

THE QUESTION NOW IS: WHEN WILL ISRAEL ATTACK IRAN?

With the passing of time and without a negotiated solution in sight to suspend Iran's nuclear program, Israeli determination to attack Teheran is everyday more pressing and manifest. Diplomatic pressure, sanctions, open or veiled threats, sabotage, attacks and cybernetic warfare are nothing but the prologue of what could be, in the near future, an Israeli armed attack against Iran.

With the support of the Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak, and of extreme right wing parties and politicians such as Avigdor Lieberman, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not hidden his true intentions. On August 14th 2012 he has appointed at the Ministry of Internal Defense another interventionist of the likes of Ben Avi Ditcher, former chief of the Shit Bet ("General Security Service, the domestic intelligence). The recent creation of a government of national unity and the support obtained from Shaul Mofaz (yet another interventionist) and his Kadima party add to the political majority in favor of an attack, as opposed to those who fear the menaces associated with yet another military venture.

The Israeli PM now has a broad majority at the Knesset allowing him wide discretion on the domestic political front. Furthermore, in August governmental procedures were modified to allow the PM to order a military operation without consulting his government nor the Chief of Staffs.

Nonetheless, there are also several high profile personalities that are against a military attack: the former Chief of Staff (from 2007 until February 2011) Gavriel Ashkenazi, the former head of the Shin Bet (from 2005 until May 2011) Yuval Diskin, the former chief of the Mossad Meir Dagan, the former head of the military intelligence Amos Yadlin, the former advisor Uzi Arad. These are all highly qualified people whom Netanyahu is absolutely not taking into account.

Preparing the population

During January 2012 Israel has carried out a drill simulating a missile attack carried out with radioactive and/or chemical warheads. The exercise, named "Dark Cloud", aimed at training the population in case of such an attack. The dual menace (chemical or radioactive) meant the threat could come either from Syria or Iran.

In June yet another drill, named "Turning Point 5", on the scenario of a missile attack coming from nearby (Hamas and Hezbollah) or farther (Iran) hostile forces. Even though these are routine exercises (they have been put in place annually since 2006), this year a particular emphasis was placed on involving the population.

In the mean time, the distribution of anti-gas masks to the population in ongoing (deliveries are at about 70%), pamphlets explaining what behavior to hold in case of an attack are being distributed, foreign embassies have been informed on where to seek refuge, new shelters and underground hospitals are being built, the government has set up an alternative office in Judea (costing 250 million dollars, it can host hundreds of people), an emergency communication system utilizing text messages on mobile phones has been put in place, evacuation plans have been updated and a new warning system capable of calculating in real time the flight path of missiles and of informing the population about the imminent threat is being set up in the Negev.

Besides from the technical preparations, the population is systematically being psychologically prepared for a future attack. The military option is presented as inescapable. During his public remarks, Benjamin Netanyahu is continuous on the menace brought by Iran, Teheran's nuclear threat is compared to the Holocaust, the attack is correlated to the survival of the population. Under this respect, several times the speeches are marked by messianic tones on the destiny of the Israelis and of the Jews.

Ehud Barak also indulges in his Prime Minister's apocalyptic scenarios when he hints to the possibility that an hypothetical Iranian missile response could cause around 500 (even though the report suggests from 500 to 3000) civilian victims in case of a 30 days conflict. This is a psychological strategy whose aim is to make the military option even more imminent by quantifying – ahead of time – the human costs and its duration (this implies that the project is at an advanced stage of implementation). According to rumors published on Israeli newspapers, the daily cost of the operation against Iran has also been estimated: 375 million dollars (of military expenses) and the cost associated with a war time economy (250 million dollars per day).

The military planning

Israel is also carrying out a series of initiatives and prearrangements that postulate a forthcoming military venture: missile batteries readied for both offensive and defensive purposes (“Iron Dome” and the “Homa” system), acquisition of depth bombs and warheads (to be mounted on “Jericho” missiles) to strike underground installations, the configuration of the “Heron” drones to carry electronic jamming systems, the continuous soil attack drills by the Israeli air force, the acquisition of in flight fuel airplanes, drills on the use of carbon fiber ammunition that will put the Iranian network and electric grid out of service, the purchase and use of electronic weapons, the use of spy satellites (“Ofeq”, “Tecsar” “Blue and White”), the preparation – with German help – of nuclear warheads for the Dolphin submarines.

Regardless of all of this, Israel also needs more American support: the use of the radars located in Qatar, other technological devices to reach the targets in a simulated way, access to the communications that are wiretapped in the Gulf, continuous and unfiltered access to intelligence, support from the drones that fly over Iran.

The relationship with the United States

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's biggest problem are the United States. President Barack Obama is particularly hostile to yet another war whose outcome is uncertain both on the military front and on the stability of an entire region. The latest wave of resentment against the United States in several

Muslim countries caused by the blasphemous movie on Prophet Mohamed is definitely an alarm bell of an anti-American social tension that could burst in case of an attack in which Washington sided with Tel Aviv.

Israel would want the U.S. to strike a red line with a deadline beyond which, in the absence of tangible results, Iranian nuclear infrastructure will automatically be attacked. A concession Washington will not grant at this stage, especially during campaign for the presidential election. Netanyahu, whose provocative attitude has not earned him the sympathy of Barack Obama (and not only him since former French president Sarkozy labelled the Israeli PM as a “liar”), has tried to insert, better said interfere, in the U.S. electoral campaign the Iranian nuclear issue and the ties with the most important ally in the Middle East. The Democratic party has had to quickly correct its electoral platform where it had forgotten to mention Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Benjamin Netanyahu has obviously obtained Republican support (candidate Mitt Romney visited Israel in July, while Obama never has. Both Romney and Netanyahu know each other as they have worked for the same company in the past) and has lobbied in favor of Romney in the Jewish community. This has once again worsened the inter-personal relationship with President Obama who also charges Israeli intransigence for the lack of progress in the negotiations with the Palestinians.

The direct consequence of such a situation is that the planned meeting between Netanyahu and Obama at the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York will not take place. The Israeli PM will only meet the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. In case of a second Obama term, the gap between Israel and the United States could widen even further.

Another consequence is that, in the planned joint Israeli-US exercise in October (the “Austere Challenge 2”), the American contingent will be strongly down sized (1500 men instead of 5000, 1 battle cruiser instead of 2, the anti-missile Patriot system will probably come without US support personnel). The drill that should have highlighted the joint effort against Iran, will instead show the disagreement between the two allies.

