



# Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts 2012

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MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA



**SPANISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

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**GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW  
OF CONFLICTS 2012**

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# **GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW OF CONFLICTS 2012**

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## **INTRODUCTION: WHY A GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS?**

*Miguel Ángel Ballesteros Martín*

The Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies presents its Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts 2012, in which the Institute's analysts, together with a number of collaborators, analyse conflicts in fifteen regions. These fifteen regions join the twelve analysed last year, although there are some, such as Afghanistan and Syria, which appear again in this edition despite having been studied in 2011, because of the important events that have occurred in the past few months.

## ■ THE GEOPOLITICAL NATURE OF CONFLICTS

The majority of conflicts, whether active or frozen, require geopolitical analysis in order to be properly understood. In some cases this is because they are not confined to a single country but are of a transnational nature, as with those taking pace in the Sahel. Much the same applies to the conflicts of Kurdistan, which covers a geopolitical region with territory in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and even Armenia, which has a small Kurdish enclave.

Other conflicts require geopolitical analysis because, although they are limited to a single country, they involve others, as is the case with Cyprus which involves Greece and Turkey as well as affecting EU politics.

In a large proportion of conflicts outside powers are acting through one side or the other. Such is the case of Syria, where countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are playing far from negligible roles.

Another case is that of conflicts among a number of countries, as is happening with the sovereignty claims by China, the Philippines and Vietnam on the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

Apart from this, the consequences of conflicts frequently spill over their natural confines to affect the entire geopolitical region and even further-flung parts. Such is the case with Syria's civil war, which could destabilise the delicate internal balance in Lebanon and, by extension, that of a significant part of the Middle Eastern region.

The EU in its report on European security strategy<sup>(1)</sup>: «*A Secure Europe in a better world*» identifies regional conflicts as one of the main threats, pointing to the far-reaching consequences for European and international security that can derive from them if they degenerate into extremism, terrorism and state failure, thus opening the way to organised crime. It also warns that regional insecurity caused by conflicts may fuel demand for weapons of mass destruction. This is one of the consequences the Iran

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<sup>(1)</sup> A Safe Europe in a better world. European security strategy: Document put forward by Javier Solana and adopted by the Heads of State and Government in a meeting of the European Council held on 12th December 2003 in Brussels.



conflict could have because of the lack of control of its controversial nuclear programme.

Experience shows that most of the conflicts of the past few decades have weakened the states in which they have taken place, which has favoured the emergence of terrorist groups. A good example was the war in Libya, which together with the Tuareg uprising in Azawad and the coup d'état of Captain Amadou Sanogo in Mali, debilitated the government in Bamako, a situation which terrorist organisations including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA) and the Tuareg jihadist group Ansar Dine have been quick to take advantage of.

In all these cases a geopolitical focus is essential in order to understand the causes of each conflict and the possible solutions.

## ■ THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOPOLITICS IN ANALYSING CONFLICTS

All conflicts arise in a given geopolitical space in the sense of the geographical area where geographical and political factors interact to form a succession of events. Studying these spaces falls to geopolitics, which according to Mackinder studies the influence of the great continental landmasses on the history and politics of peoples. According to the theories of Mahan, geopolitics is concerned with the role of sea power in states' rise to international prominence, economic integration in a multinational space and the physical integration of a region as is the case of the EU.

In every geopolitical space geographical and political factors are at work. Pierre Célérier classified the factors to be studied into two interrelated categories: stable and variable. Physical and human geography belong to the former category, whereas he considers the economic and socio-political factors variable.

Every conflict has its historical background in which are to be found some of the keys that can help us understand and point a way to solution.

But geopolitics has not only to evaluate factors that are intrinsic to it, but also to study connections with history, technology and dominant ideologies. Lucien Febvre<sup>(2)</sup> said, *«to talk of space is to talk of geography, and to talk of time is to talk of history»*. University of Barcelona Professor Vicens Vives said<sup>(3)</sup>, *«war and peace sometimes depend on the geohistorical mentality with which foreign affairs influence Councils of Ministers, Chancelleries and Chiefs of Staff»*. He

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<sup>(2)</sup> Febvre, Lucien: *Combates por la historia*; Esplugas de Llobregat, 1970, p. 65.

<sup>(3)</sup> Vicens Vives, Jaime: *Tratado general de geopolítica*. Ed. Vicens-Vives, Barcelona, 1981 5th edition, pp. 24 and 26.

adds in the same work that *«so, more than a sense of history, what is needed, to round it out, is a geohistorical sense»*.

Spain's Security Strategy<sup>(4)</sup>, which at the time of writing is under review, identifies armed conflicts as a threat to national security, indicating that even though the majority of violent confrontations nowadays are intra-state, their consequences spill over national borders. These conflicts are frequently related to so-called failed states, the illicit activities of both state and non-state actors, ethnic and cultural tensions or competition for scarce natural resources. Strategy points to Spain's having to take part in various kinds of armed conflict over the next few years, in which the role of the armed forces will prove essential.

96% of conflicts since World War II have been intra-state. Most of the conflicts analysed in this book are examples of this: Mali, Cyprus, Syria, Darfur, Afghanistan, and the Kurdish problem to the extent that it becomes an intra-state problem for Turkey, Syria, Iraq or Iran. But if there is an archetype of this kind of conflict at the moment, that archetype is Iraq following the departure of the last US troops.

In general terms, the United Nations has demonstrated its effectiveness in pacifying or at least promoting ceasefires in conventional wars between states, but its effectiveness in ending armed conflicts within states is very limited. This was shown by the impossibility of achieving an effective ceasefire in the case of Syria, even after Algerian UNO mediator Lakhdar Brahimi had reached an agreement with the two sides to halt the violence during Eid al-Adha in October 2012, after the previous mediator, Kofi Annan, had resigned from his position acknowledging his failure and that of the UNO.

In the Syrian conflict, it has not even been possible to have resolutions passed to apply significant pressure to the regime of Bashar al Assad, because of resistance from Russia and China, despite the 25,000 fatalities since the start of the uprising in March 2011, in addition to which according to the United Nations there are more than 250,000 refugees.

Solutions, which in these cases must be geopolitical, are very difficult because of the different interests and points of view of the international players that are in a position to influence the conflict or even possibly to impose peace under the doctrine of the *«duty to protect»*.

One thing on which all international observers usually agree is the threat that most of these conflicts pose to world peace and security, irrespective of their location.

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<sup>(4)</sup> SPANISH SECURITY STRATEGY. Everyone's responsibility, approved by the Council of Ministers on 24th June 2011, Ed. Government of Spain, Madrid, 2011, p. 43.

The Atlantic Alliance, in its 2010 Strategy Concept<sup>(5)</sup>, expresses its concern regarding crises and conflicts beyond its borders, which may pose a direct threat to the territorial security of the Alliance and its citizens.

All these arguments lead us to consider the need for a geopolitical analysis of conflicts, rather than a merely local one. Lacoste<sup>(6)</sup>, founder of the French Institute of Geopolitics, tells us that what we call the present is nothing more than a succession of events that require us not just to take account of the countries in which they have just taken place, but also to place them in a more or less complex chain of cause and effect constituting a geopolitical reasoning.

## ■ WHAT DOES A GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS INVOLVE?

Geopolitics is a concept developed by the Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellén in 1899, which according to G.J. Martin is essentially a body of ideas developed in a given territory that aims to maximise its own ends. The core of this discipline is power.

To make this definition of geopolitics more practical, we have to regard it as the science that seeks to define national or international politics based on the systematic study of the geographical scenario and of economic, human, socio-political and other factors. To this definition we would have to add that, in a globalised world, the natural geographical space for analysis is the geopolitical region, understood as a delimited and continuous territory in which the seas do not separate but are a path of communication. It is a territory in which there is interaction among its parts, although this interaction can sometimes be competitive and other times complementary. A territory with a degree of internal organisation (entropy) such that, what happens in one part of it has consequences in the others. It is a territory in which there are areas of transition and discontinuities. All these characteristics do not necessarily imply a political unity or economic solidarity. The Western Mediterranean, the EU and the Middle East are some examples of geopolitical regions that meet the criteria mentioned.

Geopolitics is concerned with change and conflict, evolution and revolution, attack and defence, the dynamics of terrestrial spaces and the political forces that are struggling to survive there.

The geopolitical regions constitute in themselves a system of interconnected countries in which events in one have consequences for others in the region,

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<sup>(5)</sup> «Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation» approved by the Heads of State and Government in Lisbon on 22nd November 2010.

<sup>(6)</sup> Lacoste, Yves: *Why Hérodote? Crisis of geography and geography of crisis*, in «Geografías, ideologías y estrategias espaciales», Dédalo Ediciones, Madrid, 1977, p. 53.

without forgetting that in each region it is normal to find centres of power, generally state, that play an important role in regional conflicts to ensure their leadership and influence in the region. All this without forgetting the interests and influences of the world powers which, while not belonging to these geopolitical regions, do have their own interests and the ability to influence conflicts. The group of countries with this ability is being added to by emerging countries, especially the so-called BRIC countries: Brazil, Russia, India and China, to which South Africa is increasingly added.

There are a number of constants in geopolitics that are always present in any analysis: territory as the vital space in which the activity being studied takes place; borders not as limits but as zones in which continuous relations are carried on; the position on the globe that conditions relations with other states and stability, the key element of which is security.

Unlike political geography, which brings us static snapshots of conflict situations, geopolitics is a dynamic discipline that takes account of the events of each moment and their consequences. The viewpoint we should adopt, according to Gallois, takes us to the international level, where naturally there will be a large number of mutual influences among the various «power policies». UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has referred to the Syrian conflict as a «*struggle for power between Sunnis and Shiites, between Saudi Arabia and Iran*»<sup>(7)</sup>.

Geopolitical analysis is based on parameters that should be borne in mind, such as the forces in the conflict being analysed and their support. It is also necessary to carry out an analysis of the actors' real underlying intentions, their philosophy, history and dominant ideologies. For example the Arab uprisings were inspired and spread by young people seeking greater freedom, using communication networks, but they have ended up being displaced by the religious roots and feelings that are so dominant in those countries.

André-Louis Sanguin<sup>(8)</sup> points out that it is crucial when studying political processes to know how and why the political territory is organised. The political space is the scenario of an interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The former tend to promote the internal cohesion of the territory, whereas the latter impede or hinder the fruitful integration of a people and its space.

According to Admiral Lepotier, geopolitical and geostrategic phenomena tend to come together thanks to three inescapable factors: physical geography, which provides the framework for the phenomena, human geography, which contributes the social environment, and economic geography, which supplies the means of action.

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<sup>(7)</sup> Failure of diplomacy in Syria. Dawn.com Opinion. 23/10/2012. Available at <http://dawn.com/2012/10/23/failure-of-diplomacy-in-syria/> Consulted 27/10/2012.

<sup>(8)</sup> Sanguin, André-Louis; *Political Geography*, Ed. Oikos-tau, Barcelona, 1981.

It is important to observe conflicts' positions on the globe and to note that the majority are in the Northern hemisphere, with a large number of them in Africa, which has a large number of weak or failed states such as Somalia, and in the Middle East and Asia with its Afghanistan buffer states and area of religious conflict such as Kashmir. In any case, a high percentage of them are in what the American geographer Saul Bernard Cohen<sup>(9)</sup> has called the shatter belt: the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Many of them take place in the region that Huntington called the Muslim World, but not many of them have their cause in the clash of civilisations in the sense of clash of cultures. Conflicts proliferate more readily in regions with the lowest levels of economic and cultural development.

Spain belongs to two clear geopolitical regions: Europe, and more particularly the EU, and the Mediterranean, more precisely the Western Mediterranean. And it is very particularly affected by all conflicts that take place in these regions.

The term *Ecumene* in the ancient world meant the known world, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Far East. Nowadays it is used to refer to the inhabited and inhabitable regions of the Earth. Societies develop in very different ecumenes whose special characteristics lead them to adopt different socio-political structures.

Cohen<sup>(10)</sup> identifies four regional powers in the Middle East shatter belt: Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Israel, to which nowadays we should add Saudi Arabia as an Islamic leader in a region where political Islam is gaining more and more ground. Egypt is distancing itself from Israel and the US in order pragmatically to regain the Arab leadership it lost with the signing of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. Iran, not content with dominating the Persian Gulf, aspires to dominate the Middle East, through its influence on Shiites and related groups, taking advantage of the freedom of action granted by its energy resources and thanks to its nuclear programme. It is likely soon to acquire the technology needed to make nuclear bombs, which in itself, even if it does not actually do so, would give it the *de facto* nuclear deterrent that Israel already has. This makes them the main military powers in the region. Turkey for its part has the largest conventional armed forces in the region and a considerable ability to exert influence thanks to its political model which has managed to combine the practice of Islam with a good level of development.

For Cohen<sup>(11)</sup>, the distinguishing feature of shatter belts is how fragmentary they are, politically and economically, due to historical, cultural and political

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<sup>(9)</sup> Cohen, Saul Bernard: *Geography and politics in a divided world*, Ed. Ejército, Madrid, 1980, p. 428.

<sup>(10)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>(11)</sup> Cohen, Saul Bernard, *Op. cit.* p. 138.

differences. This writer<sup>(12)</sup> sees the need to maintain positions in the seas of Africa's shatter belts as decisive. He also considers that the first global geopolitical view was taken by the Prussian philosopher Emmanuel Kant, who maintained that nature:

- provided so that mankind could live anywhere in the world;
- scattered its inhabitants by means of war so that they could populate the most inhabitable regions.
- obliged them, by the same means, to make peace with one another.

## ■ HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICTS?

As long ago as 1994, at the Brussels Summit of the Atlantic Alliance, the UN was offered the possibility of carrying out peacekeeping and other operations in accordance with its own procedures under the authority of the Security Council or under the responsibility of the OSCE, even with technology of the Alliance. In its 1999 Strategic Concept<sup>(13)</sup> NATO indicated that it would strive, in co-operation with other organisations, to prevent conflicts. In Lisbon, with the experience of the intervening eleven years, the Alliance approved its 2010 Strategic Concept<sup>(14)</sup> in which it establishes that «*the best way to manage conflicts is by avoiding their occurrence*». To this end NATO continuously watches and analyses the international scene, with a view to being able to manage crises before they escalate and turn into armed conflicts, because although they are outside its borders, they may pose a direct threat to the security of the Alliance's territory and that of its populations. Therefore whenever necessary and possible NATO puts crisis management in place, without forgetting the importance of stabilising post-conflict situations, which involves reconstruction and development aid.

The lessons learnt in these years, especially in Afghanistan and the Western Balkans, make it advisable to manage crises and post-conflict situations with a comprehensive approach that appropriately combines civil and military capabilities. Errors committed in managing post-conflict situations can generate great instability in the affected zones and even throughout the geopolitical region.

The ending of hostilities is often just the end of the first phase, which is sometimes the easiest one to resolve. In the post-conflict phase we see situations requiring a major military and civil effort, with weighty contributions of development aid aimed at creating the conditions for a lasting and stable peace without the need for international troops to be present. In this phase, interna-

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<sup>(12)</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>(13)</sup> North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept of the Alliance approved in Washington on 23rd April 1999.

<sup>(14)</sup> «Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation» approved by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon on 22nd November 2010.

tional co-operation, both civil and military, is indispensable. This phase is also the longest and the most complex.

The Atlantic Alliance promotes collaboration with other international actors, applying the concept of co-operative security, which favours analysis, planning and on-the-ground activities with a view to maximising the coherence and effectiveness of the international effort.

The contribution of each country to stabilisation in the post-conflict phase will depend on its geopolitical position with regard to the conflict. This obliges the international organisations and governments involved to carry out a geopolitical study in order to ascertain what can be asked of each country and what obstacles need to be removed. The objective is to arrive at stable and lasting solutions that facilitate the transfer of responsibilities to the local authorities as soon as possible, without military operations being extended in time with the consequent waste of human and material resources and public opinion fatigue.

## ■ THE CONFLICTS ANALYSED IN THIS WORK

In this edition of the Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts we have studied fifteen of the most significant conflicts at this time.

In the first chapter, Col. Emilio Sánchez de Rojas analyses the Sahel conflict taking place in the North of Mali. A zone dominated historically by the Tuareg, who in January 2012 succeeded in driving out the Bamako army, declaring the independence of Azawad. This led to a coup d'état which deposed President Amadou Toumani Touré and provided an opportunity for the jihadist groups in this part of the Sahel to dislodge the Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA) leaving the region in the hands of terrorist groups such as AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine. In this conflict Algeria, Mauritania and Libya have important roles, as do the international organisations of the region such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) which, with the support of the international community, and particularly the EU, France and the United States, should provide a stable solution.

In the second chapter, analyst Blanca Palacian studies the Cyprus conflict which, starting in the sixties, led to the partition of the island in 1974. This island occupies a position in the Mediterranean of great strategic value, to which must be added the energy resources recently discovered.

This conflict has important international consequences, prominent among which is the difficulty of co-operation between NATO and the EU, given the

continual blocking moves by both Turkey and Cyprus to the implementation of the Berlin Plus agreements.

In chapter three Lt. Col. Enrique Silvela studies perennially unstable Lebanon where in the author's view Israel's mistaken policy of blaming the Lebanese government for its lack of control over Hezbollah has strengthened its militias and united the Lebanese people against their common enemy to the South. Hezbollah's image in the Arab world is that an organisation that withstood the onslaught of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), strengthening its role of parallel state, capable of providing social services to its people, maintaining its militias as resistance forces and with significant influence on Lebanese politics.

In chapter four, Lt. Col. Mario Laborie analyses the war in Syria, to which there is no end in sight, indeed it only goes from bad to worse, with all that implies for Middle East instability, since everything that happens in Syria is of crucial importance to its neighbours, particularly for Israel and Lebanon. In these circumstances, the conflict, along the lines of the sectarian division of the population between Sunnis and Shiites, has destroyed the social and political equilibrium that was kept in place by AlAssad's regime. Whereas the rebels find their support mainly among the Sunni majority, some minorities, Alawites and Christians in particular, are considered fundamental to the regime's survival.

In chapter five, Lt. Cdr Francisco Ruiz studies Turkish Kurdistan, a conflict which has cost more than 30,000 lives since 1983 and for which a solution is being sought, with the Turkish government's eyes fixed on how the situation develops with the «Government of Kurdistan» in Iraq, which is the nearest thing to an independent Kurdish state. The final status of Kirkuk, a city claimed by Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen supported by Turkey, is the main bone of contention. Meanwhile the conflict in Syria, which has traditionally been the most stable state for the Kurdish minority, could favour the emergence of a de facto independent Syrian Kurdistan.

In chapter six, Col. José Luis Calvo Albero deals with the conflict in Iraq, where ethnic and religious strife combines with the activity of jihadist terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, and in the North the territorial disputes over the demarcation of the autonomous Kurdish region, which may see instability as an opportunity to achieve independence.

On top of ethnic and religious rivalries comes the struggle for energy resources. In this atmosphere violence, far from disappearing, is increasing. And the situation is even worse than that, because Iraq is in the middle of a large number of lines of tension currently crisscrossing the Middle East. In the hypothetical event that Israel were to attack Iran's nuclear installations, peace in Iraqi airspace could be seriously compromised.



In chapter seven, Navy Captain Federico Aznar concludes that the Iran's problem is one not basically of religion, although demands are often voiced as if it were, but of power and influence. It is projecting itself as the leader of a world, the Shiite world, which goes beyond its ethnic and territorial borders. It looks to the East to rebalance the play of forces, and seeks to become 'the' great Islamic power, definitively dislodging countries such as Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and attaining a status equivalent to that of India. The regime, which bases its legitimacy on Shiite cohesion and repression, has ensured that no meaningful opposition can exist, so it is hard to see it succumbing to movements such as those of the Arab Spring. Apart from that, the nationalistic nature of Iran means that change is highly unlikely to come from outside. Its policy of *faits accomplis* as regards its nuclear programme leaves negotiation and pressure as the only viable and effective ways of persuading Iran to accept credible and reliable international supervision .

In chapter eight, Lt. Col. Jesús Díez Alcalde studies the Darfur conflict. The inhabitants of this Sudanese region are fighting for a more equitable sharing of political power and wealth but, unlike South Sudan, they have never claimed independence. The conflict, which started in 2003, has caused an extremely serious humanitarian crisis. The conflict is intensifying, with ethnic confrontation with black tribes from the East. New alliances of armed groups are emerging in the border area of Kordofan, and armed conflict is increasing on the border with South Sudan. However, the new political scenario following the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), together with the responsibility assumed by the African Union and the United Nations to move forward with the peace process are, faced with the risk factors, the only hope of bringing an end to many years of open conflict in Darfur.

In chapter nine, analyst Jorge Bolaños writes that both Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea are within the priority objectives of Al Qaeda in West Africa, threatening one of the alternative routes for the supply of oil to the West. Jihadists are establishing a network of related organisations in the region, with which the Nigerian Islamists of Boko Haram have already collaborated. The map of risks and threats to security in the region is completed with stalled or latent internal conflicts, a considerable increase in piracy and the activity of organised crime, which has succeeded in consolidating the presence of its networks that traffic in people, arms or drugs. The situation described explains the growing strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea for Western countries seeking to give effective responses to the challenges that the region presents for international security.

Navy Captain Ignacio García Sánchez has written chapter ten, in which he tackles the situation in the Great Lakes region, where the situation appears to

be at a point of no return. The geopolitical framework and the international economic situation create a favourable context for this part of Africa at last and once and for all to break free from the chains to a destiny it has never wanted. Its history and culture, its natural resources and its leaders' personalities have to be overcome by the growing thrust of its youth, with women and education forming the pillars of the future.

A solution of and for Africans, which overcomes reality and, leaving behind tribal, racial, cultural and religious concepts, sustains communities that organise themselves and contribute to the general benefit of their inhabitants, where the strength of its institutions forms a wall to contain the profound social challenges it has to face. Its proven ability to create organisations at regional and continental level and its ever greater interest in becoming an international player must be the fundamental factor that breaks the ties to a past that never really belonged to it.

The geopolitical challenge is set out in the strategic overview of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Europe and the entire Atlantic community has a responsibility, and that responsibility involves favouring the general interests of the region, supporting development based on universal principles and values, as well as promoting the region's political and economic autonomy that will enable it to develop in a forward-looking, balanced and sustainable way, with nature and human dignity as the key paths of progress.

Air Force Col. Ignacio Matalobos has written Chapter XI on Yemen, which he analyses in the context of recent events in the Arabian Peninsula, the fight against international terrorism and the importance of its geographical location in relation to the sea transport of energy resources originating from or transiting through the region. Yemen's internal political situation makes it possible to contain the violence within its borders and neutralise the export of terrorist activity. The international community will remain watchful and will provide limited support to whoever occupies the Presidency or takes power in Yemen. On the other hand, a chaotic situation leading to a lack of control of or an increase in the activities of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) or related organisations would very likely lead to a new intervention by one or other major power or international coalition, in this case most probably with the support of the Gulf states, and in particular of Saudi Arabia.

