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THE ISIS CURRENCY

Could there exist a nation, which claims to be such, without its own state structure, flag, anthem or currency?

This is a question that Abu Bakr al Baghdadi must have asked himself so, in order to legitimize his claim to head the Caliphate, he decided to provide the ISIS with all of the above.

First, he set up the “structure”. In doing so, he obviously thought of the ethical-religious aspects first. He thus established courses and seminars for aspiring Mullahs, a ragtag Committee for the protection of the consumer, a Division for consumer claims and complaints, a religious police, the Hisba, that oversees the behaviour of the population with regards to the dictats of the Koran; there is even a traffic police unit, a judicial system based on the Sharia, a unit for the collection of the Zaqat (Islamic charity, which is “mandatory” and replaces taxes), a bread distribution network, an education system (especially religious and professional), a structure to oversee the energy network (through the control and exploitation of the oil wells conquered from the enemy) and structures for the maintenance of the territory and garbage collection.

All of the above were widely publicized through propaganda documents diffused through the internet in order to contrast the “biased” news diffused by the West, aimed at making one think that living under the ISIS is hell while, according to the ISIS itself, it is heaven on earth.

As for the flag, the black drape that appears on every photograph and footage that portrays the ISIS, it is a well known brand already. It is the trademark of the organization. It is black like the war flag used by Mohammed. In the tradition of the prophet, the black flag will mark the advent of the Mahdi, the Messiah, coming forth to guide the people. Although the 'Mahdi' tradition is mostly Shiite, it is recurrent in Sunni Islam as well and is instrumental in the eyes of the neo-Caliph al Baghdadi in that it legitimizes his arrival in the midst of the religious and military matters of the Middle East.

In order to underline the religious symbolism of the black flag there is a “shahada”, a declaration of faith, inscribed on it: “There is no other God outside of Allah and Mohammed is his messenger”. It is the basis of Islam, the “taweed”, the uniqueness; God is one and unique.

As for the anthem, which is not part of the Islamic tradition but rather an “apostate” habit, the ISIS doesn't need one. It is the prayers that count; they are important enough to surmount the absence of an anthem.

There was a problem, instead, with the absence of a currency, because to have one's currency and one's national mint that produces it is one of the most 'legitimizing' aspects

of the existence of the “Dawla al Islamiyah” (Islamic nation), as the territories under the dominion of the ISIS are called.

And here lies the religious problem. To go from an “imara Khassa” (the administration of an emirate on the mere military level) to a Caliphate (thus including political and administrative responsibilities, as is the case with ISIS since June 2014) means that one is forced to apply the Islamic economy. There are no banks and no instrests; just the mandatory division of all of the resources among all citizens equally. That is why one needs one's own currency; it is the only way to avoid the vicious circle of the “exploitation” of money (as happens in the “apostate” regimes, which include the Arab nations that are subjugated to international interests, the Americans, Europeans and, obviously, the Sionists).

The assumption is thus that the currency of the ISIS will bypass the international financial system.

But there arises another religious dilemma: Mohammed (and even the first Caliph Abu Bakr) never used their own currency. Instead, they used the existing currency of the time, be it Roman or Persian. Sometimes Mohammad would change the effigy on the coins in order to remove images that are contrary to the Muslim beliefs. Well, according to Al Baghdadi, the kind of money is not in itself a problem as long as the value of the coin is equal to the value of the material used to make it. No intermediations, no virtual value or presumed speculation on such virtual value.

After said premise was established, the ISIS began to enact its plan to produce and spread its own currency. In reality, despite the wide publicity that preceded the introduction of the new currency and despite the thousands of illustrative posters affixed throughout the controlled territories, the “dinar” isn't very easy to come by.

The Dinar is a coin made of gold, silver or copper.
The golden one has two versions: 1 dinar and 5 dinars.



1 Dinar - 4.25 grammi d'oro - Simbolo: le spige di grano

The 1 Dinar coin has an estimated value – according to the ISIS – of 127 euro, while the 5 Dinar coin is allegedly worth 638 euro.