All these signs – at least for now – against an attack do not seem to divert Benjamin Netanyahu from continuing along the path of his military ambitions. Recently there has been an argument between the US Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Dan Shapiro, and the Israeli PM when he accused the United States of lack of compliance with respect to Iran's nuclear programme. Netanyahu's provocations continue to strongly worry the Americans in the fear of an Israeli coup de theatre.

CIA boss Petraeus has visited Israel in early September to meet with his Israeli counterparts, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has phoned Benjamin Netanyahu to convince him to leave more room for diplomacy and sanctions, the US Chief of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey (also recently in Israel) has said in late August that the United States will not be part of an Israeli attack against Iran. On the other hand, the Israeli PM has publicly declared that as long as the safeguard of Israel is concerned, there are no moral obligations.

When could the attack be carried out?

Setting the date for the attacks basically depends on two sets of assessments: of a military nature

(when will the Iranian program be close to completion) and of political opportunity.

Regarding the first factor, Israel has recently released US intelligence documents that spell out the progress of the Iranian nuclear program. Besides from the impropriety of such a behavior and the consequent charge of manipulating information, the news is that the Iranians are going ahead with acquiring the atomic bomb. According to Israeli experts, Iran should reach by October what is technically speaking the point of no return. From that moment onwards – having over 200 kg of uranium enriched at 20% - a nuclear bomb could be obtained within a few weeks (5 to 7). From there the Iranians would need more time to install the nuclear warheads on the “Shebab 3” missiles; these are medium range warheads (1280 km) that have been improved to reach almost 2000 km.

On the basis of this data, the Israelis can trace the afore mentioned “red line”, the event postulating an armed intervention. Another element that will have to be taken into account has been recently stated by former Mossad chief, Efran Halevyal: for climatic and meteorological reasons Israel is against attacks during winter. If we put all of this together we could forecast an attack over the next 2 or 3 months. Past Israeli operations against Iraqi and Syrian nuclear sites all took place in September and this year the Yom Kippur will end on September 26.

But, as mentioned before, there is also a political assessment to be made. Here the relationship with the United States comes into play. Should the attack be carried out before the US presidential elections on November 6th and with their open disapproval, or should Israel wait for the new president elect? But if the next President will still be Obama, what does Netanyahu have to gain from waiting if his counterpart has no sympathy for him? The worst case scenario would be an attack before the elections and a re-election of Obama. In this case the lack of sympathy could turn into hostility.

The wider regional context also has to be taken into account. The rise of the so called Arab Spring has created great social instability. Israel has lost the uncritical support of Mubarak's Egypt and now has a difficult relationship with the new president, Mohamed Morsi. The latter was recently in Teheran for the meeting of the non-aligned States (and the respective secret services have also recently been in touch). The Arab Spring has paved the way for Islamic majorities in several nations; the fight against Israel acts as their main glue. Syria is sliding down a similar path, Turkey is not the ally it once was, the Palestinians are more and more restless because of useless negotiations. These are all situations that create in Israel a sense of isolation and encirclement and thus of danger. A feeling that could suggest prudence, but that can also lead to a show of strength.

How the attack could take place

Israel is not new to sudden attacks against nuclear sites in nearby countries. It did so in September 1980 against the Osiraq structures in Iraq (Operation “Babilon”) and, more recently, in September 2007 against the Syrian nuclear site of Deir el Zor (operation “Orchard”). The Iraqi operation had a similar scenario if we think of Iran: a far away target needing the passage over other countries with all the limitations and precautions such an act implies.

Firstly, today just as back then, the operation was preceded by a series of covert operations (the destruction in France of equipment bound for Iraq, the elimination of people associated with the Iraqi nuclear program like the Egyptian scientist Yehia al Mashad, acts of sabotage, menaces

against foreign technicians and companies involved in the project). The only difference between now and the past is the use of cyber warfare, not conceivable in those times. So no spyware nor malware like Flame, Stuxnet, Duqu or Stars. The tools to block the command and control systems have also changed. In the same way, the then decision to attack Iraq taken by PM Begin and Ariel Sharon was opposed by several politicians (Dayan, Ezer Weizman, Yagzel Yadin) who were not taken into account.

In 1980 the distance to the target was about 1600 km and this implied the violation of both Jordanian and Saudi air space and the need for in flight refueling for the fighter jets. During the attack the Israelis employed eight F-16As (armed with Mark-84 missiles) and six F-15s for cover. A total of 14 airplanes.

To go past Jordanian and Saudi air space, the Israeli pilots talked in Arabic with a Saudi accent with the different control towers while crossing Jordan (thus implying they were Saudis who had crossed over in the neighboring country) and then, the other way around, they employed Jordanian language (including radio signals and frequencies) to confound the Saudis.

The attack was carried out on a Sunday to avoid the potential presence of foreign technicians (while for Iran a Friday could suit the purpose because surveillance will be diminished).

Once inside the Iraqi air space, the F-16As flew hedgehopping towards their target to avoid being intercepted by radars or anti-aircraft defense, while the F-15s scattered all over the enemy's air space to create confusion. The attack lasted around 2 minutes, 8 missiles (out of the 16 launched) hit the structure, after that the Israeli fighter jets returned to their bases flying at a high altitude.

In the presumable next attack, Israel will face the same problems: not getting identified during the trip to the target (even though Saudi Arabia could be available to turning a blind eye), inflight refueling (with the avail of air tankers or the use of bigger tanks that could affect the handling of the airplanes).

There are also other major issues. The biggest one is that this time the targets are spread across several structures. There are basically two alternatives: a surgical operation against those sites that can delay the Iranian nuclear program the most, or the massive use of fighter jets. The first option seems more plausible.

Another challenge is that some of the sites are underground and will require depth bombs whose impact cannot be verified.

To counterbalance the Iranian reaction, during the attack the Israelis will need to rely on huge fire power that could be provided by the stationing of its submarines in the Gulf. Can this be done without the Iranians knowing?

The aerial attack against Osiraq in 1980 was carried out whilst Iraq was busy with the war against Iran. In this case the surprise factor has little value. The Iranians know that Israel wants to attack, they have already set up their countermeasures and, above all, have a military apparatus worthy of respect. To avoid the collapse of the command and control system the military apparatus has been decentralized and divided into 31 districts, each one of them with its own operative autonomy.

Technology will have an impact on how the attack will be carried out. The two Gulf Wars were preceded by a jamming of the communication systems, by the subsequent destruction of the command and control systems, by a black out of the electricity network, by the destruction of the most important military missile sites and their warehouses. Without such precautions, the risk of both a fighter jet being intercepted and taken down by the anti-craft defense and a missile response are both very high. In other words, an Israeli attack against Iranian nuclear sites will require a series of action typical of total war.