In chapter XIII, analyst Miguel Ángel Serrano studies the Southern Cone, which is currently swinging between co-operating with Asia (the Asia-Pacific Alliance, APA) on the one hand and with the Arab countries (the South America-Arab Countries grouping, ASPA) on the other.

The uncertain future facing Latin-American countries advocates regulating flows of capital, and of people, from countries outside their area.

In chapter XIV analyst María José Caro addresses the conflict in Sri Lanka, where after nearly three decades the ethnic Tamil conflict was brought to an end in May 2009 when the national government succeeded in defeating the guerrilla movement and killing its leaders. On a political level, the government maintains a significant military presence in the Northeast Province. In September 2012 local elections in the Eastern Province strengthened the government's representation to the detriment of the political groupings of the Tamil minority, which is actually a majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces. This involves a risk of the government's ignoring Tamil demands for greater decentralisation of powers. The adoption of certain policies in the Northern Province is leading to fundamental changes in culture, demographics and the economy. These approaches exclude the local population, neglect their need of economic, physical and cultural security and only fuel the grievances that may lead to violence in the future.

Navy Captain Alejandro Mackinlay analyses the potential conflicts in the South China Sea, including the claims of sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands and their territorial waters on the part of China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and not least Taiwan, which aspires to control 90% of this sea. China's economic growth is enabling it to strengthen its armed forces, and more particularly its navy. What is more, it is acting more and more firmly and aggressively in disputes with neighbouring countries, altering the balance of power in the region. For the US, the challenge is to maintain and strengthen its presence in the region without provoking a reaction from China that could lead it to increase its military power even further.

Most conflicts are of a strategic nature, such that time, far from being a stabilising factor, actually weakens state structures, favouring groups such as Al Qaeda, which has a worldwide strategy to which we must pay attention.

## CHAPTER I

# THE SAHEL: AN ARCHETYPAL CONFLICT

*Emilio Sánchez de Rojas Díaz*

### **Abstract**

The rebellion that recently took place in Mali in the first half of 2012 resulted in the declaration of independence of Northern Mali by the Tuareg rebels, who were subsequently displaced by AQIM and Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine and MUJAO. This rebellion was triggered by two events: the war in Libya and the coup d'état staged by Captain Amadou Sanogo. However, the Sahel has a long history of Tuareg revolts –dating back to colonial times–, unfulfilled peace agreements and new violent actions, in an area where natural resources –both vital and mineral– are key to security. Corruption has diverted funds destined to humanitarian aid, while terrorism, transnational crime and various trafficking activities blend in a game in which historical *grievance* is used as a *justification* of the start of the aforementioned revolts, while the *demands* seek rationality in «*greed*».

### **Keywords:**

**Ansar Dine, AQIM, Mali, Mauritania, MNLA, MUJAO, Niger, Tuareg.**

## ■ INTRODUCTION

*«The security strategy of Spain identifies three areas as vital to Spanish interests in the coming decades: «the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea».*

DDN 1/2012 states that «the security of Spain and full Mediterranean stability will only be achieved if the immediate surroundings, the Middle East and the Sahel, move in the right direction, and if illegal trafficking can be controlled...».

Sahel is an Arabic word meaning «frontier» or «outpost», between white and black Africa; it is a geographical and climactic region south of the Sahara and north of the savannahs and jungles. In a geopolitical sense, it is the geographical area that occupies the southern belt of the Sahara desert, where Tuareg settlements are based. This definition is taken from the European Union, which considers *Mauritania, Mali and Niger* as the three states that form the core of the Sahel (Simon, Mattelaer and Hadfield 2012). The three T's in the Sahel –Trafficking, Tuaregs, Terrorism– are the powers in the conflict.

As David Gutelius pointed out in 2009: «Today we face an uncertain, complex, ever-shifting situation across the countries that straddle the Sahel and Sahara»... While certain factors seem new, such as the discovery of and interest in natural resource exploitation, the emergence of a new Al-Qaeda franchise in AQIM, and recent revolts in Niger and Mali, in many ways are simply newer threads of an older weave and belong to a much longer history. (Gutelius 2009).

The Nigerian academic A. O. Ikelegbe described colonialism as «*the axe that tore African tradition away from its roots, setting populations adrift, with little opportunity to draw upon the experience of the past*» (Huband 2001). The Tuareg conflict appeared during the French colonial period, and after independence it was aggravated by the failures of successive governments to fulfil the agreements reached with the Tuareg. In 1958, the Tuaregs agreed to set down their weapons in exchange for their own independent territory in the Sahara, but the independence of Niger and Mali in 1960 quickly put an end to that dream and their rebellion remained active from 1960 to late in the decade of the 2000s, with little real progress in any direction (Wing 2012).

Conflict and fragility are intimately related. Although not all fragile countries end up in civil war, conflict is present in latent form, and in many other cases there is a risk of violence. Conflict can be seen as a process requiring three basic conditions for its existence and propagation (Reynal-Querol 2009):

- A violent conflict is triggered by an unexpected *event*. A change that makes it appear, explaining why it began today and not yesterday.
- Conflicts have *propagation mechanisms* that allow them to continue existing over time. In this context they can be social differences, ethnic divisions, political repression, etc.

- All conflicts need *financing*.

The fragmentation of Mali is an *unexpected consequence* of the war in Libya, an *event* that showcases the importance of the players –both regional and external– for the stability of the Sahel. Paraphrasing Carmen Iglesias, «Politicians meddle in History with short-term goals, divisive goals...this is *asymmetric indulgence*: if the crimes are committed by the others, they are crimes, if they are committed by us, they are not». Power corrupts –affirms Iglesias– because «the sense of reality is lost».

But we are still missing the propagation mechanism and the financing. «*Greed and Grievance*» are the two theoretical motivations for civil war, as presented by researchers into armed conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000). The treatment received by the Tuareg and the failure of the government to comply with the terms of the various peace agreements constitute *grievances* that are systematically used to justify the start of revolts, but recent economic demands suggest that *greed* is also present, and that the revolts respond to a rational cost-efficiency analysis. On the other hand, *financing*, that is, the preferred access to the substantial financial resources derived from kidnapping Westerners, drug and arms trafficking, and other types of traditional crime, has been determinant in the final evolution of the conflict, with the decisive participation of AQIM and other Islamist groups such as *Ansar Dine* and *MUJAO*.

Mauritania, Mali and Niger are examples of fragile countries. They suffer from a *panoply of polemologic causes* that have resisted history by a delicate balance that nowadays seems to be broken. The insecurity resulting from confrontations, the proliferation of armed groups in the region and the political instability resulting from the military coup in March 2012, have made over 250,000 Malians flee to neighbouring countries, in addition to the 174,000 internal displaced population. UNICEF has received credible reports indicating that armed groups in northern Mali have recruited hundreds of children for military purposes.

The kidnapping in November 2009 of the members of the NGO *Barcelona Acció Solidaria*, and in October 2011 of two Spanish volunteers in Tindouf, the main Saharawi exile camp, make our interest even greater. In both cases their release was obtained either by paying a ransom or releasing imprisoned terrorists, another reason for focusing on this area that is in many ways so close to us.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The justifications and demands are the key to understanding the reasons why these revolts have increased in frequency and violence over time, becoming

rebellions and civil wars. Historically, the nomadic populations of the central Sahara were under the rule of the Tuareg until the appearance of European Imperialism in the late 19th century. After suffering a military defeat, the Tuareg surrendered to French troops following a long and hard resistance. The first Tuareg rebellion occurred in Niger between 1916 and 1917. The explanations given for this were: a French colonial administration that was grievous to the Tuareg's interests and way of life (*grievance*); the long drought of 1913-14; the effects of WWI; and the extension of the *Sanusi* brotherhood among the Tuareg (Fuglestad 1973).

### ■ Post-colonial Period (Up to 1989)

This period saw the rule of single-party systems in the three countries, resulting from the resistance and the successive military coups. They inherited structural problems from the French decolonisation: the difficult to exert sovereignty over states inherited from the colonial period, due to their size and low population density; and as regards human safety, the large variety of ethnic groups, with the resulting tensions between them. (Dumont 2010)

The Tuareg moved within a colonial globality that only marginally hindered their movements. After the French colonisation they found themselves divided among Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, instead of in their own independent Tuareg, Berber and Arab state. This was the origin of the revolts of 1962-63, following independence. The fast intervention and harsh repression by the Malian army forced thousands of refugees to flee to Algeria, and left a feeling of resentment in the Tuareg population that lasts to this day. Shortly afterward the Arlit mine began to be exploited, and a prolonged drought claimed over 75% of their cattle (1973-1974): many Tuareg took the road of exile towards Algeria and Libya.

The new borders established after the French colonial administration did not prevent relations between Tuareg tribes, but the birth of two sovereign states – Niger and Mali – gave rise to similar situations: distant nomads ruled from capitals that did not care about their way of life, nor about their survival in tough times (*grievance*). Migrations helped the Tuareg learn the use of modern weapons, particularly in Libya, where they formed the core of the Islamic Legion created by Muhammad Al Gadaffi to participate in the numerous revolutionary movements proliferating in the Sahel strip. Following the Tripoli Conference (1987), a Tuareg nationalist movement crystallised that led in the 90s to the *first Tuareg rebellion* in Mali, which later was extended into Niger.

For Mauritania the problem was the Western Sahara conflict, which affected its relations with its neighbours to the north, particularly Morocco, triggering a succession of coups between groups supporting Morocco and groups sup-

porting the Polisarian Front, which has claimed independence –as a former colony– since 1975. Mauritania renounced its rights in 1978. Based in *Tindouf*, the Polisarian Front staged a guerrilla war against Morocco which, in view of its successive and humiliating defeats, built fortifications covering 80% of the territory (Boukhars 2012).

### ■ From 1990 to 2009

- *The first Tuareg rebellion, 1990-96*

After *three decades* of independence, Niger and Mali were shaken by armed rebellions. The uprising began in Mali in 1990 when Tuareg separatists attacked government facilities in Gao. In 1991, the Malian government and the rebels signed the Tamanrasset Agreements, which created a «special status» in the north: to prevent harassing of civilians by the military stationed in the north, the Malian government took measures to integrate Tuareg officers and soldiers in the regions where the Tuareg were more present; however *these were never applied* (Wing 2012).

Twenty thousand refugees returned to Niger in the late 80s after the death of dictator Seyni Kountché and the end of thirteen years of a «state of emergency». At the time Niger was in the midst of an economic crisis and was not able to absorb this massive return of refugees. A clash between Tuaregs and security forces in Tchénoua (May 1990) was answered by a violent repression (revolutionary principle of *action-reaction-action*). October 1991 saw the outbreak of the first Tuareg rebellion: *the uranium war* (Bednik 2008). In Niger, peace was restored following a series of peace agreements (1995, 1997, 1998), the adoption of a new constitution and the elections of 2000.

In Mali the uprising also began in 1990, when Tuareg separatists attacked government facilities in Gao. The response by the Malian armed forces led to a generalised rebellion. In 1994, Tuareg rebels trained and armed by Libya attacked Gao again, with the resulting response by the armed forces, leading to a true civil war. The government of Mali and the rebels signed a series of peace agreements (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994), which led to the incorporation of 7000 rebels in the armed forces and other government organisms. In October 1995, the repatriation of about 120,000 Tuareg refugees from neighbouring countries was initiated following a settlement with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Azawad and other groups. This agreement was subsequently represented by a burning of weapons on 27th March 1996 in Timbuktu as a symbol of the end of the conflict.

The Tuaregs of Mali and Niger demanded:

- The end of the marginalisation of the Tuaregs (*grievance*).
- The decentralisation of the Kidal region in Mali (*profit*).



- An ethnic balance in the armed forces and the government (*grievance*).
  - An improved redistribution of the revenue obtained from uranium in Niger (*profit*).
  - Security forces in the north recruited among the Tuareg population (*profit*).
- *The second Tuareg rebellion (2007-2009)*

One *decade* later, Tuareg violence appeared again in both Mali and Niger, which had become transit areas for arms smuggling between the coastal countries of West Africa and the active conflicts in Central Africa, with part of these arms being diverted to the north. Despite the various agreements, the problems led to the appearance of a new movement, the Tuareg Alliance of Niger and Mali (ATNM). Why this simultaneous reappearance in Mali and Niger, two countries which dealt with the problems in different ways? (Benshimon 2007). In both cases, the justifications provided were the failure to comply with commitments (*grievance*) by the government: in Niger, twelve years after the first peace agreements, decentralisation had not been completed yet, the 15% of mining revenue had still not been transferred to the corresponding municipalities, as agreed in 2006, and the granting of new mining permits did not allow foreseeing any compensation measures (*profit*) (Bednik 2008).

In 2006 the first Algeria agreement was signed, but the conflicts in Niger extended to Mali again in September 2007. The quick military response and the mediation of other Tuaregs allowed a new ceasefire, with the mediation of Algeria and Libya, which was made official in 2008. Following the Algeria Agreements of 2006 and 2008, the ADC rebels created their own units within the armed forces, with the readmission of 180 combatants, all of them deserters from the Malian armed forces, in the Kidal base. Iyad Ag Ghali, the main Tuareg interlocutor in these negotiations of Algeria 2008, would play a key role in the rebellion of 2012.

In Niger, twelve years after the agreements of 1995, the fight against the central power was also resumed. In February 2007, the Tuareg rose in arms again in the region of Agadez to demand a fairer distribution of uranium dividends. The offensive of the MNJ, a Tuareg-majority organisation, reached the area of Lake Chad in south-eastern Niger. The MNJ, mainly made up of the union of old rebel groups, deserters of the regular army and some local authorities, redoubled its attacks on military installations and symbols of the State (Bednik 2008). Some of the Tuareg deserters belonged to the *Fast Intervention Company of Niger*, trained by the US. As well as the *effective application of the agreements of 1995*, the MNJ demanded:

- the transfer of 50% of mining revenue to local collectives;
- the preferred hiring of local populations in this economic sector;

- the cessation of exploitation permits for raw materials; and
- the suspension of research activities in livestock farming areas.

After the first phase, dominated by the rebels of the Nigerien Movement for Justice, led by *Aghaly ag Alambo*, in March 2009, following a government offensive, a fracture appeared in the MNJ leading to the integration of most of the movement in the Nigerien Patriotic Front (FPN), and peace talks were initiated.

- *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*

AQIM appeared in early 2007 from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which in turn had split in 1998 from the Islamic Armed Group (GIA) of Algeria created in the early 90s (Reinares 2010). Its area of action –in the Sahel– includes Mali, Mauritania, Niger and parts of Chad. Abdelmalek Droukdal is the emir of AQIM. In this region, the emirs were Mokhtar Belmokhtar, «Katiba Al Moulathamoun», Abdelhamid Abu Zeid «Katiba Al Fatihîn». Yahia Djaouadi, who had replaced Belmokhtar, (emir of zone IX South of the GSPC until 2006) as emir of the Sahara-Sahel, was replaced in November 2011 by Nabil Abu Alkama, with the objective –unfulfilled– of improved the damaged relationships between the emirs. (Yacoub 2012).

The Taoudenit desert, which extends across Mauritania, Mali and Algeria, is an ideal scenario for setting up mobile training camps. The cooperation between Tuareg tribes and AQIM is mutually beneficial: Belmokhtar married a young Malian Arab woman and two youths of the Tuareg and Barbeche tribes, benefiting from local networks and increasing his freedom of movement and access to lucrative illegal activities in the region. (Guerrero and Arenas-Garcia 2012). Belmokhtar financed purchases of arms and equipment by smuggling tobacco, stolen vehicles, illegal immigration and drug trafficking (AFP 2011). He operated in the area of Timbuktu– Araouane– Taoudenni– Mauritania-Mali border, in Ain Hallil –Thessalit, and in Algeria in Bordj Badji Mokhtar– Tamanrasset – Djanet (gates of entry into Algeria from the Sahel).

Northern Mali and Mauritania are recruitment areas for AQIM. Four French tourists were murdered in Mauritania in December 2007. The Israeli embassy in Nouakchott was attacked, and twelve soldiers were killed in an ambush in 2008. In 2009, the French Embassy was the target. In the same year two Italians and three Spaniards were kidnapped in south-eastern Mauritania and taken to Mali (Guerrero and Arenas-Garcia 2012).

Amnesty International states in its 2012 Annual Report (Niger): In March [2011], Mahamadou Issoufou was elected president, ending the provisional government of the military junta that had overthrown Mamadou Tandja in

2010. As a result of the armed conflict in Libya, over 200,000 Nigeriens returned to their country, which generated a complicated humanitarian situation. During the entire year there were news of confrontations in northern Niger between the armed forces and armed elements of AQIM. The Nigerian government stated that AQIM obtained smuggled arms from Libya. Niger announced in May that it would reinforce cooperation in matters of security with Mali, Mauritania and Algeria. In November, the Nigerien armed forces destroyed a convoy of heavy armament heading from Libya to Mali (AI 2012).

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

The creation of Arab and Tuareg *militias*, together with the arms race initiated by other communities, are a reflection of the methods used by president Touré to rule the north: creating irregular armed players that temporarily neutralise one another. In the words of one international civil servant in Bamako, even if a rebellion «[breaks out] every five years» (ICG 2012). The instability in the Sahel has been used by the Malian central government in its own *interest*.

The starting situation in the countries of the Sahel is similar, and Mali seemed to be in the best position of the three: according to the index of failed states by FP, it occupied the 79th position, better than Mauritania (38th) and Niger (19th). The same applies to the fragility index, in which Niger is in 18th place, above Mauritania (16th) and Mali (14th). Countries lacking conflict propagation mechanisms are safer.

Before the Libyan crisis, careful observers were aware of the risk of political destabilisation of the country due to the presence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the GSPC since 2003 in Mali. The recurrence of localised armed actions by Tuaregs and other politically and economically marginalised groups in the north of the country, and the increasingly dysfunctional nature of the Malian government were clear signs of this (ICG 2012). However, it was not possible to predict the *sequence of events* nor the extent and nature of the crisis.

In little more than two months, the Malian political regime crumbled: an armed Tuareg rebellion initiated on 17th January 2012 drove the army out of the north, while on 22nd March a coup d'état deposed president Amadou Toumani Touré.

## ■ Triggering Factors

With Gaddafi dead since 2011, thousands of experienced and well-armed Tuareg returned home from Libya, determined to achieve their historic objective: independence. They encountered the presence of AQIM in northern Mali

and neighbouring Niger. Responsible for a series of attacks and kidnappings in Timbuktu, Gao and Niamey, AQIM has been targeted by US and French special forces working with the Malian government to control and restrict its movements (Toulmin 2012).

A dangerous turn occurred in late in January 2012: the rebels conquered a city in the north (Aguelhoc) and captured over 80 soldiers, some of whom were executed with their hands tied. It is not clear who was responsible for this: the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) denies its authorship, but it could have been either AQIM or Ansar Din, which had been fighting together with the MNLA from the start (Toulmin 2012). The rebels had plenty of armament received through the *El Dorado* of Libya, but lacked both the international backing and the popular support to obtain a successful «divorce» from Bamako (Economist 2012).

In the current conflict in Mali there exist some triggering *events* (Wing 2012):

- The Libyan civil war, with the active participation of France, the US and the UK. The fragmentation of Mali is the *unexpected consequence* of the *asymmetric indulgence* by the *triple coalition* that led to the extension of instability to the entire Sahel.
- The coup d'état by Captain Amadou Sanogo, which was meant to create a stronger army able to operate in the entire region. Although it was the military defeats inflicted by the Tuareg rebels that facilitated the mutiny (Economist 2012), this coup prevented an immediate response from the army.
- In early in April, taking advantage of the confusion caused by the coup, the MNLA declared the independence of the *Tuareg homeland* in northern Mali. On 2nd April, the Islamist group Ansar Dine imposed Sharia law as the only official law in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, the three main cities in northern Mali.

### ■ Propagation Mechanism

The Azawad National Movement (MAN) –the main base of the MNLA– explained in a document of November 2010 why it considered that relations between Azawad and Bamako had reached a breaking point (ICG 2012). The document described the gradual and irreversible erosion of trust between the communities of the north and the central government, pointing out several *justifying grievances*:

- Economic marginalisation of the north;
- Brutal treatment of the northern population by security forces;
- Failure to comply with commitments made in the various peace settlements;
- Lax approach of the government towards AQIM and drug traffickers; and
- Corrupt use of aid provided by the International Community for the north.

This *discourse*, which may sound repetitive, does reflect the generalised feelings of the Tuareg as of late 2010. There was a great discontent of the elected representatives of the north with the government. The Libyan war precipitated the transformation of this network of discontent into a rebellion (ICG 2012).

The Malian forces were not surprised by a sudden revolt. Since September 2011, the press in Bamako had been informing of the resurgence of «security problems in the north» and the situation of the «returnees» from Libya. The MNLA –created officially in October 2011– is a coalition of several groups: its military might and experience depend on Mohammed Ag Maim and his fellow Libyan returnees, while its political leadership is dominated by the relatives of Ibrahim Barangay.

The MNLA consists of representatives of most northern Mali communities, including those of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. However, it is dominated by those who opposed the Algeria Agreements (loyal to Barangay) and those who were subsequently marginalised by the agreement (the ID nans and Ag Maim tribes). The centre of gravity of the rebellion was far from Iyad Ag Ghali, an old Tuareg rebel from Kidal who had negotiated the Algeria agreement after the rebellion of 2006. The MNLA rejected the authority of the central government and of northerners committed with Bamako, such as Ag Ghali. The MNLA initiated a classical Tuareg rebellion; the difference appeared with the entrance of Ansar Dine, an Islamist Tuareg, led by Iyad Ag Ghali, who had meant to head the MNLA since its creation and since visiting Mecca was close to the leaders of AQIM (Olakounlé Yabba 2012).

- *The Offensive by the MNLA*

On 16th and 17th January, MNLA members attacked an army barracks and a National Guard base in *Menaka*, in the Gao region. On the morning of the 17th, the MNLA continued its attacks on the north-eastern cities of Aguelhoc and Tessalit in the Kidal region. They remained under rebel control for at least a short period, as the Malian government, in a statement of 20th January, indicated that it had recovered control of Menaka and Aguelhoc and Tessalit. The rebels returned to Aguelhoc with reinforcements, and after cutting off supplies for several days launched an attack on the city on 24th January. The army troops had to withdraw from Aguelhoc when they ran out of ammunition, reinforcing the nearby town of Kidal. On 26th January, the MNLA continued its series of attacks on the towns of Anderamboukane –Gao region– and Lere –Timbuktu region. (Stewart 2012)

On Friday 30th March, one week after the coup d'état by Captain Amadou Sanog, the rebels took the city of Kidal (population 40,000). A notice by the

Junta admitted that the «military command had decided not to prolong the battle to preserve the life of the people of Kidal» (BBC 2012). On Saturday 31st March the rebels occupied Gao, the largest city in northern Mali. Neither Kidal nor Gao had fallen in previous rebellions. On Sunday 1st April, Tuareg rebels laid siege to the legendary city of Timbuktu, taking the struggle to implement a homeland for the Tuareg people to the last government stronghold in the north. Timbuktu's defences were penetrated in the morning, and by the evening the rebel flag was raised. By night, the airport, administrative buildings and military camps inside Timbuktu were in the hands of the rebels (AP 2012). On Monday night they reached Docents, south of Timbuktu (a city located in the great transverse axis leading to Mote, Segoe and Bamako), and other neighbouring towns, thereby completing the offensive (Remy 2012).