5 Dinar - 21.25 grammi d'oro - Simbolo: la mappa della Terra

Even the choice of the images on the coins is religious. The sheaf of wheat symbolizes, with reference to Mohammed, generosity, while the world map, which appears on the 5 Dinar version symbolizes the idea that the Ummah (the community of believers) will spread across the entire globe.

The silver version is the Dirham, which comes in 1, 5 and 10 Dirham coins. Obviously, the value that the ISIS attributes to these coins is equal to the intrinsic value of the silver used to forge them. In this case it is respectively 80 cents, 4 euro and 8 euro.



1 Dirham - 2.00 grammi d'argento - Simbolo: la lancia (ar-rumh)



5 Dirham - 10.00 grammi di argento
 Simbolo: il minareto bianco di Damasco



10 Dirham - 20.00 grammi di argento - Simbolo: Masjid al-aqsa

The sword is the Muslim's contribution to the Jihad; the Mosque of Damascus is the place where, according to tradition, Isa (Jesus) – who is considered to be a prophet in Islamic tradition - will ascend (this is not so much a reference to the Christian symbol as much as to the location of the Mosque in Damascus; the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (again, it is the geographic symbolism that counts).

Finally, the least valuable coins, made of copper, are called al Fulus (simply 'money'). They come in 10 and 20 Fulus versions, with respective values of 5 and 10 cents of euro.



10 Fulus - 10.00 grammi di rame - Simbolo: la Luna (Hilaal)



20 Fulus - 20.00 grammi di rame - Simbolo: la palma (an-nakhla)

Here we find the moon, because the Islamic calendar originates from the voyage (Hijra) of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina (with the birth of the first Islamic state) and is based on the phases of the moon. As for the palm tree, Mohammed considered it a holy plant.

It is to be noted that the coins never portray Al Baghdadi himself and this is because in Islamic culture, especially the Salafite branch, there exist no idols or images. God has no image (this is the basis for the destruction of Sufi shrines, etc.).

As we mentioned, the forging of the Islamic state's currency has more of a symbolic value rather than a practical one. The ISIS steals and spends Iraqi or Syrian money (see the sack of the banks in Mosul). The image of an Islamic economic system juxtaposed to the capitalistic one may be attractive but it is not real. Surely the aim of it all is to circulate coins with an intrinsic value rather than an imaginary one, as happens with paper money.

Despite all the talk that surrounds it, the ISIS' economic system is not based on ethical exchange, where profit is execrated and where the only "mandatory" tax is the Zaqat.

Instead, looting, extortion, theft and illegal traffics are the real basis of the Caliphate's economic system.

SYRIA: A NEVER ENDING WAR WITHOUT SOLUTIONS

In the midst of a war that has been ongoing for over four years, where no prisoners are taken and where ruthlessness, shown by both parties involved, does not leave any room for a negotiated solution (despite the virtual attempts by Geneva), it is difficult to foresee if and when the regime of Bashar al Assad will collapse. Presently the loyalist troops, supported by civil paramilitary formation such as the loathed Shabiha, to whom we should add the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Shiite volunteers and some units of Iranian Pasderan, are holding a defensive stance. Over two thirds of the country are in the hands of the rebels. It is a fact, however, that the survival of the Syrian regime depends on several factors, some internal and some external, which make it very hard to predict the coming events.

The balance of power

The balance of power on the ground is the following: Assad, despite the heavy losses (about 80.000 men) and the defections (roughly 70.000 men), still has 150 to 200 thousand men on the ground (this includes the military, the paramilitary and the security services). More importantly, Assad has vast financial capabilities, which allows him to enroll more soldiers and to buy himself some useful allies. Nevertheless, the mobilization of further human resources is nearly impossible. Assad himself said so during a public speech (that is why it is vital to maintain control of the country's more important areas). A further element that must be accounted for is the "morale" factor which could become crucial after the latest defeats.