At this point we should ask ourselves whether such a complex operation can be carried out by Israel alone without the support or the coordination with the United States.

Conclusions

A predictable Israeli attack against the Iranian nuclear infrastructure raises a series of issues and consequently a series of responses.

Even though reluctant and possibly not consentient, in case of a conflict the United States will be forced to help Israel. But at this point the problem is to predict Teheran's reaction: limited to a launch of missiles against Israel? A wider range of targets across other Gulf countries and their oil infrastructures (during 2011 Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman have trebled their purchase of American weapons)? The Hormuz Strait will be mined or blocked by Iran thus throttling the export of oil? The Hezbollah (who own an estimated 1600 missiles) will open a new armed front against Israel (Nasrallah has threatened to strike also in other countries)? Will Hamas do the same? And will Egypt block the flux of oil from the Sinai to Israel? What will happen in the pseudo-theocracies that have emerged following the Arab Spring?

There are several scenarios that have to be evaluated. The common denominator is a region vital for Western economic interests and that could soon flare up. And since we're talking about an operation that will not solve the issue, but rather slow down and not block the Iranian nuclear program, is the game worth the trouble?

We should also raise a series of collateral issues: a worsening of the global economic recession, oil supplies, the stability of the countries in the Persian Gulf, a potential Sunni-Shiite alliance against both the US and the Israelis, the spreading of Al Qaeda's terrorists and their mingling with Salafist groups, the backlashes on Afghanistan.

Both sharing the concern of the threat posed by Iran owning nuclear weapons, the US and Israel differ in the solution to the problem: a massive military operation the latter, sanctions + diplomacy + potential military operation is instead the solution proposed in Washington. Tel Aviv has made Iran a question of survival (often confounded with the concept of military supremacy), whilst the US has put before a geo-strategic approach, especially now that the muslim world is ripe with anti-American feelings.

In this moment both stances seem to have generated a stall. The only signal sent by Washington was a large naval deployment in the Gulf for the drill "International Mine Countermeasures Exercise 2012" involving several countries in the region and that will last until the end of September. This is

surely a warning to Teheran, but nothing more. Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu is dedicating his efforts to appearing on major American broadcasters giving interviews about the Iranian menace, thus trying to get US public opinion on his side. The date of the attack will be set on the basis of the outcome of the struggle between these two antithetical visions of the Iranian issue.

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RUSSIA – THE PUTIN MEDVEDEV CHANGEOVER

The changeover in the presidency of the Russian federation between Medvedev and Putin – going back and forth – has occurred again on the past 7th of May with the inaugural ceremony of Vladimir Putin (Putin III, after the two preceding mandates: 2000 – 2004 and 2004 – 2008). On the following day (May 8th 2012) Medvedev filled in the post of Prime Minister, thus reconstructing, although with opposite roles, the previous tandem at the helm of power in Russia.

Regarding the composition of the government, many speak of a “new” government, or rather of “two governments”: the official one with Medvedev and the more authoritative one with Putin. It seems like a subtle invite for stronger ties between the two institutional formations (a relationship of dependence or of separation of competence).

One could, at this point, draw an easy conclusion: “nothing's changed” (with regards to the previous governments); yet these elements are not sufficient for a correct evaluation and the time elapsed from the installation of the two politicians is too little.

Before reaching a final conclusion one must consider other aspects: the terms of the mandate, the legacy of Medvedev in relation to the things that have been done during his mandate (2008 – 2012), the criteria and the initiatives that have been undertaken this far by Putin in terms of foreign policy and economy. Also, most importantly so, the operative room entrusted/delegated by Putin to Medvedev, in the light of the composition of the two hypothetical governments:

The official Medvedev government. The new young faces, most of which are aged somewhere around 40; among these there is the 29-year-old Nikolaj Nikiparov, Minister of Telecommunications, who is pushing for information technology and the access to the internet for all offices of the Russian administration;

The authoritative Putin government. Putin has placed the ministers from his previous government in the special “Council of Presidency” (in practice they walked out through the door and back in through the window). They are responsible for drafting the main governing criteria and path, among which some observers have already hypothesized the reduction and weakening of the decisional power of Medvedev (the appointment of a “presidency of companies for energetic resources”, thus the abolition of the ban on the appointment of heads of enterprises to government posts, etc.)

The presidential term

In 2008 the duration of the presidential term has been increased from 4 to 6 years, with a maximum of two consecutive terms: Putin could be president of the Russian federation from 2012 to 2024, a period of time that would be surpassed by Stalin alone (29 years – from 1924 to 1953) and by Breznev who was secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982 (18 years).

Putin would be able to collect 20 years of presidency (although not continuous) if we consider the eight years comprising his previous terms in office (2000 – 2004; 2004 – 2008).

The presidential elections (March 4th 2012) have followed closely the parliamentary elections (December 4th 2011): these have had a role in the alternation between Medvedev and Putin because at the “United Russia” party conference on September 24th 2011 the President of the Russian Federation Dmitrij Medvedev has proposed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, his predecessor, for the office of President of the Federation; Putin accepted, offering Medvedev a chance to run together at the parliamentary elections, thus offering him the office of Prime Minister at the end of his presidential term.

According to the constitution, the President of the Russian Federation appoints the Prime Minister, is responsible for foreign policy, is the head of the F.A., declares martial law, controls the security services and the agencies that supervise the media. He also has the power to dissolve parliament (which is comprised of the Duma/lower house with 450 members and by the Council of the Federation/upper house with 166 members).

The 2011 – 2012 elections

During the parliamentary elections of December 4th 2011 for the Duma, the governing party “United Russia” lost seats compared to the preceding 2007 elections (from 315 to 238 seats); the other parties – the Communist Party, “Just Russia” party and the Liberal – Democratic party have obtained respectively 92, 64 and 56 seats in the Duma.

The other three parties – the Social – Liberal party “Yabloko”, the pro-government party “Just Cause” and the Liberal – Democratic party (nationalistic one) did not surpass the minimum 7% barrage.

Such results have sparked unrest on December 10, 2011 and have triggered demonstrations against Putin where thousands of Russians marched in the streets to protest against irregularities in the counting of votes, not to mention the suggestion by Michail Gorbaciov that Putin resign.

The presidential elections of March 4th 2012 have also been plagued by electoral results that have been deemed “irregular” by the OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – because about a third of the votes were counted in an irregular manner.

There follows information about the responsibilities on the electoral procedure, on candidates, voters, electoral colleges, voting controls, results of the presidential elections and the diffusion of such results.

According to the constitution, the federation's council calls for presidential elections; the justice minister and his territorial agencies are responsible for the registration of political parties.