Mousse ag Atta her announced in a communiqué broadcast on 06th April by *France 24* the declaration of independence, which had been signed in Gao by the Secretary-General of the MNLA, Bilal Ag Acheron.

- *Displacement of the MNLA. The battle of Gao*

Since the MNLA initiated its offensive, Ansar Dine of *Iyad Ag Ghali* fought alongside, not necessarily with any coordination between them. The contribution of Ansar Dine was decisive for the victory in Tessalit. It was his troops that entered Kidal and then spectacularly removed the MNLA from the centre of Timbuktu, imposing Sharia law. The MNLA had avoided confrontation, leaving to the Islamists the control of the northern cities and occupying positions outside of Timbuktu, part of Gao and the main routes. The MUJAO consolidated its presence in Gao after the battle of Gao of 26 and 27th June 2012, driving the MNLA out of the city (ICG 2012). The Secretary-General of the MNLA, Bilal ag Acheron, was injured in combat. There was even speculation on the death of the AQIM emir Mokhtar Belmokhtar, which was denied in a communiqué made by Belmokhtar himself.

## ■ Financing

It was said –recounts Camilla Toulmin– that the government of president Touré was involved in a complex web of corruption, in which members of the administration and rebels participated in the increasing drug trade throughout the Sahara. In Bamako it could be verified that the aircraft that crashed in the desert in 2010, carrying drugs from South America, represented a significant source of income for both the armed forces and the rebels (Toulmin 2012).

All Islamist movements had flourished thanks to ransom collected for Western hostages and wanted to improve their financial situation after the chaos in Libya, the supplier of new armament (Olakounlé Yabba 2012).

The MNLA –a nationalist movement– was rich in labour but poor in resources, while Ansar Dine (and MUJAO) was poor in labour but rich in resources. As a regular negotiator for the release of hostages, Ag Ghali was close to the political-corporate complex generated by this *industry*. The play of alliances strengthened Ansar Dine, who was also able to use the money obtained from the drug trade –controlled by the Arab militias of Timbuktu– or the ransoms obtained over the years by AQIM (ICG 2012). In the end *greed* was more determinant than *grievances* in the final outcome of this conflict.

The Islamists in control of the city are attempting to destroy the graves of Timbuktu classified as Human Heritage items by UNESCO; they have already destroyed completely the mausoleum of Sidi Mahmoud (Ben Amar) and another two, insisting that they will continue this path to its final conclusion. Oumar Ould Hamaha, Head of Security of Ansar Dine in Gao, stated after the battle of Gao:

*«We control Timbuktu and we control Gao completely; Ansar Dine rules the north of Mali. We now have full opportunity to apply Sharia law. Sharia law does not require a majority vote, it is not democracy; it is a divine law set by God to be observed by his slaves. One hundred per cent of northern Mali is Muslim; even if this were not so, they must adapt to it».*  
(Sap-AP 2012)

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

Given the endemic weakness of state structures in the Sahel, both outside and non-state participants play a critical role in the life and politics of the region. Outside participants can be divided into:

- Regional players: Mainly Algeria and Libya, and to some extent Nigeria.
- Extra-regional players: France, US, China, EU and Saudi Arabia.

### ■ Algeria, a Critical Player in the Sahel

Algeria has historically been the main regional player in the Sahel: it has the greatest economy in the region, which gives it great financial independence due to its hydrocarbon exports. It has the greatest defence budget in Africa (IBIS 2012), and is particularly powerful in its anti-terrorist capabilities. Its great Air Force provides it with a large capacity to project its power, although it is reluctant to use it (Simon, Mattelaer and Hadfield 2012). Algeria has controlled the Sahel –together with the US– Niger and Mali, through its anti-terrorist policies, and aspires to obtain geopolitical control over it. It is opposed to any extra-regional intervention in an area that it considers geopolitically its

own. This is particularly true if the initiative came, as in the case of Libya and Syria, from the triple coalition (US, UK and France), to which it attributes spurious interests. The growing presence of AQIM in the Sahel is an additional source of concern to this nation, as it could undo the achievements of decades of combating terrorism after another clumsy Western intervention. The recent operation by the Algerian security forces on 15th August 2012, resulting in the death of emir Neil Maybe, head of the «legal committee» of AQIM and a very influential figure in the organisation (recruited by the GAL in 1995), on his way to a meeting with the emirs of the Sahel, confirm this (Roger 2012). No solution would be viable without the approval and contribution of Algeria, which does not admit operations by extra-regional forces.

### ■ **Libya: The Law of Unintended Consequences**

Libya is geographically and historically linked to the dynamics of the Sahel, which resulted in frequent encounters with Algeria. The Gadaffi regime played an important role in its *southern periphery*, directly participating in: training, arming and financing activities in Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan. Gadaffi relied on a strategy of *controlled chaos*; in Mali, he provided aid to Bamako while supporting the Tuareg groups in the north with money and armament. Robert Fowler, the regional envoy of the UN, argued in *The Guardian* that «whatever the motivation of the principal NATO belligerents [in ousting Gadaffi], the law of unintended consequences is exacting a heavy toll in Mali today and will continue to do so throughout the Sahel as the vast store of Libyan weapons spreads across this, one of the most unstable regions of the world» (Brood 2012). An editorial in the *Washington Post* claimed that «NATO allies should perceive a moral obligation, as well as a tangible national security interest, in restoring Mali's previous order. The West should not allow its intervention in Libya to lead to the destruction of democracy –and entrenchment of Islamic militants– in a neighbouring state.» (Washington Post 2012).

### ■ **Extra-regional Players**

France has been the extra-regional political player par excellence, often with interests opposed to those of Algeria. The French view –neo-colonial–, different from that of the EU, is tied to the important mining interests in the region, its knowledge of the region, and its capacity for direct intervention with fast military operations when its citizens or interests –particularly uranium– are at risk. France is without a doubt at the origin of the problem, and can scarcely be a part of its solution. However, no solution would be viable without France's approval.

What will happen to the base where Pentagon forces, within the framework of the Trans-Saharan program developed by the United States, are fighting



terrorism? wondered Beatriz Mesa in an article for the Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (Mesa García 2012); the question could not be more pertinent; the disengagement of the US from the Mediterranean and its surroundings is obvious. Applying its *Smart Power* –that is, allowing others to do their dirty work– and the new *official rhetoric* that Al-Qaeda is no longer a threat to the US after Osama bin Laden’s death. The interests of the United States are focused more on controlling resources than on security; the only true concern of the US is preventing China from obtaining an advantage from the situation, which explains Ms Clinton’s exotic African trips. However, the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership continue to be useful tools which, albeit geared down, will continue to work.

*China* has important mining interests in Niger, but has kept a low military profile, while its regional geo-economy is yielding excellent results. It has shown great flexibility in its alliances, and an opposition to intervention by Western countries –particularly the triple coalition– in the internal affairs of other countries (such as in Syria), taking advantage of its veto rights in the UN Security Council.

*Saudi Arabia and Qatar* are attempting to lead the Arab-Islamic world, promoting a rigorous Wahhabi interpretation of Islam that is in radical opposition to the traditional Sufi interpretation widely in place in the area. On another hand, they use their enormous economic surplus to try to limit the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood (a medium-term threat) and increase their influence on the West –the final safeguard of their security in the Gulf-, supporting triple coalition initiatives such as those in Libya and Syria.

#### ■ European Union, ECOWAS and Spain

According to Pol Morillas and Eduard Soler i Lecha, if one were to ask political leaders and experts that the European strategy is following the Arab Spring –or in the Sahel–, it is likely that their answers would consist of a long list of new instruments and programs. The current crisis and the difficulty of getting the European foreign policy gears moving prevent passing from the logic of *instruments* to that of *strategy*, which indicates a confusion between the definition of the master lines of the Union’s foreign policy towards the region and its instruments (Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2012). Within the objectives considered in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the European Union has a strategy for the Sahel that was recently revised in view of the events in the area, but which is no more than a *list of instruments and programs*. It is in this framework where the European Union Sahel mission was born, as told by *Jorge Bolaños* in an article recently published by the IEEE: with Al-Qaeda and its allies strengthened and the international organ-

ised crime networks operating in full strength in the area, efforts such as those initiated by the European Union are essential. The EUCAP, based in Niger, allows generating positive interactions with ECOWAS. The security forces of Burkina Faso and Nigeria participate in peace missions deployed by this regional organisation, such as that currently in place in Guinea-Bissau following the coup of last April. Europeans and North Americans are losing their monopoly of influence in the Mediterranean.

The attempt by ECOWAS to oust the military junta and bring back a civil government has failed. The junta and the civil government exert a poorly defined parallel authority, in fact, there is a power vacuum in Bamako. The leaders of ECOWAS are afraid that the Jihadist Islamism in northern Mali could threaten their own governments. The reality is that the Tuareg and Ansar Dine cannot be militarily defeated within the limits of the Sahara (Campbell 2012).

The importance to Spain is clear, for many reasons: its physical proximity, being a destination of immigrants and cocaine trafficking, its colonial past in Western Sahara, and being a declared target of AQIM. The recent kidnappings of Spanish citizens represent an additional element. Spain is not a leading player in the area, but it cannot be a mere spectator.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Mali is submerged in a complex and worrisome political situation caused by the superposition of linked factors with local, national and international dimensions. The *grievances* that were used to justify the offensive by the MNLA are real: the Bamako government has systematically failed to fulfil its commitments.

However, it should be recalled that both parties have *benefited* from the corruption and lack of control in an area open to all types of criminal activities, leading to a true *criminal industry*.

The war in Libya, with its potential to destabilise the region, and the coup staged by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo were *events* that triggered and enhanced the conflict, which later evolved into a competition for potential future financial resources, that is, for *profit*.

At this time we are not facing a latent war, but instead a *Cold War* and one of positions, with a great challenge to terrorist groups. This is so because the dominant players will gain an advantage in obtaining financial resources –such as from kidnapping and drug trafficking– for their criminal activities.

AQIM, ripped apart by internal battles between its leaders, has been forced to «reunite the emirs of AQIM in the Sahel, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Abdelhamid Abu Zeid and Nabil Abu Alkama, in order to put an end to the disputes

and conflicts». Abdelmalek Droukdel, hiding in the Kabylia mountains, has a diminishing control over the Sahel.

Belkmojtar patrols the region of Gao, while Abu Zeid is based in the palace built by Gadaffi in Timbuktu, and both try to take over the business of their competitor (Roger 2012). MUJAO and AQIM both want to control this vast territory where any type of criminal activity can be pursued. It is now time for each one to try to impose itself over the rest. The war for leadership has just begun.

ECOWAS, with the support of the International Community, particularly the EU, France and the United States, must broker conversations between the government of Bamako and the MNLA. Initially, the objective must be to isolate Ansar Dine. In the long term, complaints from the north can probably be dealt with better by solutions guaranteeing substantial autonomy to the region. Indeed, the government of Bamako refused these agreements in the past. ECOWAS and the International Community must prevent this from happening again. (Campbell 2012)

For the EU, due to the lack of a true strategic culture, it is hard to reach an agreement on when, where and how to use force, which hinders the efforts of the EU in defence matters. The development of military capabilities through the EDA has been scarce in member states, which prefer national initiatives. In addition, without an agreement on the role that the EU must play, it is hard to be decisive regarding the military capabilities that must be attained (Morillas and Soler i Lecha 2012).

Spain, in addition to participating in the initiative of the EU, must participate in or at least support regional operations in the area, including those related to restoring security and those related to fighting AQIM or the various trafficking operations, including cocaine.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 1.1**

DATE		EVENTS
1916-1917		Tuareg rebellion in Niger during the colonial era.
1960		Independence of Mauritania, Mali and Niger.
1962-1963		Post-independence Tuareg rebellion.
		Repression by the Mali army. Thousands of refugees flee to Algeria.
1971		The Arlit mine in northern Niger comes into operation.
1973-1974		Over 75% of Tuareg cattle die in the drought, many Tuareg leave for exile in Algeria and Libya.
1975		The Polisario Front claims independence for Western Sahara.
1990-1995		First Tuareg rebellion in Niger and Mali.
1996		Weapons are burnt in Timbuktu as a symbol of ending the conflict in Mali.
2000		New constitution and elections, peace returns to Niger.
2006		The first Algiers agreement is signed between the Mal government and the Tuareg.
2007-2009		Second Tuareg rebellion in Niger and Mali.
2008		The second Algiers agreement is signed between the Mali government and the Tuareg.
2011		Gaddafi dies in 2011, thousands of veteran, well-armed Tuaregs return from Libya. Newspapers in Bamako tell of the resurgence of "security problems in the north".
2012	End of January	The MNLA attack Menaka, a region in Gao, and take Aguelhoc.
	22 March	Coup d'état led by Captain Amadou Sanogo.
	30 March - 1 April	Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu are taken.
	6 April	Northern Mali declares independence.
	26- 27 June	Battle of Gao. The MNLA is ousted by AQIM, Ansar Edine and MUJAO.

Table 1.2

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		Mauritania	Mali	Niger
Area		1,030,700 km2 (29°)	1,240,192 km2 (24°)	1,267,000km2 (22°)
Estimated GDP PPP 2011		US\$ 7,184 M (155 °)	US\$ 18,100 M (134°)	US\$ 11,780 M (149°)
Structure	Agriculture	17.8	38.8%	39%
	Industry	37.6%	21.9%	16%
	Services	44.7%	39.3%	45%
GDP/Active population				
Estimated GDP per capita 2011		US\$ 2.200 (187°)	US\$ 1,100 (209°)	US\$ 800 (220°)
GDP growth rate		3.6% (106°)	2.7% (127°)	2.3% (141°)
% Unemployment		30%	30%	ND
Trade relations (Exports):		China 46.6%, Italy 8.8%, France.1%, Ivory Coast 5.1%, Spain 4.6%, Japan 4.5%, Belgium 4.3%, the Netherlands 4% (2011)	China 32.5%, South Korea 15.2%, Indonesia 12.8%, Thailand 6.6%, Bangladesh 5.3% (2011)	USA 49.1%, Nigeria 29.3%, Russia 10.3%, Ghana 4.1% (2011)
Trade relations (Imports):		China 12.6%, Netherlands 9.1%, France 8.8%, US 7.9%, Spain 5.9%, Germany 5.5%, Brazil 5.2%, Belgium 4.4% (2011)	Senegal 15%, France 11.7%, China 8.2%, Ivory Coast 6.3% (2011)	France 15.8%, China 9.8%, Nigeria 9%, French Polynesia 8.5%, Belgium 6.9%, India 5%, Togo 4.8% (2011)
Population		3,359,185 (133°)	14,533,511 (68°)	17,078,839
% Urban population		41%	36%	17%
Age structure	0-14	40.4%	47.3%	49.6%
	15-64	56.2%	49.7%	48%
	Over 65	3.5%	3%	2.3%
Population growth rate		2.323%	2.613%	3.63%
Ethnic groups		Mixed Arab/African 40%, Arab 30%, African 30%	Mande 50% (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Fulani 17%, Voltaic 12%, Songhai 6%, Tuareg and Arabs 10%, other 5%	Hausa 55.4%, Djerma Sonrai 21%, Tuareg 9.3%, Fulani 8.5%, Kanuri Manga 4.7%, other 1.2%
Religions		Muslims 100%	Muslims 90%, Animist 9% and Christian 1%	Muslims 80%, Animist and Christian 20%
Population literacy rate		58% (64.9% - 51.2%)	31.1% (43.4% - 20.3%)	28.7% (42.9% - 15.1%)
Population below the poverty line		40%	36.1%	63%

<b>TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS</b>	<b>Mauritania</b>	<b>Mali</b>	<b>Niger</b>
Infant mortality rate: deaths/1,000 live births	58.93 (34°)	109.08 (3°)	109.98 (2°)
Refugees	48,000 from Mali and 26,000 Saharawi	10,468 from Mauritania	27,950 from Mali
Displaced persons	-	110,000	11.000
GINI index		40.1 (60°)	34 (92°)
Military spending. % GDP.	5.5% (12°)	1.9% (72°)	1.3% (114°)

Source: CIA The World FACTBOOK

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## CHAPTER II

# THE CYPRUS CONFLICT: AN OBSTACLE TO RELATIONS BETWEEN NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

*Blanca Palacián de Inza*

### **ABSTRACT**

The island of Cyprus has been divided into two areas since 1974. In that year the Turkish army occupied the north of the island calling itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This republic is only recognised by Turkey who, in turn, does not recognise the southern area of the island, the Republic of Cyprus, which is however recognised by the rest of the International Community. The Cyprus question, which began as an ethnic conflict in the 60s, has become an international problem of the first order. This situation, among many other domestic consequences, is causing a lack of cooperation and coordination between NATO and the European Union undermining their main tool of cooperation: *the Berlin Plus agreement*.

### **Keywords:**

**Conflict, Turkey, Greece, NATO, European Union, Berlin Plus**

## ■ INTRODUCTION

*«I know that the UN had done much to facilitate the negotiations between the southern and northern island. I indeed hope that these talks would bear a positive outcome. I am in favour of cooperation between the NATO and the EU. This is what we need. The cooperation between NATO and EU could not reach its full potential due to the Cyprus problem. Therefore I hope that a solution to the Cyprus issue will be found soon.»*

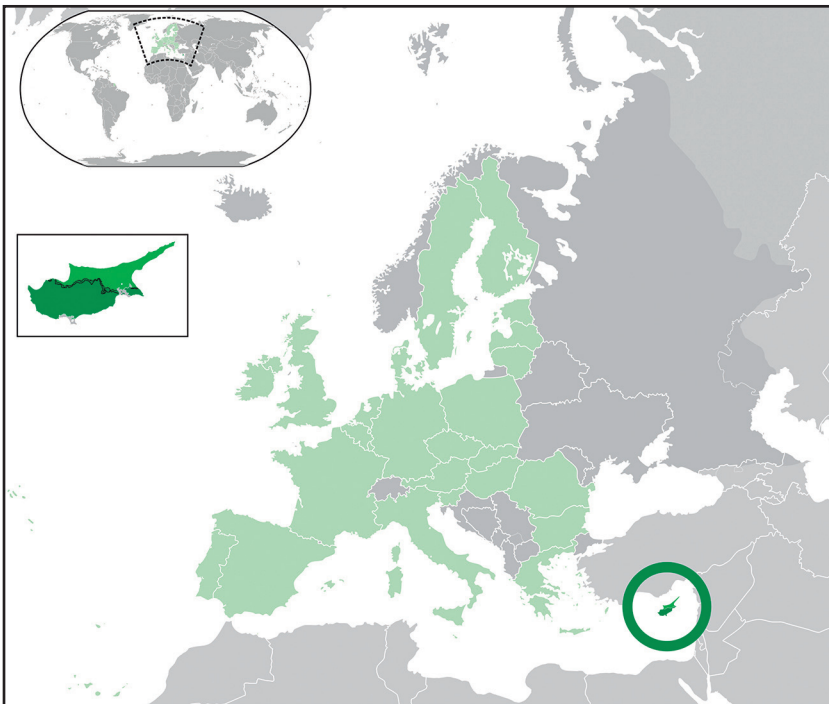
(Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary-General, February 2012)<sup>(1)</sup>

The island of Cyprus' extraordinary importance with respect to international relations is mainly due to two issues: its physical location and the energy resources which have been recently found in its surrounding seabed.

### ■ Geostrategic situation

Cyprus is located in the Mediterranean Sea, less than 200 km south of Turkey, west of Syria, less than 500 km east of Greece (Rhodes), and north of Egypt (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1. Cyprus and the European Union. Source: NuclearVacum/wikipedia**



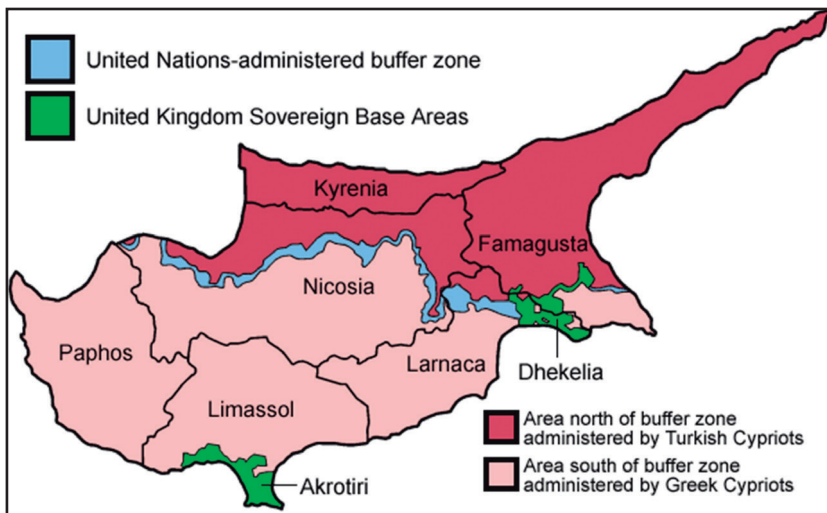
<sup>(1)</sup> Quote published in the website of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus: <http://www.trncinfo.com/tanitma/en/index.asp?sayfa=haberdetay&newsid=1225>.

It is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, covering an area of almost 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> which is mostly mountainous terrain. It is divided into two zones separated by a border which has been militarised for nearly 40 years. The southern zone, which covers two thirds of the island, is occupied by the Republic of Cyprus, with a Greek Cypriot population. North of the border is the self-proclaimed *Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*, which covers the third of the island occupied by military force by Turkey in 1974 and is only recognised by the latter; it is populated by Turkish Cypriots. Even though all of Cyprus has been part of the European Union since the Republic of Cyprus joined it in 2004,<sup>(2)</sup> the Community acquis has been temporarily suspended in the northern part of the island.

Greek Cypriots amount to 77% of the island's population, whereas another 18% is made up of Turkish Cypriots, the remaining 5% having other extractions. The predominant religion is, therefore, Orthodox Christianity, which is observed by 78% of the inhabitants, 18% of the population being Sunni Muslims.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Republic of Cyprus is divided for administrative purposes into six districts: Famagusta, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, Nicosia, and Paphos. The administrative area of the Turkish Cypriot area encompasses Kyrenia, most of Famagusta and small parts of Nicosia (Lefkosia) and Larnaca (see Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2. Administrative divisions of Cyprus. Source: Golbez/Wikipedia**



<sup>(2)</sup> The British Sovereign Base Areas of Acrotiri and Dhekelia are excluded. Akrotiri and Dhekelia, in the north and the south of the island respectively, i.e. facing the Suez Canal and Syria, each occupying roughly 120 km<sup>2</sup>, or 3% of Cyprus' total area. Most of the land – 60 percent – is privately owned by either Britons or Cypriots, the rest belonging to the Ministry of Defence or the Crown. These two bases are considered British Overseas Territories, but in contrast to other territories with the same status, Akrotiri and Dhekelia have an administrator instead of a governor. The difference lies in that the administrator reports to the Ministry of Defence and not to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is in charge of foreign affairs. Overall, there are around 3,500 military personnel stationed in Cyprus.