Fighting alongside the regular army and the paramilitary we find a varied lot of Shiites volunteers which includes Afghans, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Iranians. Altogether they should total no more than 15.000 men. These volunteers have recently arrived to Syria, where they disembarked in Latakia or landed in Damascus, and are being assisted, formed and trained by the Iranians. Lastly, there are the Lebanese Hezbollah, who presently total roughly 5.000 men, but who should increase in numbers according to their leader Hassan Nasrallah.

The brutality of the Islamic state reinforce the drive of the troops loyal to Assad. These are not just Alawites, but also minorities like Shiites, Yazidis, Christians and the 20.000 Druzes of the Golan Heights (the reason for the attack against Israeli ambulances that were carrying wounded rebels to their hospitals on June 22).

On the other front, the armed opposition is divided and multi-colored. The al Nusra front of Abu Mohammed Golani (3 to 4 thousand men, about a third of which are foreigners) competes against the ISIS (due to a rift that occurred in 2013, when al Nusra decided to remain an affiliate of Al Qaeda). Then there are various other groups with varying degrees of Islamic radicalism (in Idlib, together with Golani, there were six more terrorist factions fighting on the ground, including Ahrar ash Sham). We have the Free Syrian Army which is financed by the USA, and there is a rebel coalition on the southern front (the "Southern

Army of Conquest”, which branches out into the area of Hermon and which counts on a total of about 35 thousand men). This last coalition is sponsored by Jordan (with weapons, salaries, logistic assistance, operative coordination though a Command Center north of Amman headed by the USA, Britain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar).

Again, we find a long list of names, some of which are already known, like the above-mentioned Free Syrian Army, while others are not (Sayf al Sham, Jesus Christ Brigade, Afnad al Sham aka “The Soldiers of Syria”). It is a varied world where there exists no real military coordination. When such coordination is provided, the results on the ground immediately reflect the effort. Many of the groups operate independently, while some are under the umbrella of the National Coalition of Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces. It is not easy to quantify the number of soldiers that fight for each of these factions and there are often clashes between the 'secular' rebels and the Salafite ones. In addition, there are Kurdish Syrian militias that neither fight against Assad, nor support him, who's goal is the fight for their territorial independence which is threatened by the ISIS.

Yet much of that which happens in Syria does not depend directly on the evaluation of the forces on the ground, but by the decisions of other regional or international actors in the theater.

The wider picture

Firstly, there is Iran. Teheran fights alongside Assad because of the ongoing struggle in the Muslim world which pits Sunnis against Shiites (who are, in this case, represented by the minority Alawite sect which governs in Damascus). Iran cannot afford to lose this confrontation, even though it is a proxy war. Damascus and Teheran have signed a mutual defense agreement in 2006 which binds one country with the other. It is an agreement which could legitimize in the future a direct involvement of the Iranian regular troops in the Syrian conflict. It is a last resort which cannot be ruled out if the conflict were to turn really nasty for Assad.

The interests of Iran go well beyond the Syrian events and into the Lebanese region. The Shiite Hezbollahs are fighting alongside Assad with Iranian support. This support is materially ensured by the territorial contiguity between Iran and Lebanon, through Syria, where weapons and aid can transit. If Syria collapses, Teheran would lose a valuable military ally, especially in the struggle against Israel and against the Sunni monarchies.

On a separate front we find the Sunni coalition formed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar which, for substantially religious reasons, want to topple Assad's regime. Turkey, for one, has an additional problem: they want to prevent the Syrian Kurds, who are associated with the Turkish PKK, from gaining control over a territory where they hope to establish in the future their own nation, just like the Iraqi Kurds have attempted to do for the past decade. The Sunni front has recently reached an agreement to support with weapons and financing the armed oppositions that fight against Damascus. This has provided certain rebel factions, including the more radical ones, to have a source of provisions and support that increases their military capabilities.