The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is responsible for the electoral process, beginning with informing the citizens and all the way to the drafting and diffusion of the electoral results; it is composed of 83 Electoral Commissions of Administrative Subjects (SEC), one for each federal entity (21 republics, 47 provinces/oblast, 9 territories/krai, 4 administrative districts and 2 cities: Moscow and Saint Petersburg), 2746 Territorial Electoral Commissions (TEC) and 94300 Electoral Commissions of constituency (PEC).

The CEC, SEC and TEC are permanent commissions and are designated every 5 years while the

new PEC's are designated during each election. The PEC's meet no later than 50 days before the date of each election.

Every citizen that has reached the 18 th year of age can participate in the controls on the exercise of vote and on the conduct of the Commissions for presidential elections. These citizens will be designated by each candidate, political party or by the mass media: every citizen who participate in the controls will be monitoring the electoral campaign and in the organization of the telephone numbers and websites where every citizen can report on any irregularity.

Each electoral seat has two “web cams” and a computer for checking and recording voting operations.

The GOLOS association has trained about 6000 observers that will monitor elections in all of Russia; other associations have also become involved after the irregularities that followed the Duma elections in 2011.

The OECD, as mentioned above, will be responsible for monitoring the development of the electoral process; The OECD in Moscow has 15 expert observers and 40 more that have completed training; it is also able to designate 160 more observers if need be; the presidential elections kept them busy from January 26 to March 15 2012.

The electoral system in Russia is based on a majority vote with a second round if no candidate reaches an absolute majority during the first round, which is quite rare (it happened to Yeltsin in 1996).

The context of irregularities during voting is guaranteed by specific laws regarding democracy, constitutional liberties of the country and the information system of the federation, also known as GAS Vyborg.

Every citizen that has reached the 18th year of age can vote in presidential elections. In order to be eligible one has to have reached the 35th year of age without having served two consecutive presidential mandates and without having been condemned for “serious or extreme crimes”.

The political parties that support each candidate cannot have professional, racial, national or religious bases; they must be located within the above-mentioned 83 administrative districts and must have a total of at least 10.000 members.

Voluntary contributions of more than 10 times the monthly minimum established on March 1st, 2011 (the day before elections) are not allowed.

Voting in the 817 electoral seats that are located in far away districts begin two weeks ahead of time.

Voting instruments (such as scanners and touch-screen equipment) have been deployed in 5566 stations, 411 more than those deployed for the 2011 Duma elections.

There follows a chart with the five candidates, their supporting party, the number of votes obtained and the relative percentage.

CANDIDATE	SUPPORTING PARTY AND ITS POLITICAL ORIENTATION	NUMBER OF VOTES	PERCENTAGE %
PUTIN VLADIMIR	“UNITED RUSSIA” (governing party)	45.513.001	63,64
ZJUGANOV GHENNADIJ	COMMUNIST PARTY (the opposition)	12.288.624	17,18
PROKHOROV MIKHAIL	INDIPENDENT	5.680.558	7,94
ZIRINOVSKIJ VLADIMIR	LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY (nationalistic opposition)	4.448.959	6,22
MIRONOV SERGEIJ	“JUST RUSSIA” (Democratic Socialist Party)	2.755.642	3,85
VALID VOTES		70.686.784	98,84
NON VALID VOTES		833.191	1,46
TOTAL		71.519.975	100

In brief:

-over a total of 109.610.812 citizens that have a right to vote, the actual voters were 65,25%;
 -Putin has obtained: less than 50% of the votes in the central FD (Federal District – Moscow);
 between 50 and 56% in the North-Western FD (S. Petersburg) and about 70% in the other FD's.

The elections and the opposition

Just like on December 10, 2011, after the parliamentary elections of the Duma, when thousands of protesters marched in the streets demanding regular elections, on March 5th 2012, the day after presidential elections, the protest began anew against irregularities in a third of the electoral seats as denounced by the OECD.

The demonstrations were authorized by Putin himself as an expression of “democratic government”. Putin renounced the use of force in Pushkin plaza, Moscow, by the agents of the interior ministry – the “Omon” - who were dressed in anti-riot clothing (kneepads, bullet-proof vests, helmet and earphones for communications).

The protesters chanted their anti-regime slogans (such as “real elections” and “thieves and crooks be gone”, etc.). In the afternoon a Television conductor asked the protesters to go home peacefully and the crowd agreed.

Yet the use of non-violent means were the premise for an easier control and round-up of the organizers of the protests, who were identified ahead of time. This new strategy allowed Putin's men to arrest hundreds, who were charged with disobeying the orders of authorities and were sent to peripheral police stations: such an offense is punishable with two weeks jail time.

Among the arrested:

- Aleksej Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger;
- Sergej Udaltsov, leader of the “Left Front” and militant for “civil rights”;
- Ilya Yashin, leader of the “Solidarnosh Movement”, one of the biggest critics of the new Putin-Medvedev fellowship;
- Edvard Limonov, writer, who was arrested some hours earlier in Lubyanka Plaze, where the Information Services of the Federation are located.

Faced with this new strategy by the police, the opposition too tried to devise a new way to deal with the conduct of the regime, based on the appeal by Mikhail Gorbachev (“here nobody should die for the country; we should all live to achieve democracy”) by the world chess champion Garry Kasparov (“the regime cannot defend itself; in the end it will lose its head”) and by journalist Oleg Kashin, already a victim of the regime (he was beaten by two individuals after publishing an article against the oligarchs) who stated that during a fight, if one is knocked on the ground, one should wait until he has regained enough strength before getting up and fighting again.

In short, the opposition is finding it hard to organize itself against a very strong “enemy” and to surpass a time of reduced operative enthusiasm:

- the leaders follow the demonstrators but stay away from the spotlight, with great use of the web;
- the slogans, even those against the government (“Putin thief”, etc.) are less effective because they have been heard too many times;
- there is the need to give more room and power to information about the crimes of the regime, by limiting the meetings and swarming the streets on significant dates: during the procession on the 1st of May, like in the times of the Soviet Union (Putin and Medvedev were present), on the inaugural ceremony of Putin at the Kremlin (May 7), on the national celebration of the 12th of June and during the demonstration against the “anti-protest law” that came into effect on June 9th.

The opinions of bloggers that oppose the regime such as Navalny are supported by more moderate observers such as Mikhail Gorbachev, who are trying to avoid that the country become a tyranny where the citizens are not allowed to express their dissent. (article 31 of the constitution plus heavy fines – up to 12.000 euro – for “non authorized demonstration” which, in relation to the low wages and the jail time for those who do not pay up, makes it very hard to express thoughts that are critical with regards to government policies).