<sup>(3)</sup> CIA figures: The World Factbook, August 2012.

The geostrategic importance of the island has shaped Cyprus' history. The island is located between three continents: Europe, African and Asia. Besides this intercontinental situation, the island is located at the crossroads joining the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean through two passages: the Suez Canal, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. This extraordinary location for communications and commerce did not go unnoticed by the British, who occupied the island in 1878 and still keep to military bases on it (see Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3. Geostrategical situacion of Cyprus. Source Own elaboration**

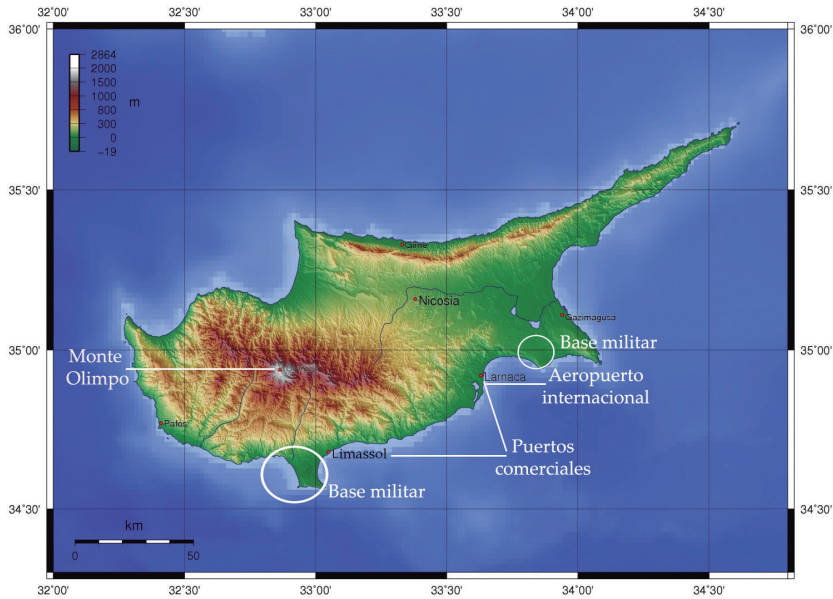


Due to this enviable geostrategic position, outside powers have tried to exert their influence over Cyprus throughout its history. Among its occupants are the Phoenicians, the Mycenaean and, around the 15th Century AD, the Greeks, who ever since became their core ethnic group. Before the Ottoman conquest, the island was dominated by the Egyptians, the Hittites, the Sea Peoples, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Arabs. The British «inherited» Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire.

The instability that is rocking the foundations of some Muslim countries since 2001 and the chance that some of these countries may end up controlling the crucial bottlenecks of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz might put a stranglehold on the economies of many other countries. Thus, Cyprus' strategic significance in relation to the patrolling of the sea routes and straits and canals near it becomes even greater in this scenario. We can also say that Cyprus is ready to fulfil this lookout role since it has a powerful radar on Mount Olympus, commercial ports in Limassol and Larnaca, military bases in Akrotiri and Dhekelia, and an international airport in Larnaca. Cyprus can be the perfect Air Force and navy base. On top of that, it is an excellent vantage point from which to monitor and listen in on electronic communica-

tions and a privileged launch pad for air missions to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf (see Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4. Strategic locations of Cyprus. Source: Own elaboration on Zaminin/Wikipedia**



## ■ Gas geopolitics

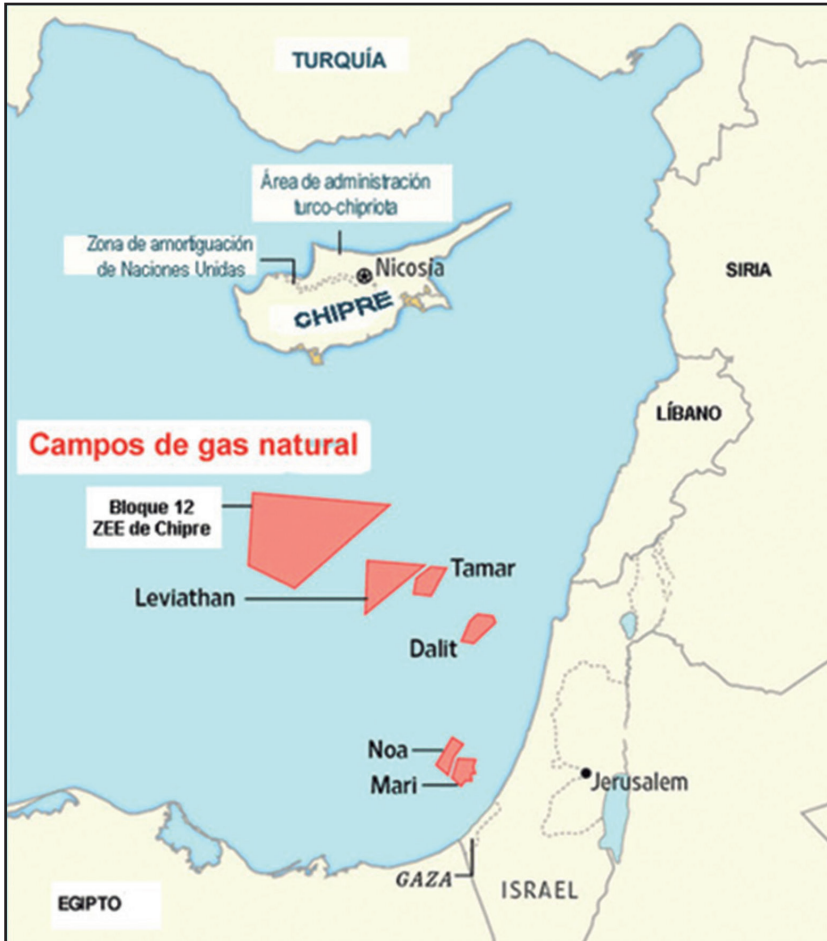
If Cyprus' influence in international affairs thanks to its location was not enough, the recent discovery of oil deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean, most of them inside the Cypriot territorial sea, has increased its weight. These discoveries are boosting the island's importance but are also contributing to increasing the tension in the area since Turkish authorities do not recognise either Cyprus or, hence, its rights over the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)<sup>(4)</sup> (see Figure 2.5).

These discoveries have given rise to a legal dispute over considerable energy reserves. According to a US Geological Survey's report, the Mediterranean's Levant Basin Province has oil reserves amounting to 1700 millions of barrels and 3.4 billion cubic meters of gas,<sup>(5)</sup> most of them located within the Exclusive Economic Zone of Israel, which up until now had been dependent on oil imports.

<sup>(4)</sup> This is the name of the maritime area with a markedly economic nature created at the third United Nations Conference on Law of the Sea. It is an area located beyond and adjacent territorial waters. It has a maximum width of 200 nautical miles.

<sup>(5)</sup> US Geological Survey's Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas Resources of the Levant Basin Province, Eastern Mediterranean <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2010/3014/pdf/FS10-3014.pdf>

Figure 2.5. Natural gas fields in the Levant basin. Source: Own elaboration



The UN, in another effort to achieve the reunification of the island, has made an appeal to both Cypriot communities for sharing these natural resources. On the other hand, the United States has already sided with one of the litigants by defending the right of the Republic of Cyprus to perform the prospecting work it has already begun, which is deteriorating even more its relations with Turkey.

The Greek Cypriot government has commissioned drilling of the Block 12 oilfields<sup>(6)</sup> to the US company Noble Energy, which is also working in the prospecting of the Israeli seabed. This unilateral decision by the Greek Cypriot government to start to drill has been viewed by Ankara as a provocation for not waiting for the island to be reunified to carry out this work jointly, as had been initially proposed. It is estimated that the billions of cubic meters of gas

<sup>(6)</sup> Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone, measuring 51,000 km<sup>2</sup>, is divided into 13 blocks.

found in this block are just 10% of the total gas reserves lying in the Republic of Cyprus' EEZ. What lies in front of Cyprus' coast might mean not only its energy self-sufficiency but also its becoming the oil supplier to the rest of the European Union.

These disputes over the sharing out of the natural resources of the Mediterranean's Levant Basin are not conducive for the time being to the island of Cyprus' reunification process and have soured the relations between Turkey and Israel, great allies in the past. Israel and Cyprus, however, have an agreement in place to mutually protect their gas reserves, apart from other defence pacts, among which the arrangements for using the Paphos airport as an Israeli air base stand out. This type of agreements greatly benefits both parties. Israel gets to use a base 300 km from its shores and inside EU territory and Cyprus sees its defences supplemented since it does not have its own Air Force, one of the reasons why it was so easy for Turkey to invade the island in 1974.

Oil also plays an important role in the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island. The reason is that Cyprus is located at the entry point of the Turkish Gulf of Iskenderun, onto which the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline connecting the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean without going through Russian territory comes out. Measuring 2000 km in length, it is the second longest oil pipeline in the world.<sup>(7)</sup> The island of Cyprus is essential to protect the oil from the Caspian Sea. It is crucial for Turkey to ensure that the island is not occupied by a hostile power, as Greece is seen. A way for Turkey to achieve this is exactly what it has been doing up until now: keeping both Cyprus divided and a strong military presence on it.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The Turkish occupation of Cyprus in 1974 was not the first time this had happened as the Turks had already conquered the island in 1571, keeping it in their possession until the British did the same in 1878 and turned it into a British colony.

At the end of the World War II, several strong nationalist claims were made unanimously to end the British occupation, although their ends were different as to the future of Cyprus. Some, led by Archbishop Makarios, were in favour of «enosis», the union of Cyprus and Greece, while others supported «taksim», the partition of the island. The same as we talk about a «resource curse» over certain – particularly African – countries, we could talk about a «geostrategic curse» for Cyprus, which has been occupied for most of his history.

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<sup>(7)</sup> In addition to transporting Azerbaijan's oil to Europe over the BTC pipeline, it is also expected for Turkey to carry Azerbaijani gas by means of the Trans-Anatolia Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP), which is to be built between 2014 and 2017. Thus, Turkey will become a key supplier to Europe, which in turn will strengthen its position before the EU.

In 1960, Turkey, Greece, the United Kingdom and the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, that were competing to maintain their stronghold over the island, signed a treaty whereby the island was declared to be independent and granted a constitution. The main aim of these treaties was not independence and the democratic rights of the Cypriot people, but the defence of Western interests in the island. For instance, the UK has kept the two sovereign enclaves of Akrotiri and Dhekelia ever since.

The presidency of Cyprus was taken on by Makarios. The constitution, which is still in force, stated that Turkish Cypriots would occupy the vice presidency and would have the right of veto. This peculiar constitution that was imposed on Cyprus hindered the functioning of the State by promoting segregation. Thus, relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots became strained, ending in the violent episodes of the 60s.

In 1974, the coup staged by Greek Cypriot nationalists, backed by the then-in-power Greek Military Junta, toppled the legitimate government of the island of Archbishop Makarios in an attempt to join Cyprus to Greece. The Turkish reaction was swift: five days later it invaded and occupied the island by means of an air, land and sea strike with means that far outnumbered the opposition they encountered. The attack of Turkey, a member of NATO and the US's main ally in the region, in the midst of the Cold War, did not find any opposition.

This invasion did not affect the British bases since the Turkish attack stopped short of Dhekelia's borders. The United Kingdom did not involve itself in the conflict, which would have meant a confrontation with Turkey, despite the 1960 Treaty also stipulating that:

*«Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom, in accordance with the guarantees of the Republic of Cyprus stipulated in article 1 of this Treaty, recognise and guarantee the independence, territorial integrity and the security of the Republic of Cyprus.»<sup>(8)</sup>*

The Greek Cypriot position is that, since then, British policy with regard to Cyprus has been clearly pro-Turkish.

In the part finally occupied by the Turkish army, the currently self-proclaimed but not internationally recognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), there were disappearances,<sup>(9)</sup> ethnic cleansing, displaced persons, etc.

<sup>(8)</sup> Article 2 of the Treaty Concerning the Establishment of The Republic of Cyprus, Nicosia, 16th August 1960. [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/0/F207EF6146AA7AFEC22571BF0038DDC6/\\$file/Treaty%20of%20Establishment.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/0/F207EF6146AA7AFEC22571BF0038DDC6/$file/Treaty%20of%20Establishment.pdf?OpenElement).

<sup>(9)</sup> The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus was established in 1981. It was set up by agreement between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities under the auspices of the UN. A total of 502 missing Turkish Cypriots and 1493 missing Greek Cypriots were reported to this Committee. Of them, as of August 2012, the remains of 321 individuals have



Ankara promoted the colonisation of the occupied territory with the settlement of people from the most depressed areas in Anatolia.

After the 1964 hostilities between both communities, the UN started a peace-keeping mission in the island (UNFICYP, UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus). Almost fifty years later, this mission is still open,<sup>(10)</sup> something which attests to the entrenchment of the respective positions. Since 1974, UNFICYP keeps a separation zone between the north and the south, is having widened the dividing *green line* already drawn by the British in 1963; in some places, this line is 7.5 km wide. There are villages known as Civil Use Areas inside the buffer zone, where more than 10,000 people live. Inside this zone and in its surroundings there are still landmines<sup>(11)</sup> that were scattered by both parties during the conflict.

**Figure 2.6. Warning sign on the edge of the UN Buffer Zone. Source: Jpatokal/ Wikipedia**



Currently, this buffer zone covers 3% of the island; it includes very valuable farmland. In the eastern portion of the island, this line is interrupted by

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been identified and returned to their families (255 Greek Cypriots and 66 Turkish Cypriots). Source: Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus. <http://www.cmp-cyprus.org>.

<sup>(10)</sup> Up to July 2012, the UNFICYP Mission has suffered a total of 181 casualties: 171 soldiers, 3 policemen, 5 foreign civilians and 2 locals. As of that date, 857 soldiers, 68 policemen and 143 civilians have been deployed.

<sup>(11)</sup> In 2004, the UN and the EU set in motion an anti-landmine programme in Cyprus. At the beginning of the project, 101 minefields were identified: 53 outside and 48 inside the demilitarised zone. Moreover, it was estimated that there were 5000 anti-tank mines and 15,000 anti-personnel mines. Since then, 81 minefields have been declared «mine-free», 27,000 landmines having been removed from the DMZ. Source: PNUD.

the British air base at Dhekelia, inside of which the UN does not operate. Another area outside of UN control is Varosha, an abandoned neighbourhood<sup>(12)</sup> of the city of Famagusta, which is under the *de facto* control of the Turkish army.

In 2004, the Republic of Cyprus became a full member of the European Union. That same year a reunification plan supported by the UN was set in motion. However, the referendum on the Annan Plan,<sup>(13)</sup> which proposed a two-zone bi-communal Federal State and the return of Varosha to the Greek Cypriot community was rejected by 76% of Greek Cypriots, despite it was accepted by the inhabitants of the northern part of the island.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

The winner of the presidential elections held in Cyprus in 2008 was Dimitris Christofias, the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Cyprus, who obtained 53.36% of the votes. One of the goals of his campaign was to resume negotiations for the reunification of the island. As established by the 1960 constitution, the president is the joint Head of State and Prime Minister. The vice-president position is vacant since this constitution reserves it for a Turkish Cypriot.

Despite these good intentions, the Cyprus dispute is at a standstill. All reunification proposals put forward by the UN have been useless thanks to the refusal of both sides to relinquish their positions.

In January 2012, the Secretary-General of United Nations, the South Korean Ban Ki-moon, organised a meeting in New York with the leaders of both communities, the president of Cyprus, Dimitris Christofias, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Devis Eroglu. The UN planned to convene an international meeting in May 2012 to give the final details of the eventual agreement for unification. But no progress was made and, thus, said meeting was never held. In April, Ban Ki-moon himself declared that «the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders had not made enough progress in their talks about an eventual reunification of the Mediterranean island to warrant calling an international conference on the issue.»<sup>(14)</sup> To put it succinctly, both parties agree to a federated solution but while Greek Cypriots wish for the return of the assets the original

<sup>(12)</sup> Pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 550/1984, this neighbourhood may only be populated by its old inhabitants, who were practically all Greek Cypriots who fled in 1974 but do not return because Varosha is under Turkish control.

<sup>(13)</sup> The text of the Annan Plan can be consulted at [http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/Annan\\_Plan\\_Text.html](http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/Annan_Plan_Text.html).

<sup>(14)</sup> BBC, «ONU no ve avances en diálogo en Chipre.» 12th April 2012. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/ultimas\\_noticias/2012/04/120421\\_ultnot\\_chipre\\_onu\\_cch.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/ultimas_noticias/2012/04/120421_ultnot_chipre_onu_cch.shtml).

Greek Cypriots owners lost in the north of the island in 1974, Turkish Cypriots want the segregation of both communities on ethnic grounds, which is impossible if the return premise is accepted. Turkish Cypriots want a territory that is theirs exclusively, a confederation on the basis of segregation, a foundation that contravenes the freedom of movement and settlement championed by the EU.

All these negotiation and meeting attempts were being imposed by the International Community to prevent the conflict that was looming when Turkey warned that it would freeze its relations with the EU if Cyprus were to finally take over the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in the second semester of 2012. In the end, it does not look like this presidency has had major consequences given that the process for Turkey to join the EU is currently at a standstill.

## ■ **ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS**

### ■ **Turkey and Greece**

Cyprus' geostrategic situation is vital to Turkey, as seen above, for energy and location reasons, since Turkish, as well as Syrian and Israeli, ports are controlled from the island. Furthermore, it can become a missile launching pad and an air and sea route checkpoint. Greece is interested in the island for the same reasons, to which its cultural ties to the majority of the population and the historical ambitions to incorporate Cyprus into the motherland, or «enosis», can be added.

### ■ **USA and Russia**

All these qualities are also relevant to the United States, which has great interest in Cyprus to control its energy resources and commercial routes, and Russia, which is in excellent terms with Cyprus in fear that the island becomes a NATO base. The large financial investments Russia has made in Cyprus are a key factor in alleviating the serious situation of economic crisis that the island is in. Good examples of these cosy Russian-Cypriot relations are the news about a Russian ship<sup>(15)</sup> carrying weapons to Syria that refuelled at the port of Limassol, where there Russian population has been on the rise,<sup>(16)</sup> and, on the other hand, the Cypriot request for financial rescue from Russia.<sup>(17)</sup>

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<sup>(15)</sup> Galpin, Richard.(30th Jan 2012) «Russian arm shipments bolster Syria's embattled Assad,» BBC.

<sup>(16)</sup> Harding, Luke.(26th Jan 2012) «Russian expat invasion of Cyprus also has sinister overtones,»The Guardian.

<sup>(17)</sup> Bilefsky, Dan.(18th Jun 2012) «For Rescue Line, Cyprus Prefers a Russian Loan,» The New York Times.

## ■ The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has two Sovereign Base Areas<sup>(18)</sup> on the island of Cyprus ever since, thanks to the 1960 Treaty of Establishment, this British colony was granted independence:

*«The territory of the Republic of Cyprus shall comprise the island of Cyprus, together with the islands lying off its coast, with the exception of the two areas defined in Annex A to this Treaty, which areas shall remain under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. These areas are in this Treaty and its Annexes referred to as the Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area and the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area.»<sup>(19)</sup>*

During the most important campaign of the Iraq Wars of 1991 and 2003, Akrotiri served as a refuelling base for British forces. More recently, it had a major role in supporting the Ellamy Operation during the Libya Intervention in 2011.

The Republic of Cyprus has demanded several times the annexation of Akrotiri and Dhekelia to its territory, with the resulting withdrawal of British forces from the island, as well as payment for letting the bases, which has not been received for almost 50 years. From 1960 to 1964 the British government paid the government of the island a rent for using the bases, which it has not paid since, arguing that ever since the 1963-1964 conflict between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots it has had no assurance that both communities were going to benefit equally from the amount paid as rent.

In 2008 the president of Cyprus, Dimitris Christofias, promised to put an end to the stationing of British troops on the island, thereby getting rid of what he termed «the colonial blood stain». It does not seem that Christofias' threats will amount to anything more than election campaign promises. For the UK in particular and NATO in general Cyprus military bases are prime sites which, together with the potential improved relations with Turkey, are the essential hinges of the door to the East.

## ■ European Union

The Turkish occupation of a member state is a very complex situation for the EU. Turkey does not recognise a member state and in turn is requesting becoming one. On the other hand, Europe needs to maintain good relations with Turkey, which is increasingly becoming a key energy supplier. In addition, it

<sup>(18)</sup> SBAs:Sovereign Base Areas. Website of the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus: <http://www.sbaadministration.org>.

<sup>(19)</sup> Article 1 of the Treaty Concerning the Establishment of The Republic of Cyprus, Nicosia, 16th August 1960. Consulted in July 2012:[http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/0/F207EF6146AA7AFEC22571BF0038DDC6/\\$file/Treaty%20of%20Establishment.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/0/F207EF6146AA7AFEC22571BF0038DDC6/$file/Treaty%20of%20Establishment.pdf?OpenElement).

needs for Turkey to keep buffering the Middle East and at the same time to act as a barrier against Russian expansion towards the Mediterranean. Likewise, Turkey offers economic advantages to the EU, among other things, because it is a huge market for its products, but it also stirs up important fears, such as the potential uncontrolled immigration of too many Turks towards Europe, with the cultural and religious difficulties this phenomenon would likely pose. In turn, the fact of Cyprus being a member state of the EU is very advantageous to the latter since it gives it a presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, through which most of the oil that Europe buys goes.

It is due to this set of competing interests that the EU cannot opt for either one of the countries up front, and must wait for the negotiations to move forward under the auspices of the UN.

### ■ NATO-EU relations

The entrenched Cypriot conflict is having a manifest negative consequence in the relations between NATO and the EU. It is enlightening to analyse in a summarised manner the history of the relations of these two organisations in order to understand why the damaging thereof is so important.

Broadly speaking, we can say that military cooperation between both sides of the Atlantic has been running increasingly into trouble as the EU has been developing its own autonomous criteria and capabilities as regards security and defence. NATO, on the other hand, has been devising global strategies that include civilian capabilities. This friction increased when the EU started considering common defence objectives, mainly a common command, i.e. an Operation HQ, broadening its initial political and economic purpose and overlapping NATO's original political and military goal.

The so-called Berlin Plus agreements were signed in 1999, which have been the most important collaboration tool between NATO and the EU since they came into effect in 2003. These agreements allow the EU to use NATO's capabilities and means when it is deemed necessary. This agreed cooperation has only been exercised during two operations: one in Macedonia in 2003 and the other in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2004, with the handing over of NATO's SFOR operation to the EU as EUFOR Althea, which is still on-going. NATO means have not been used in any other operations carried out by the EU, to date other six military missions and one of a joint civilian-military nature.<sup>(20)</sup> This is due to the Cyprus dispute having completely brought to a halt the cooperation envisaged by the framework of the Berlin Plus agreements.