In order to support the attempts to topple Assad, rumors of a possible coup against the regime are spreading through Turkey. These rumors were fueled by the recent arrest of the head of intelligence, Ali Mamlouk, in Damascus, for alleged contacts with the opposition and by the death, a month earlier, of the head of the Political Security Directorate, Rustum Ghazaleh, who was caught in a feud with the head of Military Intelligence, General Rafiq Shehadeh, who was later sacked.

The recent terrorist attacks on Turkish ground have convinced the President Recep Erdogan to shift from a passive position to a direct military involvement in the events in Syria. Turkey has thus finally allowed the USA to use the air base of Incirlik (until today their jets were based in Bahrain) and has begun bombings of the ISIS and PKK in Syria. The most notable result of this is that, in the near future, the ISIS will be left isolated from their only source of men and weapons, and this will produce a sensible weakening of the military capabilities of al Baghdadi's militias.

Where this military stalemate will lead is still uncertain. Will Assad resist? And will the ISIS manage to maintain its military prowess in the future? Seen the stances of the various international parties involved and the change in Turkey's political line, we must now ask ourselves if there is the possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict.

A negotiated solution?

Russia has been very active of late on this front. Seen their need to uphold the Syrian regime, Russia is trying to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian problem. There was a first meeting, the so-called "Geneva I", then a second one in June 2012, the "Geneva II", which produced a protocol undersigned by the parts. Now there is talk of an upcoming "Geneva III".

Recently, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov organized two advisory inter-Syrian meetings in Moscow. The meetings were attended by a delegation from the government, members of the opposition, and representatives of the civil society. The meetings were aimed at easing dialog between the parts and creating a transitional government. The results, however, were scarce and the UN was called in. The envoy of the Secretary General, Staffan de Mistura, has been working for weeks on a series of meetings in Geneva and Damascus in order to define a road-map, the final goal of which is the creation of a transitional government (with full legislative, executive and judicial powers). In practice, they seek a political solution to the problem with the estrangement of Bashar al Assad (there is already talk about his being exiled in Teheran or Moscow). In a situation such as the Syrian one, finding a negotiated solution seems difficult, if not impossible.

The United States were initially favorable to the ousting of Assad. Now their position has changed because they are aware that, when Assad falls, there is a reasonable risk that Syria will fall prey to the same Islamic factions that fight against him today. The fall of Assad would then become a victory for the ISIS, which is Washington's number one enemy. The United States would now rather see Assad leaving power through negotiations than see him booted out. It is, however, a mighty task, because, in the event of Assad's

'soft' removal, it is still unclear which of the factions that fight against him could emerge as a credible political alternative, notwithstanding their military merits.

There is therefore a convergence of interests between the United States and Russia. On the one side Moscow supports Assad, but would also agree to his removal through negotiations. This should, of course, be a transition that would keep Russia's direct strategic interests intact, namely the military naval base in Latakia and the possibility that the new Syrian government be close to Russia.

Lately, the two main Syrian opposition groups in exile, the "National Syrian Coalition" and the "National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change" met in Brussels and decided to focus their debate around an issue that sees every party agreeable: Bashar al Assad must go. The two opposition groups were until now on opposite fronts and this is a small step towards convergence that could ease negotiations.

The problem is that neither of the two opposition groups has any power over the armed factions that are currently fighting against the regime. Their decisions could well remain in the 'virtual' grounds of a diplomatic initiative. Also, there is the possibility that the solution for Syria will include the 'partitioning' of Syria into a federal state. It has been said that too much blood has been shed to envisage a peaceful cohabitation of the various communities.

A disaster with no end

The civil war in Syria has caused over 220.000 dead since March 2011. According to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, there are an additional, not documented, 90.000 dead, seen that both sides tend to downplay their losses. There are also 20.000 detainees (out of the 200.000 arrests carried out by the regime) whom have literally vanished (not to mention the executed war prisoners). A total carnage which does not stop with the Syrians; there are an esteemed 4.000 casualties among foreigners on the loyalist side and another 30.000 on the side of the rebels.