Even “spontaneous” parties or aggregations in parks by the opposition members (even without a political agenda) are subject to fines. Any form of mass gathering is prohibited, although the law does not specify the number of individuals that make up a “mass” gathering.

70.000 individuals took part in the demonstration against the “anti-protest” law, under the prying eyes of young police officers that were strangely “gentle” with the protesters, while the Omon were checking for developments in the side alleys.

It could, once again, be a new strategy of the regime against demonstrations; the police would be “discreet” while agents would penetrate demonstrations in order to provoke the violent reaction of

the Omon. This would allow the regime to arrest hundreds and then to release those deemed less dangerous while making it look like an act of clemency.

During the ceremony for the June 12th national celebration Putin himself – for the first time – commented a demonstration against his person, underlining the importance of listening to others on important issues. He also emphasized, though, that “that which divides or damages the state cannot be tolerated”.

All of this happened while the blogger Aleksej Navalny, the anti-corruption blogger, was being questioned for his responsibility in the clashes of May 6th and while his office was being searched to find any traces of evidence on the corruption involving the circle of power that revolves around Putin.

Ilya Ponomarov, deputy of “Just Russia” also expressed a significant invite for a change in the protests: the proposal asked for the election of a “governing group” for the protest that would be elected through primaries if need be.

The legacy of Medvedev

The legacy of Medvedev regards essentially foreign policy. Medvedev's mandate as president of the Russian federation (2008-2012) was exercised in a time of economic restraint. The fight against corruption was also very important because corruption is a considerable obstacle in the modernization of the Russian political system. Also, on the regional level (the Black Sea area), the “five day” war against Georgia in August 2008 highlighted contrasts between Russia and the West.

In brief, this leads to a situation of possible isolation of Russia on the international level following the worsening of relations with the US and with the EU.

Two events have helped reduce the tension: one is the peace plan drafted by the EU, under the French presidency, signed by Medvedev and by the Georgian president Saakashvili. The other is the global financial crisis that has helped forget about the Georgian issue, as witnessed during the “Conference for international politics” in Evian in the following month of October and the Summit Russia- EU in Nice in November.

The bettering of relations between Russia and the West has been ulteriorly evidenced during the Nato summit in Lisbon in 2010, when president Medvedev asked the USA to organize a “joint anti-missile defense system”: Moscow does not believe in the proposed purpose of the “anti-missile space shield” (exclusively against Iran) partly in light of the fact that the US senate has approved a “proposal to prohibit” all transfer of information on the shield to any foreign country.

On the other hand, there is the so-called “off-air” conversation between Obama and Medvedev during the Nuclear summit in Seoul in March 2012:

- Obama asked Medvedev to help him out with the missiles (“this is my last election, afterwards I can be more flexible”);
- Medvedev answered: “I understand; I'll forward your message to Vladimir” (Putin);

The relationship between the two “superpowers” also include the reduction of strategic weapons, the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty); in particular the problem of exchanges of information data on the missiles:

- the USA were favorable to the exchange of data;
- Russia thought that such exchange should not be part of the deal.

It was agreed, as a sign of “reached accord” that each country would decide on its own which data to exchange (rocket launches; information data; tests on new missiles, etc.).

The deal opened the door to a more flexible stance by Russia both on the signing of the Treaty of Prague in 2010 – as opposed to the “tension” between the two nations during the Bush administration – and on the support by Russia to the UN resolution n.1929 (sanctions against Iran), including the prohibition to transfer to Teheran the missile system S-300.

Finally there is the decision by Moscow to “abstain” itself on occasion of the military intervention in against Libya: Russia thought that it was a bad idea to worsen relations with the US for Tripoli's sake.

On the economic front, the most important event was the adhesion of Russia to the WTO (World Trade Organization): the US thought it a good time for Russia to enter the WTO during Medvedev's mandate, seen his engagement in favor of lessening tensions between the two countries.

The inaugural ceremony (May 7th 2012)

After the preceding two terms (2000-2004; 2004-2008), the inaugural ceremony of Putin for his third term has underlined the austerity of the “time of the Tzars” even without huge gatherings, as evidenced by the mass media.

Among the applause of the guests (3000 participants, among whom 1000 were invited to attend the dinner party), the “contained” expression of Gorbachev is to be noted. Gorbachev had invited Putin to “step aside”. Also, the reassured face of Medvedev, whom on May 8th 2012 had constituted together with Putin an alternation of power in the guise of Prime Minister.

After taking the oath on the constitution and taking possession of the “atomic briefcase”, the ceremonial continued with the signing by Putin of some measures in favor of the Russian people:

- a one-time subsidy for war veterans and invalids of 130 euro;
- a decree for the creation, within 2020, of 25 million new jobs.

A message was also sent to the US regarding the “missile shield” that, in brief, underlines the willingness of Russia to negotiate on the subject while demanding respect and no interference with the internal affairs of the Russian federation.

Putin also made promises – albeit ones that are hard to keep – such as the fight against corruption, the modernization of economy and a free and determined society: this last promise in stark contrast with the law on “democratic elections” of governors and mayors of large cities, whom are presently designated directly by the president of the russian federation.

Putin III's greeting card

A few months after the inauguration of the new government, several strategies already appear clearly outlined:

- the attention to the huge Russian territory in relation to its population (145 millions only);
- the strengthening of the economy (essentially the energetic resources);
- restrictions on the West and China with regards to the strategic sector;
- nationalism, the press and the intelligentsia in general.

For those who have followed closely the two preceding terms (2000-2004; 2004-2008) it all seems like a *deja-vu*, especially if the depths of the lands under the north pole are substituted with the inhospitability of the Tundra and of the Siberian glaciers: all of them serve the purpose of further exploration and exploitation of ulterior natural resources.

There is a “Company for the development of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Extreme Orient”, based in Vladivostok, capital of the territory of Primorje and the end of the Transiberian railway (9300 km from Moscow).

The aforementioned company, with unlimited powers, would be controlled directly by the President of the Federation; its goal is to bring Siberia back to life (“the land that sleeps”), to populate 10.000 square km of glaciers and taiga (the coniferous forest with a swampy ground), to exploit the mineral resources (gold, iron, coal and petrol) that are so enticing for the Russian oligarchs and to stop the proliferation of Chinese colonies, which take ownership of the territories and their production through contracts that last decades (as has already happened in Africa) and through the exploitation of local manual labor to exploit the resources thereof.