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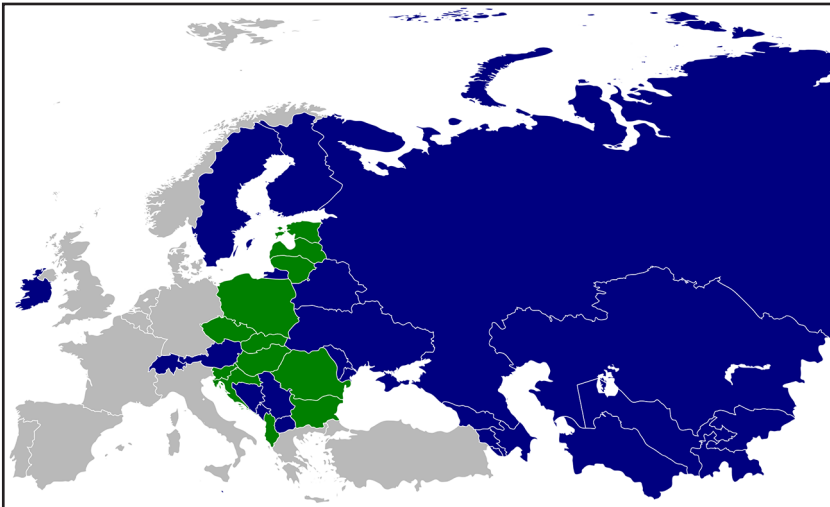
<sup>(20)</sup> Military missions: Concordia FYROM, Artemis RD Congo, EUFORChad/RCA, EUFOR RD Congo, EUTM Somalia, EUNAVFOR Atalanta. Civilian-military mission: supporting the AMIS II mission of the African Union in Sudan/Darfur. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations?lang=en> Consulted in September 2012.

The Turkish-Greek rivalry for the island of Cyprus delayed by four years the entry into force of the Berlin Plus agreements, hampering negotiations from 1999 to 2003 via veto or the threat of veto from one party or the other. Finally, it was agreed that Berlin Plus would apply to the member states of the EU that were also NATO allies or at least that took part in its association programme, known as Partnership for Peace (PfP), so Cyprus could only participate in EU operations in which no NATO capabilities were used. Therefore, this conflict as of today is the chief reason behind the paralysis of the most important framework for cooperation between NATO and the EU, which share 21 out of 28 members, as far as the Alliance is concerned, and 27, in the case of the European Union.

In 2004, Cyprus joined the EU; however, it is not a member of NATO or its Partnership for Peace programme, which fosters the bilateral cooperation between Euro-Atlantic countries and NATO. In 2001, President Christofias vetoed the Cypriot Parliament's proposal to request Cyprus's adhesion to this programme brandishing the island's traditional non-alignment. At any rate, it is more than likely that, even if after the 2013 elections there is a change in the presidency of Cyprus and the proposal is finally accepted, Turkey will veto it.

Turkey does not diplomatically recognise the Republic of Cyprus and, in turn, it is not a member of the EU yet. The likelihood of its becoming one seems to be ever more remote due to, among other things, the Cypriot conflict. Turkey, with 30,000 troops posted on the north of the island, is considered to be occupying Cyprus, an EU member. The Turkish position is that that problem stems from the validation of Cyprus' membership to the EU without a solution to the

**Figure 2.7. Members of the Partnership of Peace program (in blue). Source: Patrickneil/Wikipedia**



conflict having been accepted yet and not from the Turkish occupation of the north of the island. Furthermore, now that they are members of the EU, Greek Cypriots have fewer incentives to find a solution.

Turkey signed an association agreement (Ankara Agreement) with the European Economic Community in 1963 but it did not put itself forward as a candidate for membership until 1987. In turn, the European Council did not accept its candidacy until twelve years later, in 1999; the reason for acceptance was that in 1999 Cyprus and Turkey were in good terms and that Greece remove its objections to the Turkish candidacy, so the latter and the Cypriot were accepted. However, whereas Cyprus is an EU member since 2004, formal negotiations for Turkey's adhesion did not begin until October 2005.

With regard to NATO, Turkey is an old and important member<sup>(21)</sup> and one that has the most troops, with the second largest army in the Atlantic Alliance after the US; it also allocates one of the largest shares of GDP to defence in the world.<sup>(22)</sup>As a member of NATO that does not belong to the EU, Turkey views with concern the increasingly prominent role of the latter's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Both Turkey and Cyprus are affecting the collaboration between NATO and the EU in a security environment that needs greater understanding between both organisations. The economic crisis is making this need for collaboration a bit more pressing, if such a thing is possible, since both are being pressurised to make a more efficient use of their resources. Cases such as the Darfur crisis, in which both organisations have given their support, separately, to the African Union, must be avoided.

In NATO's New Strategic Concept of 2010, in its paragraph 32, it is acknowledged that «the EU is a unique and essential partner for NATO» and that «NATO and the EU can and should play complementary and mutually reinforcing roles in supporting international peace and security. «However, the difficulties appear when these wishes are to be put into practice. Since Cyprus does not have any agreements with NATO and does not belong either to the Partnership for Peace (PfP), it cannot take part in the exchange of classified information between the countries of the Alliance and so it must leave any CSDP meeting table in which NATO participates. The EU finds this state of affairs unacceptable; this is why the cooperation at the operational and tactical levels during the missions is stalled. On the other hand, Cyprus refuses to allow Turkey to participate in the development of the CSDP and vetoes the association of the latter with the European Defence Agency (EDA).

<sup>(21)</sup> Turkey joined NATO, together with Greece, three years after signing the Treaty of Washington in 1952.

<sup>(22)</sup> According to the CIA, with estimated figures from 2005, it earmarks 5.30%, it being ranked 14th in the world, ahead of the US. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

Insofar, as NATO's comprehensive approach is accepted and the lessons learnt invite us to use both civilian and military resources, the difficulties experienced in the NATO-EU cooperation are obstacles that must be overcome. This does not mean that the assignment of tasks is to be limited to a contribution of money and civilian capabilities by the EU, as it has been unequivocally proven with the Berlin Plus paralysis, during the six military missions and one civilian-military mission, that it needs to build up its own military capabilities.

The EU needs to involve Turkey in the CSDP because without its help, NATO-EU coordination will remain weak. This situation is frustrating for Turkey, which was already part of the Western European Union (WEU) as an associate member. The importance of Turkey, an increasingly more powerful regional player and a NATO member, is relevant for European security. Achieving stability in Turkey's area of influence is too important for the Cyprus dispute to have halted the process.

After some issues stemming from Turkey's opposition, the EU was finally represented at its highest level at the Chicago NATO Summit 2012. Nevertheless, in spite of the significance of the Turkish Cypriot conflict for NATO-EU relations, this issue was not discussed during this summit.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Today, the European Union has a growing dependence on foreign energy and Turkey is an energy corridor between Central Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the EU is reeling from the global economic crisis whereas Turkey, a G-20 member,<sup>(23)</sup> is experiencing economic growth of the sort that allows to state that it will become an emerging power. All these realities combined allow concluding that a solution for the Cyprus dispute would be the most desirable scenario for the EU. Moreover, quoting the current president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, «*as long as Cyprus is divided, in a way Europe will be divided.*»<sup>(24)</sup>

It does not appear that the solution will be arrived at in the immediate future, but it can be glimpsed in the medium term. Perhaps, that which negotiations, coercion, talks and meetings did not achieve, the economy, which has several doors open, might. On the one hand, in the current economic climate, collaboration between both organisations, and, hence, not the duplication of expendi-

<sup>(23)</sup> The Group of 20: a forum of industrialised and emerging countries. The G-20 is made up of 19 countries plus the EU which, overall, represent almost 90% of world GDP, 80% of global commerce, and two thirds of the total population.

<sup>(24)</sup> Herman Van Rompuy's Speech at the Official Opening Ceremony of the Cyprus Presidency, 5th July 2012. Consulted in August 2012. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/131560.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/131560.pdf).



ture, will prevail.<sup>(25)</sup> This interest is reflected in the declaration of the recent Chicago NATO Summit:

*«NATO and the EU share common values and strategic interests. The EU is a unique and essential partner for NATO. Fully strengthening this strategic partnership, as agreed by our two organisations and enshrined in the Strategic Concept, is particularly important in the current environment of austerity; NATO and the EU should continue to work to enhance practical cooperation in operations, broaden political consultations, and cooperate more fully in capability development.» (Chicago Summit Declaration, 20th May 2012, Article 20)*

On the other hand, the discovery of gas deposits in the area of the conflict may become an incentive to close the Cyprus dispute by means of the Federal State option. Meanwhile, in some practical aspects, the better economic situation of Turkey is bringing it closer to the more impoverished Greece.

It is still not known when will the international summit that NATO had planned to hold in January 2012 on the Cypriot issue take place. This summit may be the starting point for a federated solution that allows the relations between Euro-Atlantic security organisations to thaw, and to think of a Euro-Atlantic security space where NATO, the EU, Turkey and Russia are on the same wavelength, since, in many ways, the Cyprus dispute is the main obstacle to achieving this framework for Euro-Atlantic security.

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<sup>(25)</sup> This is the idea underlying NATO's smart defence and the EU's pooling and sharing concepts.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 2.1**

DATE	EVENTS
1960	Independence of Cyprus. It is no longer a British colony.
1963	Tension between the Turkish and Greek communities.
1964	United Nations sends a mission to the island: UNFICYP
1974	Pro-Greek coup d'état Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus
1983	Turkey proclaims the occupied region as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
2004	Referendum on reunifying the island. Annan Plan. 76% of Greek Cypriots voted against.
	Cyprus joins the European Union
2008	Presidential elections. The Communist Party's Dimitris Christofias wins.
	The United Nations relaunches negotiations.
2012	Cyprus holds the European Union's rotating presidency.

Table 2.2

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS	
<b>Area</b> 9251 km <sup>2</sup> , of which 3355 km <sup>2</sup> belong to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus	
<b>GDP</b> US\$ 24.03 billion (2011 estimate) North of the island US\$ 1.829 billion (est. 2007)	
<b>Structure.</b>	<b>Agriculture</b> 2.4% North: 8.6%
	<b>Industry</b> 16.5% North: 22.5%
	<b>Services</b> 81.1% (est. 2011) North: 69.1% (est. 2006 )
<b>GDP per capita</b> US\$ 29,400 (est. 2011) North: US\$ 11,700 (est. 2007)	
<b>GDP growth rate</b> 0.5% (est. 2011) North: -0.6% (est. 2010)	
<b>Trade relations</b>	
<b>(Exports):</b> US\$ 2.165 billion (est. 2011.) North: US\$ 68.1 million, f.o.b. (2007 est.)	
<b>Trade relations</b>	
<b>(Imports):</b> US\$ 8.034 billion (est. 2011) North: US\$1.2 billion, f.o.b. (2007 est.)	
<b>Population</b> 1,138,071 (est. July 2012)	
<b>Age structure</b>	<b>0-14</b> 16,2%
	<b>15-64</b> 73,4%
	<b>Over 65</b> 10.4%
<b>Population growth rate</b> 1.571% (est. 2012)	
<b>Ethnic groups</b> 77% Greek, 18% Turks, 5% other (2001)	
<b>Religions</b> 78% Greek Orthodox, 18% Muslim, 4% other	
<b>Population literacy rate</b> 97.6%	
<b>Population below the poverty line</b> no data available	
<b>GINI index</b> 29 (2005)	
<b>Military spending. % GDP.</b> 3.8% of GDP (2005 est.) (U)	

Source: CIA The World FACTBOOK

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### CHAPTER III

# LEBANON: A COUNTRY IN PERMANENT RECONSTRUCTION

*Enrique Silvela Díaz-Criado*

#### **ABSTRACT**

The conflict in Lebanon is taking place in a very appealing country, made up of diverse religious communities, which has drawn the attention and subsequent intervention of the great powers and its own regional neighbours. It is a complex conflict, which mixes internal sectarian rivalries with outside interests, as a sideshow to the Middle East conflict. Following the 2006 war, Lebanon is once again undergoing reconstruction, which it has accomplished successfully in the past. Although not yet in a situation of peace, signs can be perceived of prosperity and stability, albeit very fragile, since any spark could serve to reignite the conflict.

#### **Keywords**

Conflict; UN Security Council; UNIFIL; War; Civil War; Lebanon; Mediterranean; Middle East.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is a legendary country: the cradle of the alphabet, of great civilisations, occupying centre stage in history for six thousand years, a magnet for all the people that have travelled through the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East, whether to visit it, to trade, to invest or to invade it. Indeed, it has always had the power to attract all kinds of human activities: good, neutral or evil. This may be due to its location in the heart of the ancient world, its landscape and climate, and the entrepreneurial spirit of its people and its rich intangible heritage, since its primitive natural resources – water and wood – were used up many centuries ago.

It has thus become an amalgam of cultures and religions, where the eternal dilemmas caused by the juxtaposition of its attractions and its permanent state of conflict are played out. The interests of all the neighbouring and far-off powers who use its benefits but then divest it of its potential and its future gravitate around its territory today and have done so throughout history. This is how it finds itself now, like Sisyphus, undergoing a permanent return to the beginning of its reconstruction<sup>(1)</sup>.

In this century, Lebanon has been left as a side show to the great conflict in the Middle East, and in turn, as Lieutenant Colonel Laborie writes in the Overview of Conflicts 2011, «has stood apart from the major world political and social events», without losing its violent starring role. In the West it is perceived that there is a complex conflict in Lebanon, which could be solved, but which remains a side show for an old and deep-rooted problem. Attention is paid to it but the degree of commitment is restricted; its resolution has been subsumed within the greater framework of the Middle East conflict. Lebanon is thus perceived as a place where the main participants in the region resolve their quarrels while avoiding direct confrontation. However, they are all aware that, at any moment, a spark could be ignited, causing an intense reaction that would involve the outside participants. This is what happened in 2006, when the constant harassment of Israel, by Hezbollah, at the border led to an open war that destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure and endangered the fragile balance that had been achieved in the Taif Agreement. As a result the situation in Syria is now being viewed with fresh concern.

The Middle East has been at boiling point since the creation of the State of Israel. The region, which was artificially divided into states –with a tenuous national basis– after the end of the First World War, debated between its collective Arab identity and the new political system which had been imposed on it, in order to integrate the different communities and provinces that it comprised. Lebanon and Palestine were the two least homogeneous provinces,

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<sup>(1)</sup> In Table 3.5, at the end of the chapter, there are some geopolitical indicators on the Lebanese Republic.

due to the existence of the Christian and Jewish communities respectively. Both minorities were major constituents of two of the nations that gained independence from the British and French mandate: Lebanon and Israel. Lebanon was able to sustain a regime in which each community had a stake in the political system, while in Palestine, one community, the Jewish, seized all the power.

**Figure 3.1. Map of Lebanon. Source: [www.escolar.com](http://www.escolar.com)**



Lebanon is a creation of the Mandate power, in this case France, in a process driven by the Maronite Christians, independently of the French Mandate of Syria. On Mount Lebanon, the Christians were in the majority, making up a large part of the population of Beirut, although they were in the minority in other areas. Even so, they put pressure on France and achieved the formation of a province separated from Syria, which was called Greater Lebanon, including Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre and the Bekaa Valley. Thus, the proportion of Christians was diluted, leaving the province fragmented into several communities, none of which was in the majority. The most numerous were the Maronite Christians, the Sunni Muslims, the Shiite Muslims and the Druze; the Lebanese Constitution provides for the existence of eighteen religious communities, as listed in Table 3.1<sup>(2)</sup>. Syria never accepted this partition; today it still continues to believe that Lebanon should be a province of Syria. This is why it has never extricated itself from Lebanese affairs.

<sup>(2)</sup> The set of temporary alliances among competing interests has always been common in Lebanon. Christians or Muslims have not always taken common positions within their respective religious minority. Above all, this is true of Muslims, with three denominations as different as Sunni, Shiite and Druze. Throughout this essay, the term «Muslims» will be used occasionally, whenever they take a position which is common among them; at other times specific reference will be made to Sunnis, Shiites and Druze.

Along the road to independence from the French mandate, despite the initial balance, two opposing attitudes could be perceived in the understanding of the essence of the country. On one hand lay the strength of pan-Lebanism, understood as national identification with the new province; on the other lay pan-Arabism, as the engine of a broader identity, shared with the rest of the Arab Muslim world. However, Lebanonism was mainly a Maronite Christian construction, while pan-Arabism was that of the Muslims. Lebanonism became openly pro-Western, always seeking political, economic and military support from there.

**Table 3.1: Religious Communities in Lebanon**

Religious communities in Lebanon	
CHRISTIAN	Armenian Catholic
	Syrian Catholic
	Roman Catholic
	Chaldean Catholic
	Greek Catholic
	Copt
	Assyrian Church of the East
	Maronites
	Greek Orthodox
	Armenian Orthodox
	Syrian Orthodox
Protestants	
MUSLIM	Sunni
	Shiite
	Druze*
	Alawite
	Ismaelite
JEWISH	

\* Some Druze consider themselves to be a religion in its own right, and not part of Islam.

At the outbreak of the Israeli War of Independence, the fragile regional balance was immediately destroyed. The country became a destination for large numbers of Palestinian refugees expelled by the Israeli army from their villages, which altered the domestic balance between Christians and Muslims. Where in other countries, mainly Jordan, the Palestinians were integrated more or less smoothly into national life, in Lebanon this was impossible, and they were isolated in refugee camps. In 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was expelled from Jordan and settled in Lebanon. From that moment, the situation became untenable; this was the beginning of the current conflict in Lebanon.



## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Strictly speaking, one should talk of the Lebanese conflicts in plural. There are so many clashes of communities and interests that the plurality of conflicts of Lebanon, all linked to one another, is too complex to summarise in a few paragraphs. The current situation cannot be understood without a brief review of the major events that have taken place since its independence, which are presented below..

### ■ Background of the Civil War

France granted supervised independence to Lebanon in 1941, after it had been seized from the Vichy government by the Free France of General *de Gaulle*. In the ensuing years, the Lebanese government gradually rid itself of that supervision, amending the Constitution and eliminating the powers of the French High Commissioner. To do so, the main Lebanese communities reached a power-sharing pact in 1943, based on unwritten common principles and a proportional distribution of political offices, known as the «National Pact». The Pact incorporated local Druze interests; involved acceptance by Sunni communities of the independence and national character of Lebanon, in exchange for sharing the tasks of government; and granted a minor role to the Shiites, who at that time had little influence. Among the fundamental principles involved in this independence was the maintenance of a privileged relationship with the West, without being separated from the country's Arab identity.

The established political system, in parallel with the economic system, favoured the traditional families who led each community, and even the remnants of the ancient tribes, maintaining a semi-feudal and semi-tribal structure involving obvious inequality. The economy became mainly tertiary, neglecting agricultural and industrial progress, while converting the country into a true commercial republic. Because of its location and its relations with both the East and West, it became a major centre for trade and deposit banking, achieving a rapid economic boom, which was restricted to the elites. Beirut was consolidated as a financial, commercial, cultural and tourist centre of the first order.

The Army and most of the institutions were made up of Christians, who typically maintained a moderate and inclusive spirit, without giving up their share of power. The private economy and trade had a significant participation by

**Figure 3.2. Situation of Lebanon in the Middle East. Source: CIA World Factbook**



Muslims, which intensified their interest in integration. The people were left on the margins. This system could be sustained over time only while there were no tensions, whether external or internal, which could put it to the test. Over the past seventy years there have been plenty of tensions of either type. The first, and most important, was the proclamation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

A notable feature of the events described below is the way every conflict, every dispute, creates a new violent participant which is capable of overcoming the moderation of its fellow believers who are installed in power. Thus, the domain of the moderates was gradually replaced by that of the more violent participants. Every peace agreement brought the moderates back in, who then gradually returned power to the hands of the violent. This is how the constant cycle of destruction and reconstruction of Lebanon was born.

Lebanon, along with other Arab countries, took part in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. After that defeat, each country separately signed an armistice, in the case of Lebanon on 23rd March 1949. A peace treaty was never signed, meaning that Lebanon remains in a state of war with Israel, suspended by that armistice.

The main consequence of this war for Lebanon, which had only committed a force of 2000 soldiers, was the flood of Palestinian refugees who flooded into their territory. Their sheer number meant a considerable alteration of the demographic ratio between Christian and Sunni Muslims; both the Shia and Druze took a lukewarm position, tacitly endorsing Christian interests, thus, unlike in other Arab countries, the refugees were not integrated into society and were kept in camps. The United Nations established a support agency for the Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), under Resolution 302 (IV) of the General Assembly<sup>(3)</sup>. UNRWA continues to actively support these refugees throughout the Middle East, many of them in Lebanese camps from which they are barely able to leave to work.

In 1958 came the first Lebanese Civil War, which broke out due to the emergence of Arab nationalism, supplemented with a Marxist ideology, fighting the conservatism of the Christians and the Muslim elites. The war was resolved by the intervention of the United States, which sent a force of over 10,000 soldiers as an early implementation of the recent Eisenhower doctrine, to prevent the possibility of a Communist government being installed in Lebanon. This war saw the first appearance of the Christian phalanges, a militia group that would assume the leading role in the second Civil War.

The Arab-Israeli conflict led to the Six Day War in 1967, without Lebanese involvement. The Arab defeat in the battlefield was comprehensive. Consequently, Palestinians lost confidence in the military capacity of its Arab allies,

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<sup>(3)</sup> Registered in the UN record system as A/RES/302 (IV), of 8th December 1949.

starting their own low-intensity confrontation with insurgency tactics and terrorist methods. From 1968 the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon formed armed militias for a confrontation with Israel. Given their potential influence in Lebanese internal affairs, the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) General Emile Bustani, reached an agreement with Yasser Arafat in Cairo, with the mediation of Nasser. According to this so-called «Cairo agreement», the PLO agreed not to intervene in the internal affairs of Lebanon; in return, Lebanon would allow the PLO to organise and conduct attacks against Israel from its refugee camps. These ceased to be under the control of the FAL, which stopped entering them.

In September 1970, the pressure of the actions there by the PLO led Jordan to expel the organisation, in what came to be known as «Black September», after a bloody confrontation. Arafat moved to Beirut, markedly intensifying the fight from Lebanon. There was an increase in the number of actions against Israel being undertaken from Lebanese soil, but there was also an increase in the number of heavily armed Palestinian militants moving around within Lebanon itself.

The PLO operated autonomously, independent from the Lebanese state. There were constant clashes with the Army, which was mostly Christian. The PLO received some popular support, exacerbating the split between the Sunni elites –who were traditional advocates of the liberal economic regime– and their people, who embraced the cause of Marxism and a nationalised economy. The Yom Kippur War in 1973, although Lebanon did not take part in it, only worsened the situation.

On 13th April 1975 open conflict broke out, with the attempted assassination of Phalangist leader Pierre Gemayel, which was answered with an assault on a Palestinian bus. The outbreak of the war forced everyone to take sides, which meant two groups were formed: one was mainly Christian, supported by traditionalists from other communities, while the other, based around the Palestinians, received support from other Muslims, Marxists and leftist revolutionaries. This conflict turned into a combination of religious, political and economic sentiments, which dragged the country towards destruction over a period of fifteen years.