Amid this human catastrophe, we must not forget the 3,8 million Syrians that have fled abroad and the 5 million who have become refugees in their own country in order to escape from the combat zones. The remainder of the population is in dire need for humanitarian assistance.

Tomorrow's Syria will not reflect that of the past, it will be a new territorial, political and military entity. If a new, federal system will be applied, the entire coastal area, which is mainly inhabited by Alawites (who account for 15-20% of the population) will find it hard to coexist with the country's Sunni majority. Too much blood has been shed. The same is true with the other minorities: the Druze who inhabit the Golan Heights and the Syrian Kurds who, seen their military merits in the fight, will lay claims over their territory bordering Turkey.

Frankly speaking, the full picture leaves us with no easy solution in sight.

LIBYA: JUSTICE THAT FEELS LIKE REVENGE

Any justice handed after a war is a victor's justice. And it usually feels more like a payback, rather than justice. The winners judge and convict, the losers pay, even with their life. And if, as in Libya, the conflict is particularly brutal, the justice that follows is even more vindictive. Since April 2014, a tribunal in Tripoli has carried out a trial against Muammar Gaddafi's acolytes. They are accused of war crimes, killings and other abuses.

On July 28 2015 the tribunal has read out its sentence against the accused: 9 people were sentenced to death, 8 to life in jail, 7 were sentenced to 12 years in prison, 4 to 10 years, 3 to six years, one to 5 years and 4 were acquitted, while a person was confined to a mental hospital. It looks as if the jail terms handed out are proportionate to the crimes committed, after all the trial lasted for more than one year and those found guilty will be able to appeal. It would look like a fair judgment was delivered, but that's not quite the case.

Firstly, a trial that is carried out during an ongoing conflict lacks the adequate serenity on the side of those tasked with the judgment. The accused's rights were also violated, as underlined by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and even the UN's Human Rights Commissioner. Detainees were abused, lawyers were denied access to their clients, the trial was carried out without the presence of the accused.

The legitimacy of the sentence delivered in Tripoli is undermined by yet another circumstance: the government in the Libyan capital, its General Congress, its justice and police departments are not internationally recognized. The sole legitimate government is the one in Tobruk. Therefore, anything decided in Tripoli has no legal value, even internationally.

Let's now look at the death penalties that were handed out.

Seif al Islam is Gaddafi's eldest son, although from his second wife. While his father was in power, he was competing with his brother Mutassim to inherit his dad's place. He was definitely one of the most moderate people in his family. Seif had studied abroad and had a "westernized" vision for the future of Libya. During his tenure he had attempted to democratize the regime and to reduce human rights abuses. He was even in favor of a dialogue with the Libyan opposition and that his why he was on a collision route with the regime's old guard. Seif was not a man of arms. It was the outbreak of the conflict and the rules of the Arab family (whereby the oldest son replaces his father) that forced him down that path. He was never involved in the regime's brutalities. Yet, during the war he had to play a key role and ended up on the accused's stand despite his record. He was captured on November 19, 2011 while fleeing to Niger by Zintan's militias.

Seif al Islam has merely become a symbol and was judged accordingly. The Gaddafi family is now scattered and, after a brief stay in Algeria, his half-brother Mohamed, his brother Hannibal, his sister Aisha and his mother Safiya have taken refuge in Oman. His father and his brothers Mutassim, Khamis, Seif al Arabi all died during the conflict. Another of Gaddafi's sons, Saadi, is also in the hands of those in Tripoli. He was extradited from Niger (following a 2 million dollar donation to local authorities, some sources claim) in

March 2014. Saadi was not part of the trial that ended in July, but will be judged on his own. Although he was known for his transgressive behavior, the fights with his wife and his passion for football (he tried and failed in his footballing career), there is little doubt that he will also end up in the death row. A minor symbol of the Gaddafi family, but still a symbol.