It is a plan that Stalin failed to enact through his deportations; this time they are trying with incentives that include:

- Russian workers that are offered advantageous conditions (refund of accommodation expenses; an extra-monthly wage);
- foreign workers, in particular those that come from the countries that make up the “Community of Independent States” (CIS) and that inhabit the big Russian cities; to these the government offers work visas and facilitations for attaining the Russian citizenship;
- the companies that will build plants for the exploitation of raw materials; these companies will receive tax incentives.

In short, the invitation to “all go to Siberia” in order to give an answer to the discontent and to the economic crisis.

Another attempt by Putin to better the economy is the “Russian-Chinese treaty on energy and development”.

This time the circumstance was the summit of the SCO- Organization for the Cooperation of Shanghai – an inter-government organization founded on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai with the aim of countering terrorism in border zones to which economic cooperation was later added, especially

with regards to the energy sector.

The SCO includes China, Russia and four former Soviet countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan); the observers of the SCO are India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan. The SCO is located in Tashkent and has a secretariat in Beijing.

On the past 5th of June, China and Russia have signed an “Accord on energy and development” (between president Putin and President Hu Jintao) during a meeting of the SCO (with Iran, Afghanistan, Belarus and Turkey) which saw the participation of energetic giants alternative to the Middle East.

The Moscow-Beijing accord shifted the balance of the global flux of gas and oil to the east. The accord has yet to become official but China and Russia have already approved it.

The summit was also attended by the Energy ministers of the countries, by the directors of the national Atomic agencies and by the heads of the public energy companies of Russia and China.

As far as gas is concerned, an agreement on the price has yet to be reached while the siberian ducts are ready to join those of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

China and Russia generally have coinciding visions on international crisis situations (in particular the crisis in Syria); the accord on energy will further enhance the exchanges between China and Russia from 100 million dollars in 2015 up to 200 million dollars in 2020.

The agreement, apart from gas and oil, regards a “common investment fund” of four billion dollars open to private chinese investors.

Putin has also announced a Russian-Chinese plan for a trans-asian power line going through Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Also, there will be the inauguration of a motor-way connecting Saint Petersburg with Shanzhen and a technological alliance that will bring further integration between hi-tech companies in Russia and China. All of it is reminiscent of the “fortunate” epoch of Breznev and Deng Xiaoping.

Behind Putin's and Zi Jinping's (the next Chinese leader) dream there is a change to a “green economy” that is based on clean energy, as Beijing is nearing the doubling of energy consumption.

On the strategic front, the confrontation between Russia and Nato on the “missile defense system” continues. Both the USA and Nato refuse to give the Russian federation “legal guarantees” that the system will not take aim on Russia's “Nuclear forces”.

During the summit of the past 24th of May in Brussels between Russia and Nato, the Kremlin has proposed measures to slow down the weapons race, as was anticipated in the “legacy of Medvedev” above.

As a first step, according to Moscow, Nato should agree to respect international laws and renounce the independent use of force without an explicit authorization by the UN security council.

On the website of the Russian defense department, the vice-prime minister Dmitri Ragozin, in charge of modernizing the department, drafted a list of the funds allocated to the department for the

decades to come, underlining the fact that although the money would not go to other social programs, the population is proud because there has been no criticism or irritation.

The Russian public opinion doesn't trust the USA, whose conventional forces in Europe amply surpass those of the Russian federation, without speaking of new technological advancements and new kinds of weapons that could further shift the balance in favor of the US in the region.

Nato, according to the common opinion, is reinforcing its presence on the borders with Russia: new bases in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania; as in Afghanistan, where the US bases will remain even after the withdrawal of international troops.

Speaking of Syria, despite the declaration of intents by the Russian and US presidents during the G20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, on June 19 (for a non-military solution to the problem), there is a clash between foreign ministers Hillary Clinton and Sergej Lavrov, which could easily worsen relations between the two countries:

- H. Clinton accuses Russia of supplying combat helicopters and missiles to Syria that the regime could then use against the civilian population;
- S. Lavrov says that it is a “legal” sale (conventional defense weapons), as opposed to the weapons sold by the US to the opposition in order to topple the legitimate Damascus government.

According to indiscretions, the weapons for the “rebels” would have been paid for by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the two gulf countries that are favorable to an international military intervention against Damascus.

And speaking of such intervention, it remains highly improbable because of dissent within the security council; in the next security council meeting members will examine the possibility of determining a no-fly zone over Syria: this would also explain the emphasis put by H. Clinton on the weapons sold by Russia to Syria.

It must also be noted that the Syrian cargo “Mv Alad” with Russian helicopters and missiles that sailed from Kaliningrad and bound for Syria was blocked during navigation because the British insurance company suspended its coverage. The ship has probably sailed back to its origin in Kaliningrad.

Conclusive considerations, or rather, first impressions

“Nothing has changed”, one would intuitively think at first: the few facts observed since Putin took over seem to confirm that the administration of power by Putin will be “in line” with the two preceding presidential terms (2000-2008). We are speaking of the following:

- The economy is still centered on energetic resources (oil, gas) and on the exploitation of mineral deposits; in particular the agreement with China would have been signed in order to counterbalance possible “blackouts” by European countries, which are the main clients of Russia.
- The “dream” of populating the Siberian territories through the “Company for the

development of the Russian Eastern Siberia”, for the same purpose (exploitation of resources) and to stop the proliferation of Chinese colonies and their exploitation contracts.

- To impose prohibitions on the US and Nato in the strategic sector (missile defense system; presence of Nato-USA contingents and bases bordering the Russian federation; to reset the balance of power that has shifted in favor of the US with the new technological advancements in weaponry);
- Adequate relationships with the countries of the “Black sea region”: these include the first visit by Putin in Belarus and the offer of medical treatment to the former Ukrainian PM Yulia Timoshenko despite the opposition of pro-Russian president Janukovich);
- A new strategy with regards to mass demonstrations by the opposition: to control such demonstrations by using “humane faced” policemen close-by while the Omon are ready to jump in. In terms of prevention, the anti-protest law was passed on June 9: in practice it cancels article 31 of the constitution (right of citizens to express their opinion), with heavy fines (up to the equivalent of 12.000 euro) for those who take part in unauthorized demonstrations and for demonstrations that stray from the time and place indicated in such authorizations.

And what about the “new government”, or rather, “the two new governments” that we spoke of in the beginning of the article?

To answer this question we must go through more data that can confirm that the two governments are either interconnected or independent from each other.

At the moment the only proof of an interconnection lies in the famous “off-air” discussion between Obama and Medvedev in Seoul: When Obama asks for a hand on the missile problem, Medvedev reassures him that he will forward the request to Putin.