### ■ The Civil War (1975-1990)

The Civil War began as a clash between Palestinians and Christians which revealed the naivety and weakness of the Cairo Agreement. A militia with full freedom of movement and action sooner or later was bound to intervene in the internal affairs of the country, despite having signed an agreement to do otherwise. Moreover, since the militia was external to Lebanon, the confrontation

immediately attracted the attention of all those involved in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, each acting in defence of its own interests.

The Lebanese tend to present this war as a scenario in which outside powers resolved their quarrels without the locals bearing any guilt for what occurred. At most, it was «the others», whoever they were, who allowed or called for the assistance of external allies to benefit their cause. Actually, Lebanon was precariously balanced due to its own constitution of communities with divergent views and interests, which had always maintained a latent conflict. This conflict erupted due to the addition of external factors, mainly the Palestinian refugees, to a substrate of communities with divergent interests; both components, internal and external, have their own weight in the final result. Its consequences are still present in the minds of the Lebanese, and it remains a piece of background that it is essential to understand.

Initially, the combats were limited to the Christian and Palestinian militias. Besides direct confrontations between them, they both embarked on a spiral of indiscriminate sectarian revenge, including massacres of unarmed civilians, women and children. The most conservative Muslims and Marxist-inspired Christians aligned themselves, at first, based on their ideological proximity; the sectarian killings forced them to choose sides based on their religion. There were massive internal migrations, as minorities in each town, each neighbourhood, sought refuge among those of their own religion.

The conflict spread throughout the country, although most of the population wanted to stay out of it. Two main blocs were formed: the Lebanese Front (FL from its French initials), which brought together Christian militias and parties, and the Lebanese National Movement (MNL from its French initials), which brought together the various Muslim forces. Each bloc consisted of highly different parties, militias and movements, all of which shared unstable relationships. Throughout the war there would be intense internal rivalries, shifting interests and alliances, as well as the emergence of new participants. Together with the two blocs there were a number of autonomous forces, which also entered the game of variable alliances.

The Army hardly intervened as such, since it was the militias that carried out the conflict. It was divided into two: one section from the Christian majority that tried to stay formally neutral, in support of the government, although it favoured the Lebanese Front wherever possible, while the Muslim soldiers staged a sort of secession, forming a self-proclaimed Arab-Lebanese Army, which fought as a militia on Muslim side.

In 1976, the MNL managed to defeat the FL. The Lebanese President, the Christian Suleiman Frangieh, sought assistance from Syria to stop the conflict.

The Syrians, although they were pro-Palestinian, feared that a radical victory by the MNL would create a hornets' nest that would stoke open confrontation with Israel, which had already defeated them twice in war. Consequently, they intervened in Lebanon with force, easily defeating the Palestinian and Muslim militias and partially occupying Beirut, the Bekaa Valley and Tripoli. The country was essentially divided into Christian and Muslim areas, with an Arab Deterrent Force commanded by Syria as the arbiter of the balance, holding up the FL. However, the phalanx wanted to wrest control in Beirut and took on the Syrian Army, which was allied to the FL, breaking this alliance and renewing the instability.

Syria had tacitly agreed with Israel that it would avoid a confrontation with them. However, the Palestinians, now unopposed rulers of southern Lebanon, continued their operations at the border. In March 1978, a small detachment of Palestinian fighters carried out a raid on a beach in northern Israel, kidnapping passengers on two buses of the Haifa-Tel Aviv line, ending in a clash with Israeli police at a road checkpoint, in which all the terrorists and 37 civilians, mostly Israelis, including 13 children, were killed. In response to the slaughter, Israel invaded southern Lebanon to drive out the PLO and create a safety buffer zone from which no further operations could be carried out.

The operation was called Operation Litani, and lasted seven days from 14th March. Israel deployed 25,000 troops, occupying all of southern Lebanon up to the Litani River, apart from the city of Tyre. Five days later, the UN Security Council agreed Resolutions 425 and 426, calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and the creation of a United Nations Interim Force for Lebanon, UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon). On 23rd March, UNIFIL was deployed in southern Lebanon, where it still continues its work today.

UNIFIL forced a ceasefire, the first to be accepted by the PLO. Israel partially withdrew, leaving a Lebanese militia, the self-styled South Lebanon Army (SLA), in charge of security in the region, with Israeli support, which not only involved military material but also the presence of «advisers». The violence continued on a smaller scale. The Palestinians continued their infiltration and launched rockets into Israel, which responded with air operations over Palestinian interests in all parts of the country, especially in Beirut; both the PLO and the SLA clashed occasionally with UNIFIL, killing several people in their ranks.

This situation continued for several years, intensifying in 1981, until a new ceasefire was negotiated. However, a new Israeli government headed by Menachem Begin, with Ariel Sharon as Minister of Defence, considered the possibility of solving the problem once and for all. There were several minor violations of the ceasefire, insufficient to justify a major operation, until the attempted

assassination of the Israeli ambassador in London provided a justification for the invasion. On 6th June 1982, Israel entered Lebanon again.

Israel embarked upon «Operation Peace for Galilee» with the aim of expelling the PLO from Lebanon and reducing Syrian influence. To this end they conducted a large-scale operation, which included the suppression of Syrian air defences in the Bekaa Valley, air and land battles, as well as the naval blockade of the Lebanese coast. A ceasefire with Syria was reached on 11th June, with the fighting continuing against the PLO. The succession of battles led Israeli troops all the way to Beirut, where they surrounded the fighters from the PLO who remained there and even a Syrian brigade.

To break the stalemate, an intense international diplomatic effort was undertaken. At last, it was agreed to deploy a multinational force from outside the UN umbrella, made up of the United States, France, Italy and the United Kingdom<sup>(4)</sup>, to allow the evacuation of PLO fighters to several Arab countries, and of Yasir Arafat and his staff to Tunisia. This also allowed the return of Syrian forces to their country or to territory they controlled

Israel wanted to install a puppet government in Beirut, for which it reached secret agreements with the Phalange leader Bashir Gemayel, who was elected president of Lebanon. However, he was assassinated a week before his inauguration. Later, in place of Bashir, his brother, Amin Gemayel, was elected. Amin was much more of a moderate, had no agreements with Israel, and was not willing to be a puppet.

In September 1982, two days after the assassination of Bashir, the Christian phalanges argued that thousands of Palestinian fighters were hidden in the refugee camps. As a result they requested Israeli permission, which was granted by the defence minister Ariel Sharon, to enter the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, on the outskirts of Beirut, where they carried out an indiscriminate slaughter, which had major international repercussions. The UN General Assembly declared it an act of genocide.

The multinational force, which was withdrawing after the evacuation of the PLO, had to return to prevent the situation getting out of hand again. However, a new Shiite militia called Hezbollah (the Party of God), a splinter of the then-majority Shiite party, Amal, with the support of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, made its spectacular entrance on the stage. On 18th April 1983 it carried out a car bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, leaving 61 dead and 100 wounded. On 23rd October of the same year, two nearly simultaneous suicide attacks with truck bombs took 241 lives at the headquarters of the

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<sup>(4)</sup> The UK contingent was significantly smaller than that of the other three countries, but was an important bulwark for the mission.

US forces and 58 at that of the French forces. The multinational force finally withdrew on 26th February 1984.

For its part, Israel also left Beirut, withdrawing its lines to the Awali River, north of Sidon. When the Israelis withdrew, local clashes resumed, the most serious taking place in the Chouf region, where the Druze militias expelled all the Christians living there. Israel subsequently withdrew further south, occupying only a so-called security buffer zone south of the Litani River. Several agreements were reached among different parties for these withdrawals, with US mediation, which none of the parties complied with fully. In the following years there was a war of attrition between Hezbollah and the Israeli forces which also affected UNIFIL.

Both the Israeli and international withdrawals left the factions again to fend for themselves. In the ensuing years there were numerous clashes between the two blocs, as well as between internal factions within the same bloc, with occasional changes of alliances or postures, assassinations of political leaders, a situation of dual governments competing for national and international legitimacy, along with constant interference by Syria and Israel. On 14th March 1989, the Christian general Michel Aoun, who had assumed the post of interim Prime Minister, declared a «War of Liberation» against Syria in response to a Syrian attack on the presidential palace.

In view of the utter chaos and lack of internal cohesion, international pressure provided by Saudi Arabia managed to bring the key leaders, represented by the surviving parliamentarians from the last legitimate elections<sup>(5)</sup>, to the table, in the Saudi city of Taif. There a peace agreement was reached, which involved a review of the distribution of power, formally ending the civil war, although some subsequent clashes were maintained. The Taif Agreement<sup>(6)</sup> retained the power-sharing system, varying slightly the proportion of the different communities in the Parliament, increasing the proportion of both Sunnis and Shiites, and matching the number of Christians to the number of Muslims. Additionally, the agreement consolidated the effective control exercised by Syria over Lebanese affairs, which was good for both Saudi Arabia and the United States.

### ■ Reconstruction after the Taif Agreement

The Taif Agreement laid a political foundation for reconciliation, but for a while the fighting persisted, particularly as a result of Aoun's refusal to accept the agreement and leave office; when he finally went into exile in France, the conflict ended. From 1992, when Rafiq Hariri was elected as Prime Minister, the political stability allowed economic reconstruction to take place, especially

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<sup>(5)</sup> That took place in 1972.

<sup>(6)</sup> Formally called the «National Reconciliation Agreement».

repair of the infrastructure. The reconstruction effort generated a significant debt, which the country's financial earnings were not able to offset, causing successive political tensions. Even so, in the years following 1992 there was sustained economic growth and an improvement in the living conditions of the Lebanese people.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict was exchanged for the conflict with Hezbollah. This party, backed by Iran through Syria, had grown during the civil war, becoming more and more prominent, not just in military terms, but also in political and social terms, differentiating itself from the traditional Shiite party, Amal. Its presence in southern Lebanon, where most of the Shiites are found, was very strong. They presented themselves as the main protagonists of what was called the «resistance» against Israeli occupation, which attracted widespread popular support outside their own faction. They kept up a war of attrition across the Litani and within the Israeli security buffer zone, which eventually led to the withdrawal of Israel in 2000.

Israel, in light of the human and financial toll exacted by its war with Hezbollah, decided to perform a unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, in compliance with Resolutions 425 and 426 of the UN Security Council. The withdrawal was planned to occur in coordination with the Lebanese Army, but Israel unexpectedly brought forward its withdrawal, leaving Lebanon on 23rd and 24th May. The FAL never entered southern Lebanon; its place was immediately taken by the Hezbollah militia. The SLA also left Lebanon, along with their families, in anticipation of possible reprisals. UNIFIL continued its activities in a totally new setting, confirming the Israeli withdrawal and beginning to draw a clear line of separation between Lebanon and Israel, known as the «blue line», which would be the source of many subsequent disputes.

From that moment on, the only external force directly influencing Lebanon was Syria, which had entered the country in 1978 and exerted vigorous control since the Taif Agreement. The economic crisis reduced the ability of the leaders of parties, militias and factions to offer patronage, which created greater political tension. Most of the Christians and Sunnis turned against Syria and its permanent presence in Lebanon, demanding a complete withdrawal of its troops from the country. Politics in those years was polarised between supporters and opponents of the Syrian military presence in the country, the latter group being primarily led by Sunni Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the architect of economic reconstruction. He was stridently opposed to the Christian president, the former Army chief, Emil Lahoud, being kept in office by Syrian pressures despite having completed his mandate<sup>(7)</sup>. The UN Security Council

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<sup>(7)</sup> Since the Taif Agreement, Christians have been divided into a pro- or anti-Syrian stance, thus participating in both alliances, March 14 and March 8.



issued Resolution 1559 (2004)<sup>(8)</sup>, which required the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, in clear reference to Syria, and the disarming of all militias, of which only Hezbollah remained.

Hariri, who was very popular, was assassinated in 2005, without the culprits coming to light; responsibility for the attack is under investigation by a tribunal established by the United Nations for this event, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), located in The Hague, whose performance is causing much controversy in the country. His murder provoked a popular backlash, with mass demonstrations in Beirut and other cities, in what later became known as the «Cedar Revolution».

The internal and international pressure following the attack managed to force the withdrawal of Syrian troops, which had not been achieved by the UN resolution. Elections were held in the same year, won by the «March 14 Alliance»<sup>(9)</sup>, led by Saad Hariri, son of the slain Rafiq. Accordingly, alliances were reassembled again in line with their attitude towards Syria and the West. On one hand, part of the Christians and Sunnis around Hariri; on the other, Christian parties<sup>(10)</sup>, minority Sunnis and all Shiites, including Amal and Hezbollah, forming the «March 8 Alliance» without a clear leader<sup>(11)</sup>. The Druze remained independent, supporting one or the other depending on their interests in a given moment.<sup>(12)</sup>

Amid these tensions, Hezbollah carried out a raid on Israeli soil, killing several soldiers and kidnapping two on 12th July 2006. Israel responded violently, triggering the most recent conflict.

### ■ The 2006 War

In 2006 Hezbollah was gaining political importance in the Lebanon. Its highly decentralised workings required its units to undertake harassment operations against Israeli forces, as alleged retaliation or for the purpose of capturing Israeli soldiers to force exchanges. One of these Hezbollah units perceived an Israeli weakness; one of the army patrols was moving near the border without the necessary security measures. Hezbollah carried out a surprise ambush patrol,

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<sup>(8)</sup> S/RES/1559 (2004).

<sup>(9)</sup> The name of this alliance stems from the date in 1989 of the onset of the so-called «War of Liberation» against the Syrian presence in Lebanon, which forced the Taif Agreement.

<sup>(10)</sup> In a curious political stunt, which is not surprising in Lebanon, the Christian Aoun returned from exile and formed a party, the Free Patriotic Movement, that is now included in the pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance.

<sup>(11)</sup> In this case, the date was inspired by a massive demonstration that took place on 8th March 2005 in Beirut to show the support for Syria of its supporters in Lebanon in response to the «Cedar Revolution», as the reaction to the assassination of Hariri was called.

<sup>(12)</sup> At the time of the elections they were presented as part of the March 14 Alliance; later they held a free vote, before finally opting for the March 8 Alliance.

killing some of its members and kidnapping two, who were probably wounded and who died shortly afterwards.

Everything indicates that it was not an operation planned by Hezbollah to provoke a war, but rather another of the harassment activities it was performing. The immediate Israeli reaction was a botched raid in southern Lebanon in order to rescue the two soldiers, which caused more deaths and destroyed a Merkava tank.

Once the Israeli government was made aware of this situation, its reaction was far more radical than Hezbollah expected. First, it held the Lebanese government responsible for the actions of Hezbollah, considering it to be an act of state aggression. As a result, it decided to respond with a major military operation on Lebanese soil, which became an open war that lasted 34 days.

This operation had two objectives: on the one hand, to attack general Lebanese interests, in particular its infrastructure, and on the other, a direct attack on the military capabilities of Hezbollah. The first involved a naval and aerial blockade of Lebanon, with the intention of preventing both the exit from the country of the kidnapped soldiers and the entry of weapons and military resources for Hezbollah. This caused significant civilian casualties and was severely criticised by the International Community, while the second also generated civilian casualties and was less effective than intended.

Both the political and strategic decisions taken and the military leadership of the operations by the Israelis racked up a large number of controversial decisions. First, the success of the operation was entrusted to an almost exclusively aerial attack, giving up the mobilisation of reserves and actions on the ground. When this proved insufficient, it began a gradual escalation of the use of ground troops, in the end leading to an expensive and unpopular mobilisation. However, the land forces, which were trained for combat against Palestinian militants, found a well-organised opposition against which they were unable to achieve their goals. Therefore, Israel commissioned a separate report, known as the «Winograd report» on decision-making in this conflict.

The type of fighting in this war has come to be known as «hybrid» combat, in which a state's armed forces face a well organised non-state enemy, which combines typical insurgency actions with others which are more typical of a regular army. Western armies have studied it carefully, considering it a model of conflict in which they could be involved in the future.<sup>(13)</sup>

Meanwhile, against the Israeli reaction, Hezbollah demonstrated the effectiveness of the preparation it had made in recent years in anticipation of this con-

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<sup>(13)</sup> It is seen as a form of intermediate combat somewhere between «asymmetric» conflict, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, and high-intensity conflicts.

flict. On one hand, it had established a complex defence system close to the ground, with dugouts, communications and sophisticated medium-range weapons, which was able to withstand aerial bombardment and then stop or slow the progress of Israeli ground forces. On the other hand, it maintained constant pressure on the civilian population of northern Israel via the launching of rockets. Although they had medium and long range rockets, the air action was enough to thwart or discourage these launches. However, Hezbollah had a large number of short-range missiles called Katiusha, which were very easy to launch from any position. Hezbollah maintained a high level of launches up until the last day of the war, thanks to the supply of weapons from Iran via Syria.

The consequences of this conflict left around 500 Hezbollah combatants dead, to which we should add a similar or even higher number of Lebanese civilians, as well as thousands of injured. The Israelis acknowledged 114 military casualties and 43 civilians. Additionally, the Lebanese government points out, there were more than 250,000 people displaced, while roads, bridges and more than 15,000 buildings were destroyed.

Just after the beginning of the conflict, the international diplomatic effort, led by the UN, was launched to minimise its impact and stop it as soon as possible. UNIFIL, which was deployed on the ground, had only 2000 soldiers and was unable to influence the course of the operations. The Security Council began meeting to seek an agreement between the parties. This agreement was signed on 13th August 2006, with the publication of Resolution 1701 (2006)<sup>(14)</sup> of the UN Security Council, which is the basis on which the subsequent action by the International Community is founded. On 14th August 2006, as agreed, the fighting was suspended. The Israeli forces began their withdrawal from the land they had occupied; Hezbollah equally ceased its launching of rockets.

Resolution 1701 (2006) significantly strengthened the role of UNIFIL, to the point that it was considered changing the name to UNIFIL II, to denote the strengthening of its capabilities and its more robust mandate. Its main asset is the commitment of three European nations (France, Italy and Spain) to the stability of Lebanon, with a significant contribution of troops and capabilities. Since then the area has undergone a situation containing tensions, in which the reconstruction has, once again, been the main protagonist. The Lebanese army has returned to the south, where it had not been deployed since 1976 and Hezbollah has ceased its attacks and harassment against northern Israel. The role of this reinforced UNIFIL force has been essential to achieving these ends.

## ■ CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

Six years after the end of the war, the achievements have been maintained but no progress has been made in the desired peace settlement called for by

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<sup>(14)</sup> S/RES/1701 (2006).

**Figure 3.3. Deployment of UNIFIL in Hezbollah territory. Taken by Ronith Daher**



Resolution 1701 (2006). The current situation (which is a temporary, not a permanent ceasefire, let alone a peace agreement) is defined by several factors, among which the following are worth mentioning: the performance of the renewed UNIFIL; continued Lebanese political instability, and the progress of the economic reconstruction.

### ■ The Performance of UNIFIL

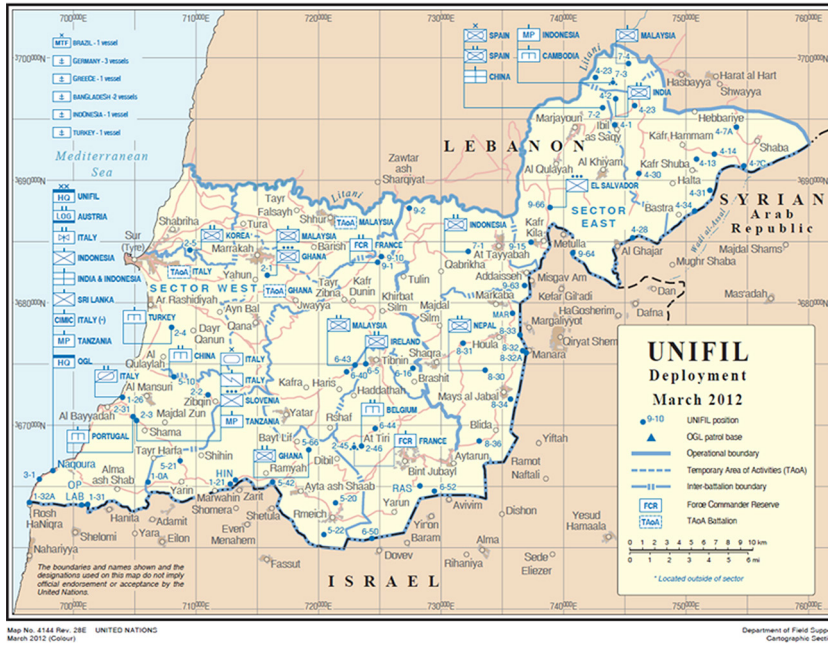
UNIFIL was established by Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 (1978)<sup>(15)</sup> of the UN Security Council to confirm Israeli withdrawal following the aforementioned Operation Litani. Despite its designation as «provisional», since then it has been trying, with mixed fortunes, to have an effective influence in containing the successive conflicts in Lebanon.

After the 2006 war, given the repercussions that Middle East policy was having in Western public opinion and the interest shared by France, Italy and Spain in the stability of the Mediterranean region, these countries decided to provide a substantial contribution to the peace effort by means of an extraordinary contribution of troops to UNIFIL. To do so, from within the United Nations and through their diplomatic contacts in the region they supported the signing of a solid agreement that would allow the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of the opposing forces.

The resolution is a carefully worded text, with alleged ambiguities, whose greatest value is that it has been publicly accepted by all parties, whether for-

<sup>(15)</sup> S/RES/425 (1978) and S/RES/426 (1978).

**Figure 3.4. Deployment of UNIFIL. Source: Press Office, Unifil.**



mal, such as the governments of Lebanon and Israel, or informal, such as Hezbollah. It calls for Israel and Lebanon to reach a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution which is based, among other things, on the «establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons except for those of the Government of Lebanon and UNIFIL».

The new mandate of UNIFIL, reflected in detail in paragraph 11, was added to the Resolutions 425 and 426 for which it had been created. It consists of the monitoring of the cessation of hostilities, the accompaniment of the FAL in its deployment in southern Lebanon as the Israeli forces withdraw coordination with the governments of Lebanon and Israel, assistance to ensure humanitarian access to civilians and assistance to the Government of Lebanon in border control.

To reinforce UNIFIL's authority in fulfilling its mandate, the resolution authorises, among other things, the taking of all necessary measures to ensure that its area of operations is not used to carry out hostile activities and to resist any attempts by coercive means to prevent it from fulfilling its functions. This paragraph has generated plenty of controversy because its ambiguity gives rise to different interpretations. It must be remembered, since it is an authorisation and not an express mandate, it has become a tool in the hands

**Figure 3.5. General Asarta with UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. Source: Press Office, UNIFIL**



of the commander of UNIFIL and Head of Mission, who must exercise it wisely and opportunely.

It also authorised an increase of the force to 15,000 troops, of which about 12,000 have been deployed and remain on the ground. This increase was not only in personnel, their capabilities have also been strengthened, including a naval group. Table 3.2 lists the countries contributing troops to UNIFIL. Between January 2010 and January 2012, UNIFIL was led by the Major General of the Spanish Army at the time, Alberto Asarta Cuevas.