Seif al Islam's conviction has also other implications. Firstly, the detainee is held in the jails of the Zintan militias and will not be handed over to those in Tripoli for the death sentence. Furthermore, Zintan is allied to the government in Tobruk and although they allowed for the trial to be carried out in Tripoli, that's as far as it goes.

Another issue is linked to the June 2011 request by the International Criminal Court in the Hague to try Seif al Islam for crimes against humanity for having been the "de facto Libyan Prime Minister". Seif was accused together with his now defunct father and his uncle, Abdullah Senussi, although the charges against the latter were dropped in July 2014. With the credibility of the ICC at its lowest – even U.S. President Barack Obama held meetings with the Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta wanted by the Court during his recent trip to Africa – there is yet another contradiction when it comes to the relationship between the court in the Hague and Libya. The Libyan lawyer that is handling the cases is working for both the Tripoli and Tobruk governments.

If Seif will face the firing squad because he is a symbol of the old regime, the same will happen to his uncle Senussi (extradited from Mauritania following a gift to local authorities in September 2012), whose hands are truly stained with blood. Abdullah Senussi was tasked with carrying out Gaddafi's dirty work. A French international arrest warrant was issued under his name for his role in the 1989 UTA flight bomb over Niger (170 victims). Senussi was also the same man responsible for the massacres to quell the uprising inside the Abu Salim prison in 1996 during which over 1.200 people were killed. If Senussi were tried in any part of the world, the least he could get is a life sentence. Now that he's on trial in Tripoli his family has stigmatized the abuses he has been suffering. It is sufficient to compare the picture of when he landed from Mauritania to the one shown during his trial to get a feeling of his treatment behind bars.

The other old regime members convicted to death are Mansour Dhao Ibrahim, who lead the so-called "People Guards" volunteer militias during the civil war and who was in charge of Gaddafi's security (they were arrested together in Sirte), Milad Daman, former director of the Abu Salim prison where torture was widespread, and Abdulhamid Ohida, closely linked to Senussi. The latter are joined by Oweidat Gandour al Nobi (responsible for the administration of the Revolutionary Committees in Tripoli) and Munder Mukhtar al Ghanimy. We will have to wait for the sentence's motivations to understand the crimes these two people were convicted for.

Finally, the last two people sentenced to death are two leading figures: the former Prime Minister Mahmoud al Baghdadi and the former chief of the External Security Service, Abuzied Durda. Baghdadi was a Prime Minister from March 2006 until Tripoli's fall in 2011. He then fled to Tunisia where he was sentenced for illegal immigration and extradited back to Libya in June 2012 (also in his case there is talk of a several million dollars donation to Tunis to hand him back). For those who know how the system worked during the

Jamahiriya, the PM had no real power, especially when it came to security or the military. Baghdadi was definitely a loyalist and held his post not because of his ruthlessness, but rather because of his servility. To convict him for the dictatorship's crimes is one of the most blatant cases of victor's justice turning into mere revenge.

Another man turned into a symbol of the old regime and sentenced to death is Abuzied Durda. He was one of Gaddafi's most trusted allies since the early days of his coup and held a number of civilian, political and diplomatic posts over the decades. Durda was a loyalist, but was never involved in the regime's repression. He was appointed head of the External Security Service because Gaddafi needed a clean up after the violence that had marked the tenure of his predecessor, Moussa Koussa. The irony is that while Durda was sentenced to death for crimes he did not commit, Koussa was welcomed by the British and is now living the good life in Qatar.

Moussa Koussa is just one of the former regime members who should have been on trial in Tripoli and that are instead safe abroad. Top of the list is Khaled Tuhami, head of the Internal Security Service, who now lives in Cairo. It is surprising how neither Tobruk nor Tripoli have ever asked for his extradition, or for his handing over to the ICC. The Tobruk government is filled with Gaddafi loyalists, but not the one in Tripoli. The latter may be satisfied with the publicity their trial has obtained on international media.