This implies a connection between the two governments with limitations in the decision-making process. Yet for this aspect we should gather yet more evidence and perhaps we shouldn't give in to the views of French writer-director Emmanuel Carrere, knowledgeable on all things Russian. When interviewed on his expectations for the March 4th 2012 elections he answered (as reported by the daily newspaper La Repubblica of March 18th 2012):

- politics mean nothing in Russia;
- the real power is in the hands of the “mafias”; these organizations act like shareholders and when the CEO loses popularity, they substitute him with another that's more likable or that appears more democratic. In short, the problem with Russia is not Vladimir Putin; if there will be discontent Putin will be kicked out of office and replaced by another candidate: all will continue as it did before;
- the governing of the country does not involve the citizens, whom at the most will be allowed to accumulate wealth, just like the “mafias”;
- all of this will continue until there will be an “authentic revolution” that is unthinkable at the time being, because nobody wants it nor does anyone dream of enacting it.

LIBYA – BIG GAME HUNTING FOR KHADAFI'S MEN

Abdallah Senussi, Khadafi's brother in law, more than anyone else represented the ruthlessness of the Libyan regime. He was the man of the repression, the most renown case was the uprising in the Abu Salim prison (1200 deaths in 1996), but also of the several opposition members who disappeared or were eliminated at home or abroad. He was also the man for terrorism against the West as his involvement in the bombing of the UTA flight over Niger in 1989 and in the attack against the Pan Am airplane downed over Lockerbie in December 1988 show.

Sentenced in absentia to life in jail by French authorities, Senussi has an international arrest warrant pending over his head. On May 16 2011, following the presentation of a report by the Libyan National Council (LNC), the International Criminal Court in The Hague had issued another arrest warrant for crimes against humanity.

With the help of Tuareg tribes, following the killing of Khadafi Abdallah Senussi had fled to Mali crossing the desert and passing through Niger. He brought along huge quantities of money and gold to make his absconding more pleasant and safer.

During the years in power, Senussi had created a network of contacts and connivance both in North Africa and in the Sub-Saharan belt: Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt and Chad. From Abdallah Senussi's point of view, these countries were all safe havens. After years of political and financial support bestowed by the past regime, he also had a special relationship with the Tuareg tribes in Mali and Niger and its independence movements. The ties were particularly strong with the National Liberation Movement of the Azawad (NLMA) and Senussi used to stay in the Kidal region under the group's protection. It might not be accidental that Senussi's money could have helped the NLMA extend its military control over a good portion of Northern Mali.

But Abdallah Senussi also aimed at re-establishing a network of former regime members that could have re-started an armed struggle in Libya. To do so he meant to contact former officials who had found refuge in other countries in the region. One of them was Kweldi al Humaidi, member of the Revolutionary Council and one of the closest people to Khadafi with who he had taken over power in the 1969 revolution and who became related to the Rais when his daughter married Saadi al Khadafi, who sojourned in Morocco. Along with him were other former regime members who had fled the uprising.

Abdallah Senussi decided to take a trip to Casablanca, he had a passport from Mali for cover (a formal precaution since everyone in the area knew him for his intense activities over the last 40 years), had let his hair and beard grow more than usual to be less identifiable, reached the Mauritanian capital escorted by members of the NLMA and boarded an Air Maroc flight from Nouakchott. Senussi has nothing to fear in Mauritania: President Ould Abdelaziz had a huge debt of gratitude towards Khadafi who had been the only leader granting the Mauritanian regime a return in the African Union after the August 2008 military coup.

But since the 1989 attack, the French secret services had never given up the idea of catching Senussi, even though they had their representatives in Tripoli and held a stable relationship with their Libyan counterparts, including Abdallah Senussi himself when he headed the military

intelligence. The hunt for Senussi had regained new energy when President Nicolas Sarkozy, after having led the international support to the Libyan uprising, was looking for new arguments for his electoral campaign against François Hollande. A tip off to the French signaled Senussi's presence in Casablanca.

Regardless of the pressure from Paris, Moroccan authorities did not stop Senussi, refusing to meddle with Libyan affairs. The Direction Générale des Etudes et de la Documentation (the Moroccan counter espionage) controlled his movements, but did not give in to the arrest/extradition requests. Rabat has always had a fair relationship with Khadafi, despite the divergence on the Libyan support to the Polisario and its RASD (the Moroccan delegation had left the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Libyan revolution in Tripoli when it realized a delegation from the Saharawi Arabic Democratic Republic was in the authorities' stand).

French pressure then moved onto Mauritania. On March 17 2012, when Abdallah Senussi and a relative got off the plane that from Casablanca brought them back to Nouakchott he was stopped by Mauritanian authorities. Libya immediately asked for his extradition, France demanded his hand over to the International Criminal Court. The Mauritanian regime bought time, torn between the gratitude and sympathy towards the Khadafi regime and the pressure coming from abroad (the French were joined by the Americans).

Abdallah Senussi was put in a residence under surveillance, sparing him from prison. Without an extradition treaty between Libya and Mauritania, juridical quibbles blocked his transfer to other nations when Senussi should have been tried in Mauritania for illegal immigration.

From March to September 2012 pressure to deliver Abdallah Senussi came from French and Libyan delegations. On September 5th the Mauritanian military junta gave in. Senussi is told he has to meet a high ranking Libyan official. He is picked up (he is dressed formally for the meeting) and is taken to the airport. When he realizes he is being duped, he tries to react but it's too late. Waiting for his extradition was a Libyan delegation headed by the Minister of Finance, Hassam Zaglam, and members of the new Security Services. A private flight takes Abdallah Senussi to the Mitiga airport (the ones used during Khadafi's times for the arrival of important delegations) in Tripoli where he lands at 14:45. He is immediately transferred via helicopter to the Al Hadbah al Khadra prison where other former members of the regime are awaiting trial.

Regardless the prompt and reassuring declarations of Libyan PM Abdurrahim al Kib that Senussi will receive a fair trial, there is no doubt that Abdallah Senussi is technically a dead man walking. He is accredited with so much brutality that any trial will only end with a death sentence. PM al Kib has also underlined, as for Seif al Islam, that there will be no extradition to The Hague.

There are 200 million dollars of good reasons why the Mauritanian military junta gave in to the Libyan requests. Money that authorities in Tripoli have promised (or already deposited as some claim) to invest in Mauritania. It cannot be ruled out that as many benefits could come from Paris to Nouakchott for the same reason. In a poor country like Mauritania that kind of sum has a strong persuasive impact. Little does it matter if Nouakchott's decision will imply the death of Senussi.