UNIFIL in a handful of years achieved the most significant part of its mandate. The cessation of hostilities has been maintained, with sporadic episodes of violence that are under control; the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the deployment of the Lebanese army has been completed, with the known exceptions of the village of Ghajjar and the Shebaa farms; and constant assistance has been offered to the Government of Lebanon to enable it carry out its tasks. The coordination with the governments of Lebanon and Israel is constant. It has managed to sit at the same table with the military leaders of both countries in a monthly coordination meeting, the so-called «tripartite» meeting.

**Figure 3.6. Maritime capabilities of UNIFIL. Source: Press Office, UNIFIL**















**Figure 3.7. Tripartite Meeting. Taken by: Lt Manuel Fernández del Hoyo.**



To date, no reliable evidence has been found of the existence of unauthorised weapons in southern Lebanon; in northern Israel, the Galilee region is experiencing the most peaceful time in its recent history, with a marked increase in tourism; the economic reconstruction of Lebanon is progressing, reflected in the proliferation of construction work in the south. Minor incidents continue to occur, which on occasion have caused fatalities, but which are not comparable with the pre-conflict situation.

However, the governments of Israel and Lebanon have not been able to take advantage of this opportunity to make progress on the permanent ceasefire and a peace agreement. This is causing a significant fatigue among the force providers, so that a future reduction of UNIFIL is under consideration.

**Table 3.2. Contributions of Troops in UNIFIL**

CONTRIBUTIONS OF TROOPS											
AUSTRIA	146		CHIPRE	1		INDIA	896		CATAR	3	
ARMENIA	1		EL SALVADOR	52		INDONESIA	1459		SERBIA	5	
BANGLADES	324		FINLANDIA	168		IRLANDA	355		SIERRA LEONA	3	

BELARÚS	3	 FRANCIA	919	 ITALIA	1100	 ESLOVENIA	14	
BÉLGICA	99	 ARY MACEDONIA	1	 KENYA	1	 ESPAÑA	962	
BRASIL	265	 ALEMANIA	101	 RD COREA	354	 SRI LANKA	151	
BRUNEI	30	 GHANA	874	 LUXEMBURGO	2	 TANZANIA	159	
CAMBOYA	215	 GRECIA	49	 MALASIA	878	 TURQUÍA	300	
CHINA	343	 GUATEMALA	3	 NEPAL	1018			
CROACIA	1	 HUNGRÍA	4	 NIGERIA	1			

■ **Lebanese Political Instability**

After the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, Lebanese political life was organised around the two major coalitions mentioned above, based on their position of support for the Syrian presence in the country. These are the March 14 Alliance and the March 8 Alliance, respectively. Hezbollah was part of the latter coalition, being the only party which kept an armed militia large enough to influence Lebanese politics.

The elections called in 2005 were won by the March 14 Alliance: although it was led by Saad, the youngest son of Rafiq Hariri, he chose to present the post of Prime Minister to his father’s right hand man, the economist Fouad Siniora<sup>(16)</sup>.

The Lebanese Constitution says the government will cease to be legitimate if it does not have at least two thirds of the ministers. In November 2006, the Shiite ministers resigned, and the March 8 Alliance demanded the resignation of the entire government as being illegitimate. However, it maintained a number of ministers that was greater than two thirds. In 2007 and 2008, the March 8 Alliance put pressure on the government to obtain a power of veto, so that there could be a number of ministers in the opposition large enough to bring it down, with the support of President Emile Lahoud. In May 2008, Hezbollah used its militias to take control by force of Lebanese institutions and facilities, such as the Beirut International Airport, and to besiege the principal leaders of the

<sup>(16)</sup> The Lebanese government at this time has been formed as a government of national unity, with the presence of ministers from the opposition, in line with their representation in parliament. The Siniora government, for the first time, was joined by two ministers belonging to Hezbollah.



March 14 Alliance at their homes, in a show of force that remains vivid in the memory of all the Lebanese political participants.

To resolve the situation, a meeting was convened in Doha for the main Lebanese political figures, at which the Doha Agreement was reached, which accepted the resignation of Lahoud and in his place agreed the appointment as the new president of the country of the Chief of the Army, General Michel Sleiman (who remains in office) in exchange for allowing the minority veto in the government.

The Lebanese Army, the main component of the FAL, is the best element of stability and national unity in the current situation. Its strict multid denominational rules have achieved greater integration than other institutions. It has regained considerable prestige among the population, and even among the most diverse political leaders. It has managed to deploy forces both in the south and in the Bekaa Valley, previously dominated by Hezbollah and the Syrian Army respectively. In 2007 it had a major role when it intervened successfully in quelling a riot at a Palestinian refugee camp in Tripoli<sup>(17)</sup>, going as far as enter and militarily controlling the camp, another area from which it had been similarly excluded.

In 2009, the March 14 Alliance again won the elections. This time, Saad Hariri was named Prime Minister. His rule has been marked by the investigation undertaken by the STL into the murder of his father. The investigation showed indications of the possible involvement of Hezbollah. This party tried by all means to block the investigation, denying any allegations as well as questioning the legitimacy of the STL. In 2011, in view of the progress of the investigation and the calls for Hezbollah leaders to be questioned, the March 8 Alliance exerted a blocking minority, resigning from the cabinet; thanks to some shifting alliances, the March 8 Alliance appointed the current Prime Minister, considered to be a consensus leader, in the person of the pro-Syrian politician and multimillionaire Najib Mikati.

### ■ The Eternal Reconstruction of Lebanon

Despite periodic bouts of violence, Lebanon has remained a country with a surprisingly dynamic economy. There are several factors that support it, such as the sending of funds to the country by its large diaspora, its reputation as the financial centre of the Near and Middle East, its ability to serve as a hub of commerce and the entrepreneurial spirit of its people.

After the 2006 war, there was again a huge reconstruction effort, both of public infrastructure and the homes and businesses that had been destroyed.

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<sup>(17)</sup> El Nahr-el-Bared camp.

At the same time there was an attempt to reduce its main economic problem, its high foreign debt. The growth of the Lebanese economy is among the highest in the region, with a per capita income of around US \$10,000. But for the latest conflicts, it would be one of the most developed economies in the world. In recent years it has been correcting one of the most traditional imbalances, in which the fruit of its prosperity was only enjoyed by the most favoured groups.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

The whole history of Lebanon, not just the most recent conflicts, has been played out in constant interaction with its neighbours and with the major international powers. Outside participants have played and continue to play a major role in Lebanese life. This is true above all of its neighbours, Syria and Israel, although the latter has already been discussed in the previous section. There is a Lebanese Christian saying in which the Creator gives Lebanon all possible riches. When Adam says that perhaps it is too much, the Creator's answer is «wait until you see the neighbours I've given them!»

For Western countries, Lebanon has always been a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. France has been the Western model for the Christians in Lebanon, subsequently offset by the presence of the great powers, first Britain and then the United States. Owing to its proximity and trade ties, Italy also has important interests there. All these countries created prestigious centres of learning in Beirut and other cities, such as the American University of Beirut. Currently, France, Italy and Spain are the main contributors to UNIFIL of capabilities and troops. The United States provides significant support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, in materiel as well as advice and training.

The orientation of the Soviet Union and then Russia, however, has been towards those Arab countries that adopted Marxist or anti-Western policies, sidelining Lebanon.

For the United Nations, the Middle East conflict is one of its main focal points, and indeed UNIFIL is one of its largest missions, second in size only to MONUC in the Congo. Table 3.4 lists the most important resolutions of the Security Council on Lebanon.

Syria has been the main influence on Lebanon, with which it shares its history and Arab identity. After its departure in 2005 it has lost much of that influence, which is reflected even in the decrease of its weight in the trade balance. The riots in Syria, in the short term, are having a limited impact on Lebanon. For now, only the city of Tripoli, in which many Syrians live, has reproduced the

conflict between Sunnis and Alawites on a small scale, but the intervention of the FAL has contained it. Even so, all the Lebanese political participants view with concern a possible extension of the conflict to Lebanese soil. The fragility of the peace in Lebanon justifies this concern.

The medium-term outlook is more complex. Syria historically has had great influence in Lebanon, although right now it is at one of its lowest points. The absence of Syrian pressure could again change the precarious balance of power. Iran directed its open support for Hezbollah through Syria, meaning that, while the conflict lasts and especially if the result is contrary to its interests, it will have to find new and certainly more difficult ways of operating, but it will certainly not allow Hezbollah to fall. The main risk is that Hezbollah, anticipating a possible loss of international influence in Lebanon due to the disappearance of its support from Syria, will provoke a confrontation between the two electoral alliances, although currently there is little evidence to support this concern.

Obviously, all the Arab countries, and not just Syria, are looking with interest at Lebanese affairs. Among other reasons, this is because they deposit their financial resources in its banks, because their elites go there for tourism and shopping and because, after all, it is part of the Middle East conflict. Finally, the large number of Shiites also makes it important for Iran, which supported the creation of Hezbollah and continues to support its activities.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Successive Israeli invasions have created a visceral hatred among most Lebanese, from all communities, towards Israel. The Israeli policy of attributing collective responsibility has been completely counterproductive. Blaming the Lebanese government for the lack of control over Hezbollah has strengthened, rather than weakening, tolerance of its militias. Israel has given the Lebanese people, which is so fragmented on other issues, an essential element of unity.

Lebanon and Israel are theoretically in a state of war, since only a ceasefire has been approved. Each Arab country at the time signed ceasefires separately with Israel, all competing to be the last to sign a peace agreement with Israel, hoping that others would do it first. Lebanon has almost no territorial disputes with Israel, nor can the country wield opposing interests beyond minor disputes. However, the weight of history is so strong that it seems unlikely that the two governments will take the necessary steps towards the peace agreement within a reasonable time frame.

Meanwhile, Israel remains vigilant regarding the methods of Hezbollah, without going back on its policy of attribution of collective responsibility. Israel is still

flying over Lebanese territory, allegedly for intelligence purposes, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty. It justifies this by citing the lack of control Lebanon has over Hezbollah and the fact that this organisation has not abandoned its weapons, which in turn would be in violation of Resolution 1559 (2004) mentioned above.

For its part, Hezbollah has emerged as the champion of resistance against Israel, for its victorious attitude in the 2006 war, the fact that it functions as parallel state, going as far as the provision of social services to its population, preserving its militias and with its capacity for coercive influence over Lebanese politics intact. A slogan has been coined that is tacitly shared by most Lebanese, from any community, that says that the confrontation with Israel is being fought by «the people, the Army and ‘the resistance’», in the view of the people and the Lebanese government legitimising the possession of weapons by Hezbollah.

It seems clear that this organisation has withdrawn its weapons from southern Lebanon, or at least has hidden them in a way that they are not readily usable, however it continues to flaunt them publicly north of the Litani River and proclaims its improved capabilities with Iranian support. It is increasingly engaged in Lebanese domestic politics, for which it already seems not to need the legitimacy that was previously granted by its permanent confrontation with Israel. It earned its stripes in 2006.

As a result, in the short term, both Israel and Hezbollah have no interest in resuming the clashes, as they are both suited by the current climate of peace created by resolution 1701 (2006), which is unlikely to be changed by the situation in Syria.

By contrast, the Palestinian refugee problem, which triggered the civil war, has now moved into the background. There are still weapons in some camps and internal control remains in the hands of small militias, supported by Fatah or Hamas, and some have even dared to launch rockets against Israel, despite the fact that even Hezbollah is trying to avoid this. However, the impact of their actions is now fairly insignificant. Only the humanitarian problem remains, which is increasingly removed from the spotlight of the media.

Meanwhile, in southern Lebanon a force of nearly 12,000 troops remains deployed, in which France, Italy and Spain are steadily reducing their participation, being replaced by other countries with lesser military capabilities. UNIFIL's presence remains essential, but the lack of progress on the path of peace is creating fatigue in the contributing countries. In the medium term it is expected that the size of the mission will be reduced.

Stability in the region is founded on the implementation of various partial agreements reached between the main participants: firstly, in the medium and

long term, the Taif Accord, which is based on the distribution of political power in Lebanon; secondly, Resolution 1701 (2006), which is the cornerstone of border stability with Israel; finally, in the short term, the Doha Agreement that recovered a unity government, even though there is a blocking minority. The elections scheduled in 2013 will provide the best perspective on the following years.

The conflict in Syria is viewed from Lebanon with concern, but its impact so far is still quite limited. The biggest loser in the event of the fall or weakening of the Assad regime would be Hezbollah, however, this organisation has already amassed a powerful arsenal, both in the case of a return to the conflict with Israel, and for internal clashes. It is therefore estimated that it can sustain itself with financial rather than material support from Iran, at least in the medium term. Hezbollah is in no hurry, since simple demographics are on its side, with the Shia population having the fastest growth rate in Lebanon.

The Lebanese miracle lies in the fact that, in this unstable balance, until conflict breaks out again, the country is prospering economically and culturally. Beirut is a modern and cosmopolitan city that continues to attract financial flows as well as tourists. Knowing that any spark, which could even arise beyond its borders, could set the country on fire again, Lebanon is being rebuilt again, with the hope that the next conflict will destroy less than what has been built so far.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 3.3 Timeline of the Conflict**

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
1943	Independence of Lebanon; national pact
1948	Independence of Israel: First Arab-Israeli War
1958	First Lebanese Civil War
1969	Cairo Agreement, non-interference of the PLO in Lebanese affairs
1970	Black September: the PLO establishes itself in Beirut

<b>TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>
1975-1990	Second Lebanese Civil War
1976	Syria intervenes in Lebanon in support of the Christians
1978	Coastal attack: Israel intervenes in Lebanon, Operation Litani
	United Nations Security Council resolutions 425 and 426. UNIFIL created and deployed
1982	New incursion by Israel into Lebanon, Operation Peace for Galilee
	Bashir Gemayel assassinated
	Sabra and Shatila massacres
	Deployment of a multi-national force in Lebanon, with troops from the United States, France and Italy
1983	Hezbollah suicide bombings against United States and French forces
1984	The multi-national force withdraws
1989	Taif Agreement
1992	Rafiq Hariri elected Prime Minister: reconstruction of Lebanon
2000	Israelis withdraw from southern Lebanon
2005	Rafiq Hariri assassinated; Cedar Revolution
	Syrian forces withdraw from Lebanon
2006	Two Israeli soldiers kidnapped
	War between Israel and Hezbollah
	United Nations Security Council resolution 1701. UNIFIL reinforcements
	Israelis withdraw; FAL deployed in southern Lebanon
2007	The Lebanese army takes control of the Nahr-el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Tripoli
2008	Hezbollah takes the streets of Beirut; Doha Agreement
2009	Parliamentary elections; Saad Hariri as Prime Minister
2011	Fall of the Hariri government; Najib Mikati as Prime Minister
2010-2012	General Alberto Asarta commands UNIFIL

**Table 3.4 United Nations resolutions relating to the Lebanese conflict**

<b>MAIN UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS ON THE LEBANON CONFLICT</b>	
<b>NUMERATION</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>
270 (1969)	By which the council condemns Israeli bombing of villages in the south of Lebanon
347 (1974)	By which the council condemns violation of Lebanese sovereignty by Israel
425 (1978)	By which the council establishes UNIFIL and requires Israel to cease military action and effect full withdrawal from Lebanese territory
426 (1978)	By which the council approves the mandate for UNIFIL
516 (1982)	By which the council authorises deployment of observers in Beirut
520 (1982)	By which the council condemns Israeli incursion into Beirut in violation of ceasefire agreements.
1223 (1999)	By which the council condemns all acts of violence committed against the force and extends the UNIFIL mandate
1559 (2004)	By which the council requires all foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon, and all militias to disarm and disband
1664 (2005)	By which the council requires and international commission to be established to investigate the assassination of the prime minister, Hariri
1701 (2006)	By which the council demands cessation of hostilities, authorises an increase in UNIFIL troops deployed, up to a maximum of 15,000 soldiers and extend the mission's mandate.
1757 (2007)	By which the council establishes the Special Tribunal for Lebanon on the assassination of Rafiq Hariri

**Table 3.5 Geopolitical Indicators**

<b>TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS</b>		<b>REPÚBLICA LIBANESA</b>
Area		10,400 km <sup>2</sup> (170°)
GDP (PPP) (2011)		62,230M\$ (87°)
Structure. GDP/Active population	Agriculture	-
	Industry	-
		-
Estimated GDP per capita (PPP) (2011)		US\$ 15,700 (78°)
GDP growth rate (2011)		1.5%
% Unemployment		-

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		REPÚBLICA LIBANESA
Trade relations (2009) (Exports):		Emirates 11.6%, South Africa 9.3%, Iraq 7.4%, Saudi Arabia 6.8%, Turkey 6.2%, Syria 6%, Egypt 5.4%, Switzerland 4.9%
Trade relations (Imports):		USA 10.3%, Italy 9.5%, France 8.9%, China 8.3%, Germany 5.2%, Turkey 4.1%
Population (2012)		4,140,289 (126°)
% Urban population (2010)		87%
Age structure	0-14	23%
	15-64	68%
	Over 65	9%
Population growth rate (2012)		0.38 (60°)
Ethnic groups		Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1%  <b>NB:</b> many Christians do not consider themselves to be Arabs.
Religions		Muslim 59.7% (Shiite, Sunni, Druze; Ishmaelite, Alawite), Christians 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melchite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Coptic, Protestant), other 1.3%  <b>NB:</b> there are 17 recognised religious communities
Literacy rate (2003)		87.% (93.1% - 82.2%)
Population below the poverty line (1999)		28%
Refugees		436,154 Palestinians
Displaced persons		76,000
GINI index (2009)		0.37% (est.
Military spending. % GDP. (2005)		3.1%



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## CHAPTER IV

# SYRIA: SLIDING TOWARDS CHAOS

*Mario A. Laborie Iglesias*

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this chapter is to present the various factors of the conflict currently affecting Syria in order to understand its current situation, its possible development and the implications for regional stability. Owing to its central position in the Middle East and the importance of the interests involved, it is undeniable that the future of the region will be defined by the outcome of the Syrian revolution.

### **Keywords**

Syria, Middle East, al-Assad, conflict.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Eighteen months after the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, civil war became generalised, the level of violence increased, atrocities became commonplace, and the humanitarian crisis worsened, with thousands of refugees seeking asylum in neighbouring countries, involving an element of instability for them.

The unjustified excessive use of force by the security forces of Bashar al-Assad's regime is responded to, with increasing determination, by a once peaceful opposition that now also sees violence as the only way to achieve its political goals. Furthermore, the growing presence of Jihadists arriving from abroad to join the fight against AlAssad, bringing their terrorist tactics with them, is causing an increase in the number of fatalities.

Despite growing international pressure on the Syrian regime, a quick solution to the conflict does not seem likely. The result is a spiral of violence that makes it difficult to predict the future awaiting not only the Syrian population but also the afflicted Middle East as a whole.

The aim of this chapter is to present the various factors of the Syrian conflict in order to understand its current situation, its possible development and its implications for regional stability. This is a complex analysis, due to the country's religious, ethnic, economic and domestic policy considerations, added to the underground struggle between the various players in the region. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, the U.S. and Russia, to name but a few, are playing a dangerous geopolitical game using Syria as their board. Owing to its central position in the Middle East and the importance of the interests involved, it is undeniable that the future of the region will be defined by the outcome of the Syrian revolution.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ The Bases of the Syrian Regime

For over four decades, the regime established by the al-Assad family has shown a remarkable ability to maintain political stability in Syria. The main legacy of Hafez Al-Assad, father of the current president, was undoubtedly ending the political intrigues and coups and counter-coups that had dominated the country's history since its independence. This was made possible by his ability to attract support from a variety of sectors of society that are now the pillars on which the regime stands.

## ■ The Baath Party

The Baath party is the first of these pillars. In Syria, the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (the Arabic word ‘Baath’ means ‘renaissance’) came to power in 1963 following an earlier period characterised by constant power struggles. Originally, the ideology of the Baath party, which was active in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East, was a combination of pan-Arabism, secularism and socialism, finding its greatest support among middle-class intellectuals and religious minorities. On the other hand, the Syrian Sunni business elite, which in recent decades has benefited from liberalising economic reforms and generous tax incentives, has also been a traditional supporter of the Baath party.

Figure 4.1



It is currently estimated that over two million Syrians are affiliated to this party, now actually a mere instrument of the regime for the implementation of its policies. Until its most recent amendment, Syria’s 1973 Constitution gave the Baath party the role of «leader of the nation and society». In addition, it still controls the so-called National Progressive Front, a coalition of 11 parties which share the Baathist principles and which control the country’s Parliament. Amid accusations of lack of credibility, in February 2012 the Syrian government held a referendum which removed precisely the Baath party’s leadership role<sup>(1)</sup>.

## ■ Religious Minorities

In addition to the Baath party, some minorities, Alawites and Christians in particular, are considered essential components for the survival of the Syrian regime. As in other Middle East countries, Syria’s more than 20 million people are ethnically divided; although 90% are Arabs, they coexist with other minorities such as the Armenians, Turks and Kurds. However, a much more significant divide than ethnicity is the sectarian divide. Along with the Sunni Muslim majority, a religion followed by 74% of the population, are other faiths, such as the Alawites (11%), Christians (10%), the Druze (3%) and the Ishmaelites (1.5%).

<sup>(1)</sup> With this modification, other parties besides the Baath party will have the right to nominate candidates for the Presidency, which is limited to a maximum of two terms of seven years each. However, this restriction will come into force from 2014 and is not retrospective, which means that Al Assad, who has already spent 12 years at the helm of the country, could continue for two more terms until 2028.

Before the French colonisation (1920-1946), the Alawites (defenders of Ali), followers of a branch of Shiism, constituted the most disadvantaged religious minority in Syria.

The Alawites appeared in the thirteenth century as an offshoot of the Ishmaelites<sup>(2)</sup>. However, because of their rituals, they are considered to be much closer to Iranian Shiism than other Ishmaelites<sup>(3)</sup>. Disdained as unbelievers for nearly 400 years of Ottoman rule in the region and forced to pay a special tax, the Alawites took refuge in the poor mountains of Western Syria, near the Mediterranean coast. France, as the colonial power of the time, created a protected autonomous territory in the area that survived from 1920 to 1936. With its expansion in the region, the French sponsored the Alawites' incorporation into the Syrian Army, and over time they became the predominant group among officers.

Since the coming into power of Hafez Al-Assad in 1971, the Alawite community has extended its influence through state institutions, allowing it to dominate Syrian politics. In the decisive historical moments, such as the succession to the presidency in 2000, the cohesion of the Alawites has been a decisive factor for the survival of the regime<sup>(4)</sup>. Regardless of the content of the Syrian Constitution, the government's power is in practice concentrated in the president and his direct collaborators, who control the state security apparatus, the armed forces and foreign relations. In all these instances, the Alawites, and more specifically the members of the Qalbiyya tribe to which the Syrian president belongs, are the ones in power. Currently, the Syrian Army's elite forces, which are in charge of leading the main armed repression of opponents, are comprised almost exclusively of Syrian Alawites. The «Shabiha<sup>(5)</sup>», the dreaded pro-government paramilitary group, are also recruited from among the members of this religious minority.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Branch of Shiism whose members recognise only the first seven Shiite imams. The Alawites, on their part, unlike more orthodox Muslims, believe in reincarnation and do not consider Ramadan or the pilgrimage to Mecca to be mandatory. They worship at home or at the tombs of saints, and they lack a clerical hierarchy.

