Syria and Iraq. But if this was the case, there would be a far greater involvement of the State Department and the local ambassador would be informed.

Another option is to capture ISIS leaders. The Delta Force is active both in Iraq and Syria. The Expeditionary Targeting Forces are run by the JSOC and are responsible for locating and capturing terrorists. The chain of command for their operations is the same. But the high risk nature of these endeavors implies a stricter approval process.

### **Drone wars**

Every US armed force is equipped with its own drones, plus those belonging to the CIA. Ever since the second Gulf War, UAVs and drones have been flying over Iraqi skies. In one instance, in 2004, two drones belonging to two different armed forces crashed while in flight.

We all know drones listen, observe, photograph, jam the communications and, of course, know how to shoot. Several functions for many different needs. And, above all, they are silent. It is hard to detect them, or hear them coming. This is why, once spotted, the potential victim of this deadly tool of war has no way out. His movements, habits are

analyzed, his mobile phone becomes a GPS signal pointing to his precise location. And when the right time comes...

The sole technical itch is that a drone is piloted by a man, or a woman, sitting inside a cockpit miles away from the target. There is a minimal time delay from when a target is identified, the request to intervene is filed to a superior and the order to strike is given. When he's not in the US, the drone operator sits in the Al Udeid base in Qatar, while the target is in Mosul, Raqqa or elsewhere. Any delay, even seconds, could allow the target to flee or save himself. And any evaluation of the context, such as potential civilian victims, could further extend the decision process.

Although we're talking war, deciding when to accept collateral damage might seem a futile argument. However, every innocent victim killed because it was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time would generate hate against the perpetrators. Unlike a traditional bombing, where military outposts or infrastructure are targeted systematically but impersonally, a drone's surgical strike sees a direct involvement of the pilot, his decisions on when it is best to hit.

The US is more concerned about collateral damage in Iraq, than the Russians are in Syria. Russia adopts the opposite approach: the more the victims, the more terror, the greater the impact on the morale of the opponent and on the feelings of the civilian population that should start taking on the rebels. Whether this works or not is debatable. Nonetheless, it is not a coincidence that every hospital in rebel-held Aleppo was systematically destroyed by Russian and/or Syrian bombardments prior to their conquest of the city.

### **A long list**

The hunt for ISIS leadership is currently ongoing both in Mosul and Raqqa. It focuses on the last two remaining ISIS strongholds. Al Baghdadi's men are trying to survive by hiding amongst the civilians and playing on the US fear for collateral damage. But this hasn't saved the 15 or so high ranking ISIS members that have been terminated by US drones recently. And the list is still pretty long.

Not only al Baghdadi: when his turn comes he will probably have the US President witness the event. There is a long list of candidates to martyrdom, individuals that haven't gone unnoticed and that surely are on the JSOP's watchlist. They are all key figures in the caliphate. Some of them are military leaders, like Abu Fatima al Jayshi, in charge of military operations in southern Iraq, Abu Shami'a (aka Rhyad Nuaimi) responsible for armaments, Abu Qassem (aka Ahmed al Mashadani) who manages kamikazes and foreign volunteers, Abu Saja (aka Abdul Rahman al Afari) who oversees female martyrs, field commander Abu Abdallah the "Kosovan", Frenchman Salim Ben Ghanim who presides over executions of inmates in Syria, Abu Mohammed (aka Bashar Ali Hamadani) who's in charge of detainees and their elimination in Iraq, and many more. There are then the emirs, who are both military and religious leaders: Abu Suleiman al Nasser, emir of Deir ez-Zor, Abu Massirah, emir of Baghdad, Abu Nabil emir of Salaheddin, Abu Luqman emir of Raqqa, Abu Jarnas emir of the border areas. Also in this case the list could

continue. And, finally, the “politicians”: Abu Abdel Qader in charge of finances or Abu Himan al Atari, who promulgates fatwas.

Despite their war-names, intended to conceal their true identities, all of these individuals in the frontline are well known by their actual names, last names and nationality. Overall we’re looking at around 30 people that can be considered in the line of fire. Until the next rocket lands, that is. They will add to the toll of over 50 thousand jihadis that have been eliminated since 2014.