Abdallah Senussi definitely is the biggest prey of the big game Libyan authorities are carrying on to

bring to justice the former members of the regime. In order to strengthen their power and discourage nostalgic come backs of people linked to Khadafi, their aim is to legitimate the new leadership through the trial of the old one. The risk is that the Tuareg tribes in Mali and Niger could fall under this spell.

The same persuasive system applied in Mauritania has been used by Libya to obtain the extradition from Tunisia of former Prime Minister Mahmoud al Baghdadi.

Al Baghdadi had fled to Tunisia after the collapse of the regime. He was tried for illegal immigration and then absolved. The promise of significant Libyan investments in that country together with the sale of oil products at discount prices has convinced Tunis to extradite Mahmoud al Baghdadi to Tripoli on June 24 2012. He is currently detained pending trial in the same prison where Senussi is held. In this case the sacrificial victim is rather a symbol of the past regime than a tormentor like Senussi.

Besides for Senussi and al Baghdadi, other relevant figures that will undergo trial in Libya sitting on the defendant's bench include Seif al Islam (like Senussi accused of crimes against humanity for his political role and currently detained in the Zintan jail) and Abu Zeid Durda, chief of the External Security Service since 2009. A bitter twist of fate will see Durda, who had been appointed to lead that organization to "clean up" the brutality of the past, undergo trial while Moussa Koussa, his predecessor at the ESS since 1994 and who physically committed those acts of cruelty, is a refugee under protection in the United Kingdom. But Koussa will have probably repaid his English host with good pieces of information on the deeds and misdeeds of the past.

But there are other important figures who are absent in the roll call for the Libyan game bag. One of them is Khaled Tuhami, chief of the Internal Security Service, an organism dedicated to the dirty jobs against the opponents of the regime. Tuhami has found refuge in Egypt and, regardless of Libyan requests, authorities in Cairo have not granted his extradition yet. Marshal Tantawi was openly criticized in Tripoli in January for the Egyptian refusal to extradite Khaled Tuhami. Overall Libyans are requesting around 40 members of the former regime including Khadafi's cousin, Ahmed Khadafi al Dam, a former Foreign Minister Ali al Treki, and a former military intelligence chief, Al Jabou Abu Zeid. But until now even President Mohamed Morsi has not expressed his view.

Then there is the big game to the few survivors from the Khadafi family. With Mutassim (in the battle for Sirte on October 20 2011), Khamis (August 29 2011), Seif al Arabi (November 30 2011) killed, Saadi, Hannibal, Mohamed and the daughter Aisha are the only ones left on the roll call.

Saadi had fled to Niger in September 2011 after a failed attempt to negotiate his surrender to the Libyan rebels. He had obtained political asylum by authorities in Niamey whom, in the mean time, had rejected Libyan extradition requests. Having fled with a lot of money with him, Saadi had literally bought the solidarity of authorities in Niger and was living a lavish life while claiming, in television interviews, to be in contact with the armed opposition to the new Libyan authorities (and for this reason he had had some problems with his host country). With the extradition to Libya of his uncle Senussi, Saadi has immediately smelled a rat and how things could change for the worse. In fact, Libyan money, as easily as they have convinced Mauritania, could do the same in a poor

country like Niger. And this will happen regardless of the strong bonds that have tied in the past President Mahamadou Issoufou and Khadafi himself.

Saadi has asked right away, through his Israeli lawyer Nick Kaufman, the authorization to quit Niger. Niamey has given the green light, but the UN (there is an international travel ban for the members of the Khadafi family) has yet to authorize Saadi to board a flight. He should probably go to South Africa where apparently part of his family's financial resources have already been set aside. Furthermore, during the conflict, authorities in Pretoria had tried to intercede to save Khadafi from defeat and had formally recognized the National Transitional Council only after the rebels had taken over Tripoli.

The remaining members of the family (his mother Safiyah, the sister Aysha, his brother Hannibal, the half brother Mohamed and the other relatives followed by a well nourished escort) are all under the protective wing of Algeria. They fled there on August 30 2011 crossing the Libya-Algeria desert near Ghadames and then pointed onto Djanet to allow Aisha to give birth to a girl. From there a private jet provided by Algerian authorities transferred them in the outskirts of Algiers. Asylum was granted for humanitarian reasons. The time to move on is approaching also for them.

Fearing a contagion and the growing presence of Islamic fundamentalists in the ranks of the rebels, Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his government, who have always been critical with regard to the Libyan rebellion, have now the interest to resume a constructive dialogue with Tripoli. The departure of the Khadafi family will surely bring renewed serenity to the bilateral relationship. Even in this case, given the UN travel ban (requested by the International Criminal Court whom Algiers does not recognize not having signed the Rome Treaty), any future movement is subject to an international authorization. Once again the final destination could be South Africa.

When the rebels finally broke into the Bab Azizya fortress in Tripoli, among the papers they found they recovered documents referring to Hana Khadafi, her passport and her studies in medicine. Hana had been adopted by the Rais and she had been officially declared dead during the US bombings of 1986. Where this person could now be (in Algeria together with the rest of the family or elsewhere) is presently unknown. Swiss authorities have ascertained that Hana had a bank account to her name in the Confederation.

Another member of the past regime is Shukri Ghanem. PM from 2003 to 2006, Minister for Oil until 2011, he represented the financial wing of all the elite surrounding the regime.

In May 2011 Ghanem fled to Tunisia with his family, passed through Italy (at that time thanks to Italian oil company ENI's intercessions he was offered the Italian citizenship, which was later refused after Khadafi's intervention) and then landed in Vienna, where he had spent quite some time during the OPEC meetings. From exile Ghanem had tried to befriend the rebellion, a move dictated more by opportunism than by conviction.

On April 29 2012 his body was fished out of the Danube. Accidental death caused by a stroke or an assassination? And, if it were the latter, who could have an interest in eliminating him? Surely enough Ghanem was a symbol of the old establishment, but he was also a holder of many secrets, especially financial ones, that someone wanted to polish off.

Well held secrets will determine the faith of several men linked to Khadafi and who have now fled abroad or have taken sides with the rebels. Someone who knows a lot and who could speak is Abdallah Senussi. When in Nouakchott a Lebanese delegation had approached him to know more about the disappearing of Shiite cleric Sheykh Moussa Sadr, who arrived in Libya in 1978 on Khadafi's invitation to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution and was never to be found again. Libyan authorities are now preparing more reports on former members of the regime for crimes against humanity. There is a lot of talk about Khaled Tuhami, of Moussa Koussa and other high ranking officials, most of whom are survivors of the 26 people sanctions list put down by the EU in March 2011.

The more people from the past regime will be pursued, caught, convicted or physically eliminated, the stronger will the new Libyan leadership feel leading the country. The big game is still on.