<sup>(3)</sup> Horrie, Chris; Chippindale, Peter. ¿Qué es el Islám? (What Is Islam?) Alianza Editorial. Revised First Edition. Madrid 2005. Pg. 223.

<sup>(4)</sup> «Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges». International Crisis Group. Middle East Report No. 24. 11/02/2004. Pg. 2. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/syria/024-syria-under-bashar-2-domestic-policy-challenges.aspx> Date of query 28/07/2012

<sup>(5)</sup> This term may be derived from the Arabic word for «ghost» («shabh»). According to a UN report, the Syrian government forces and the «Shabiha» are responsible for the May 2012 massacre in the town of Hula, where one hundred civilians, half of them women and children, were killed. Rtv.es «Un informe de la ONU acusa oficialmente al régimen sirio y los 'shabiha' de la matanza de Hula». 15/08/2012 Available at <http://www.rtv.es/noticias/20120815/informe-onu-acusa-oficialmente-regimen-sirio-shabiha-matanza-hula/557166.shtml> Date of query 30/08/2012

While acknowledging the Alawites' dominant role, most of the Syrian Christians have also traditionally supported al-Assad. This support is based on their distrust of the Sunni majority, with the belief that a secular regime such as the Baath party is a guarantee against any fundamentalist excesses. In view of the situation facing Christians in Egypt and Iraq<sup>(6)</sup>, for example, these concerns do not seem outlandish. Last January, Ignatius IV, Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, stated without hesitation that «There isn't a president like Bashar in the whole of the Arab world. A different future offers us no guarantees; that's why we are happy with this government»<sup>(7)</sup>. Likewise in neighbouring Lebanon, leading figures of the Christian community, including the Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai, have declared themselves supporters of al-Assad.

The Druze<sup>(8)</sup> also constitute a significant minority in Syria and Lebanon. The Druze, concentrated mainly in the mountains of southern Syria, had, under a French mandate and for a period of four years, a nominally independent state. The Druze have maintained an equidistant role in the riots. Despite the fact that al-Assad has favoured them over the years, Druze groups have joined the opponents' demonstrations. From neighbouring Lebanon, Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Lebanese Druze community, has urged his fellow Syrian Druze to join the fight against al-Assad<sup>(9)</sup>. However, other Lebanese Druze clerics have visited Syria and made anti-riot statements, calling for dialogue between the parties<sup>(10)</sup>.

### ■ The Start of the Uprising

Bashar al-Assad's arrival to the presidency in July 2000 was received with the hope that a young leader educated in the West would be able to liberalise the Syrian economy and political system. In reality, the taking of power had

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<sup>(6)</sup> Throughout 2011, the Coptic Christians, 10% of the Egyptian population, have been the victims of various attacks. The most serious of these occurred on 9th October, when at least 25 people died and 272 were injured following clashes between the Egyptian armed forces and Christians protesting the burning of a Coptic church in southern Egypt. In Iraq, widespread violence and marginalisation, compounded by the lack of religious freedom and poverty, have led to a mass exodus of the Iraqi Christian community, which has fallen from one million to 500,000 followers in the past 10 years.

<sup>(7)</sup> Ayestaran, Mikel. «Los cristianos no tenemos miedo». ABC. 29/01/2012. Available at <http://www.abc.es/20120129/internacional/abcp-cristianos-tenemos-miedo-20120129.html> Date of query 19/08/2012.

<sup>(8)</sup> The Druze practise a largely secret religion often described as a branch of Ishmaelite Islam, but many Muslims do not recognise them as such due to their theological heterodoxy.

<sup>(9)</sup> Sands, Phil. «Syria's Druze community: A silent minority in no rush to take sides». The National. 22/02/2012. Available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/syrias-druze-community-a-silent-minority-in-no-rush-to-take-sides> Date of query 19/02/2012

<sup>(10)</sup> Olmert, Josef. «Sectarianism and the Uprising in Syria: The Case of the Druze». Huffington Post. 25/03/2012. Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-josef-olmert/syria-druze\\_b\\_1378165.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-josef-olmert/syria-druze_b_1378165.html) Date of query 25/08/2012.

been carefully planned by the elder Hafez Al-Assad, who ensured that the «old guard» would continue to support his heir<sup>(11)</sup>.

During the early years of government, al-Assad made some economic reforms such as the liberalisation of the financial sector, the creation of a stock market and the reduction of some import taxes. However, the fight against corruption, the liberalisation of certain monopolies controlled by families close to the regime, and capital flight, among other issues, were soon forgotten. In addition, the expectations of democratisation were dashed as early as 2001 when, in response to timid requests for opening, the regime reacted by arresting some critics and closing the discussions on the political reform of the country.

At the same time, from a regional point of view, during those years many Arabs were watching the Syrian regime as a major supporter of the resistance movements against Israel in Lebanon and Palestine. Owing to its undisguised support for Hezbollah and Hamas, it was seen as one of the champions of the anti-Zionist cause<sup>(12)</sup>.

The apparent political tranquillity of the country blew up in March 2011. The uprising in other Arab and North African countries demanding social improvements and individual respect influenced some sectors of Syrian society, and peaceful demonstrations started to take place in a number of Syrian cities. The protests were answered by the security apparatus, initially with anti-riot measures, but later more intensively with firearms.

Al-Assad at all times refused to hold peaceful negotiations with opponents or to implement the reforms requested. Although the state of emergency that had prevailed in the country since 1963 was lifted on 19th April 2011, it has been replaced by an equally restrictive anti-terrorism law.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ Opposition to the Regime

In general terms, two features can be used to define today's opposition to the Syrian regime: the ideological fragmentation of the various groups that comprise it, and its predominantly Sunni composition.

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<sup>(11)</sup> It is worth clarifying that, until the recent reform of the Syrian Constitution, the president was not an elected position but one that was «accepted» by the people through a referendum in which they voted «yes or no» to the figure chosen by Baath party.

<sup>(12)</sup> Laborie Iglesias, Mario. Oriente Próximo: cambio sin retorno. Included in Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos. 2011. Pg. 80. IIEE. Ministry of Defence. 2011. Available at: [http://www.iiee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama\\_geopolitico\\_2011.pdf](http://www.iiee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2011.pdf).

Since the early years of the al-Assad family in power, the regime's main enemy has been the Islamist opposition led by the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>(13)</sup>. Despite the tight control exercised by the Syrian government, in the late 1970s the «Brotherhood» became a threat to the country's stability<sup>(14)</sup>. This Sunni Islamist group which already in those days rejected the secular Baath principles regarded the Alawites as a heretical sect launched an armed insurgency. Baath party members and Alawite officers were murdered, and there were also attempts on the life of the president. The repression was brutal. In 1982 the city of Hama, the main insurgent stronghold, was almost completely destroyed by artillery and tanks. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 30,000 people died in that incident<sup>(15)</sup>. The organisation has been banned in Syria since 1958 and, according to a 1980 law, membership is punishable by death.

Since the Muslim Brotherhood's insurgency was crushed, the regime has succeeded in controlling all political opposition, so that public demonstrations against the al-Assad were greatly reduced until the beginning of the current uprising.

Today, the opposition is very fragmented both organisationally and in relation to the goals to be achieved. A number of different trends coexist in it: moderate Islamists, human rights activists, nationalists and also Jihadists and elements linked to Al-Qaeda. The rivalry to assert leadership in the movement between groups in exile and those who remain in Syria has also characterised the development of the opposition. However, some analysts believe that the opposition groups in exile have little credibility inside the country<sup>(16)</sup>. However, the need for the various opposition groups to unite around an organisation with unified leadership in order to identify spokespeople and common positions for political negotiation is recognised by both the International Community and the Syrians themselves.

At present, two opposing groups compete for political leadership. The Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella organisation for independent activists, secular leaders and intellectuals, is one of these groups. The Muslim Brotherhood is also part of this organisation. Created in Istanbul on 24 August 2011 and now led by Abdulbaset Sieda, the SNC has received financial support from Turkey and the Gulf monarchies. The SNC has rejected all political dialogue with the Syrian regime and has publicly called for foreign military intervention to remove al-Assad.

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<sup>(13)</sup> The «Society of the Muslim Brothers,» considered the first Islamic fundamentalist movement, was founded in 1929 by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt. Over the years, it has gradually spread to other countries. In the 1980s, it was accused of sponsoring subversive fundamentalist agitation in Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania. Syria has been a particularly significant target for the Brotherhood. Horrie and Chippindale, 2005, 140-141.

<sup>(14)</sup> Ghada Hashem Telhami, «Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism and the Military,» *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 8 Iss. 4; Dec. 2001.

<sup>(15)</sup> «*Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges*». *International Crisis Group. Middle East Report No. 24*. 11/02/2004. Pg. 4 (see note 4).

<sup>(16)</sup> Barnard, Anne; Saad, Hwaida, *New York Times*, 9th May 2012. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/world/middleeast/syria-rebels-though-disparate-are-tenacious-in-crackdown.html?pagewanted=all>. Date of query 19/08/2012.



The National Coordination Committee (NCC), founded in September 2011, is the second of the two most significant opposition groups. Led by veteran opponent Hussein Abdul Azim, it brings together 13 Syrian left-wing parties, three of them Kurdish, as well as independent activists. Unlike the SNC, the NCC has called for dialogue with the government, in the belief that overthrowing al-Assad would lead the country to chaos. For this reason, it has spoken against any kind of foreign military intervention. In any case, on 31 December 2011 the two groups signed a unity agreement against the government<sup>(17)</sup>.

On the other hand, on the field itself, many volunteer fighters have organised themselves into militia and nominally claim to be loyal to the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA, which was created in August 2011, is run by Riyad al-Asaad, a former Air Force colonel, and is comprised of an estimated 15,000 troops, many of them defectors from the Syrian regular army. However, it is unclear whether the FSA commanders are able to unify the action of their many and very disparate local units. Moreover, better organised armed groups have appeared in recent months and adopting a Jihad-based agenda, allowing them to obtain financing from abroad and have the support of Al-Qaeda members<sup>(18)</sup>. These groups reject the FSA.

### ■ A Sectarian and Asymmetric Conflict

Syria is currently in the midst of a civil conflict in which the al-Assad regime seems willing to continue using military force until it either crushes the revolt or it is defeated. Over the last few months, the armed rebellion has spread through the Sunni majority areas. However, despite the external support received, the imbalance of power is still overwhelming.

The consequences are unfortunately nothing new compared to other previous civil conflicts: bombed neighbourhoods, thousands of civilians killed or wounded, and hundreds of thousands of refugees seeking refuge abroad. In the country's major cities, the fighting has overwhelmed the state institutions to the point of creating lawless zones in which civilians' living conditions have become unbearable. On 16 July, the International Committee of the Red Cross said that the fighting in Syria could be defined as «a non-international armed conflict.» This designation extends the categories for which parties can be tried for war crimes under international humanitarian law.

The conflict in Syria is shaped according to the sectarian division of the population, pitting regular and irregular government forces against irregular fighters, most of them Sunnis.

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<sup>(17)</sup> «Guide to the Syrian opposition». BBC News. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218> Date of query 6/08/12012.

<sup>(18)</sup> The New York Times. Topics: Syria. Available at: <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html?8qa> Date of query 6/08/2012

The Republican Guard and the 4th Mechanised Division, comprised of and commanded almost entirely by Alawites, carry out most of the repression. Their 50,000 troops, well trained and armed with Russian materials, constitute a formidable military force. The loyalty of the Air Force, the intelligence apparatus, and the Mukhabarat, the Syrian secret police, also led by Alawites, seems for the moment out of the question. With these resources, if foreign powers had not supplied weapons to the rebels, the uprising would certainly have been crushed a long time ago.

Given the lack of confidence in the Sunnis comprising the regular Army units, al-Assad's generals redeploy the elite units from one rebel zone to another, involving a considerable fighting and logistic effort that may prove to be unsustainable in the long run. Hence the importance of supplies from abroad in the form of ammunition and spare parts.

The use of small groups of snipers is another tactic employed by al-Assad's forces. They station themselves in strategic locations and harass the rebels while at the same time causing casualties among civilians, something which is certainly a war crime under international humanitarian law.

The possession of chemical and biological arsenals and the fear that they could be used against the rebel fighters if the al-Assad regime begins to crumble is also a factor to be taken into account in the Syrian conflict. So far, the regime has denied this possibility, although it has stated that it could use those same weapons in the event of foreign intervention<sup>(19)</sup>. There is also concern that weapons of this type might fall into the hands of terrorist groups or enter the illicit arms trade<sup>(20)</sup>. Even President Obama himself has stated that the deployment of weapons of mass destruction for use by the Syrian government would lead to immediate US military intervention<sup>(21)</sup>.

The opponents, on their part, are aware that they lack the means to fight openly against the Syrian Army. For this reason, they are repeatedly asking to be provided with heavy weapons from abroad, especially ground-to-air missiles with which to counter al-Assad's airpower<sup>(22)</sup>. Saudi Arabia, together with other Gulf

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<sup>(19)</sup> Dagher, Sam; Norman, Laurence. «Syria Says It Has Chemical Weapons» *The Wall Street Journal*. 24/07/2012. Available at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443437504577544632378473006.html?KEYWORDS=syria+chemical+weapons> Date of query 03/08/2012.

<sup>(20)</sup> Pita, Rene. «Análisis de la amenaza química y biológica de Siria». *IEEE Opinion Document*. 24/04/2012. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2012/DIEEO33-2012\\_AnalisisAmenazaQuimicaBiologicaSiria\\_RenePita.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2012/DIEEO33-2012_AnalisisAmenazaQuimicaBiologicaSiria_RenePita.pdf) Date of query 23/08/2012.

<sup>(21)</sup> Landler, Mark. «Obama Threatens Force Against Syria». *The New York Times*. 20/08/2012. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/world/middleeast/obama-threatens-force-against-syria.html> Date of query 22/08/2012.

<sup>(22)</sup> Gutiérrez, Óscar. «Los rebeldes sirios apuntan al cielo». *El País*. 12/08/2012. Available at: [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/12/actualidad/1344801275\\_339005.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/12/actualidad/1344801275_339005.html). Date of query: 19/08/2012.

monarchies, may be providing financial and material support, including weapons, to the FSA. Turkey too seems to have started supplying FIM-92 Stinger surface-to-air missiles to the rebels<sup>(23)</sup>.

Until they have the necessary weapons, the rebels are using guerrilla and terrorist tactics. The idea is to exhaust the regular army. If the regular army manages to recover an area, the rebellion is quickly reactivated on other fronts<sup>(24)</sup>. Meanwhile, the Syrian opponents themselves recognise that the war is becoming radicalised. As mentioned above, both Syrian Jihadists and Al-Qaeda members arriving from abroad are taking a more prominent role, and their doctrines and fighting methods copied from neighbouring Iraq have already become common in Syria<sup>(25)</sup>.

If, as feared, the conflagration continues over time, one possible scenario could be similar to the Lebanese civil war of the 1980s. Syria could become fragmented into separate regions divided on the basis of their population – Alawite, Sunni, Druze or Kurdish – with cities divided according to sectarian criteria by neighbourhood. This scenario has raised the possibility that the Alawites could be tempted to create their own state, like the one that already existed during the years of French colonial rule after World War I<sup>(26)</sup>. Such fragmentation would have important consequences for long-term stability, not only for Syria but for the region as a whole.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

### ■ International Organisations

- *The United Nations*

The UN Security Council is proving to be a source of disappointment due to its inability to achieve international consensus regarding the Syrian crisis. On 3 August 2011 the Council issued a statement condemning the violence and hu-

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<sup>(23)</sup> «Clinton:Chemical warfare is planned for.Rebels get first anti-air Stingers».DEBKA-file Exclusive Report. 11/08/ 2012. Available at <http://www.debka.com/article/22264/Clinton-Chemical-warfare-is-planned-for-Rebels-get-first-anti-air-Stingers> Date of query 23/08/2012.

<sup>(24)</sup> Cembrero, Ignacio.Interview with General Akil Hashem. «Los rebeldes buscan agotar al Ejército».El País. 03/08/2012. Available at: [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/03/actualidad/1344020424\\_439109.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/03/actualidad/1344020424_439109.html) Date of query: 18/08/2012.

<sup>(25)</sup> For example, on 10thMay 2012, two explosions rocked government buildings in the centre of Damascus, killing dozens of people and leaving behind them images of great cruelty.Video available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM49\\_bMW\\_lg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM49_bMW_lg)

<sup>(26)</sup> Weiniger, Gabriella. «King Abdullah:Assad may seek Alawite enclave».The Jerusalem Post. 08/07/2012. Available at <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=280431>.Date of query 14/08/2012.

man rights violations by the Syrian authorities, but reaffirming its commitment to «the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria»<sup>(27)</sup>.

In September and October 2011, Council members discussed the possibility of issuing a resolution on the Syrian conflict. Among other things, the text condemned the «gross and systematic human rights violations» and contained a warning of possible sanctions if the situation deteriorated. The resolution was rejected, with Russia and China using their veto power. In addition, Brazil, India, Lebanon and South Africa abstained. These countries' disagreement was based on the fact that the resolution did not give priority to political dialogue and instead condemned the Syrian government. They also expressed concern that the 1973 resolution on Libya, which allowed the use of force in that African country and that eventually caused the fall of Gaddafi, might constitute a precedent for Syria<sup>(28)</sup>. Subsequently and for the same reasons, Russia and China have used their veto power in the Security Council to block two other resolutions that sought to impose sanctions on al-Assad's regime<sup>(29)</sup>.

With the Security Council thus hamstrung, on 3 August of this year the UN General Assembly passed a non-binding Saudi-drafted resolution urging the government in Damascus to stop the violence and the flagrant human rights violations and «deploring» the Security Council's failure to agree on measures «to ensure the Syrian authorities' compliance with its decisions»<sup>(30)</sup>.

The General Assembly had previously voiced the Arab League's efforts to open a political dialogue in Syria by adopting resolution A/RES/66/253 of 16th February 2012.<sup>(31)</sup> According to this resolution, on 23rd February the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Secretary-General of the Arab League Nabil Elaraby announced the appointment of Kofi Annan as special joint envoy to Syria with the aim of facilitating a political solution to the conflict. Weeks later, Kofi Annan presented the Security Council with a six-point peace plan that included the ceasing of hostilities, the end of government troop movements toward population centres, and the withdrawal of troops and heavy weapons.

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<sup>(27)</sup> The full statement of the Security Council is available at:

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10352.doc.htm> Date of query 02/08/2012.

<sup>(28)</sup> Bolopion, Philippe. «After Libya, the question: To protect or depose». *Los Angeles Times*. 25/08/2011. Available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/25/opinion/la-oe-bolopion-libya-responsibility-t20110825> Date of query 23/08/2012.

<sup>(29)</sup> Without the endorsement of the UN, the EU and the US have imposed sanctions against Syria, including an embargo on arms and oil sales and the freezing of assets of certain individuals and companies linked to the Al-Assad regime.

<sup>(30)</sup> The resolution, adopted with 133 votes in favour, 12 against and 31 abstentions, has been strongly criticised by Russia and China. Text of the resolution available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/ga11266.doc.htm> Date of query 14/08/2012

<sup>(31)</sup> Resolution available at [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/Syria\\_UNGA\\_A\\_RES\\_66\\_253.pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/Syria_UNGA_A_RES_66_253.pdf) Date of query 08/08/2012.

As part of the plan, in resolution 2043 of 21st April 2012<sup>(32)</sup>, the Security Council approved the creation of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). UNSMIS was established for an initial period of 90 days and was comprised of 300 unarmed military observers and a civilian component with the mandate of monitoring the ceasing of all armed violence «in all its forms» and «by all parties» and of fully implementing the Annan Plan in order to end the conflict.

Contrary to expectations, the parties agreed to the peace plan, although both the government and the opposition subsequently started including conditions and repeatedly violating the terms of the agreement, eventually preventing its implementation. In view of the escalation of violence and the division of the International Community, Kofi Annan submitted his resignation as special envoy in mid-August, and the UN Security Council decided to deem UNSMIS to be concluded on the 19th of that month<sup>(33)</sup>.

However, Ban Ki-moon and Nabil Elaraby have decided not to close the door to a possible negotiated solution to the conflict and have proposed the veteran Algerian diplomat Lajdar Brahimi to replace Kofi Annan as the next mediator in Syria.<sup>(34)</sup> At the time of writing this chapter, it remains to be seen whether the new mediator will manage to give momentum to the negotiations required by this complicated situation.

### ■ The Possible Use of the «Responsibility to Protect» Principle

In view of the situation of serious human rights violations, increased violence against civilians and the apparent exhaustion of political and diplomatic mediation instruments, some voices<sup>(35)</sup> have called for the opportunity to apply to Syria the «Responsibility to Protect» principle (commonly known as «R2P») which holds that, when a sovereign state is unable to prevent atrocities, the International Com-

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<sup>(32)</sup> Resolution available at [http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2043\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2043(2012)). Date of query 19/08/2012.

<sup>(33)</sup> Despite the end of the mission, the UN will leave open a diplomatic office in Damascus to continue monitoring the situation in Syria. «Los observadores dejan Siria «frustrados» por no conseguir un alto el fuego». 19/08/2012. La Vanguardia. Available at: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20120819/54339274235/observadores-siria.html> Date of query 22/08/2012.

<sup>(34)</sup> «Lakhdar Brahimi será el nuevo enviado de la ONU a Siria». El Mundo. 17/08/2012. Available at: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/08/17/internacional/1345221218.html> Date of query 30/08/2012.

<sup>(35)</sup> For example, the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, or the new French president François Hollande, have shown their willingness to carry out such humanitarian intervention. «Hollande n'exclut pas une intervention militaire en Syrie sous mandat de l'ONU». Le Monde. 29/05/2012. Available at [http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/05/29/hollande-n-exclut-pas-une-intervention-militaire-en-syrie-sous-mandat-de-l-onu\\_1709252\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/05/29/hollande-n-exclut-pas-une-intervention-militaire-en-syrie-sous-mandat-de-l-onu_1709252_823448.html) Date of query 25/08/2012.

munity has a moral obligation to act<sup>(36)</sup>. In other words, as in the case in Libya in 2011, the idea would again be to deploy military action to establish safe zones, humanitarian corridors or no-fly zones to enable the protection of civilians.

However, there are important questions as to whether foreign military intervention in Syria, in the heart of the troubled Middle East, would ensure the security of the population or whether it would achieve precisely the opposite.

It is worth noting that Syria does not meet the minimum conditions for the success of a possible military intervention. The first step would be to achieve an unquestionable UN Council resolution to provide international legitimacy to the intervention. But Russia and China have blocked any initiative that could provide a mere possibility of initiating military action and, so far, they do not seem willing to change their minds<sup>(37)</sup>. No doubt the argument that NATO overstepped its mandate in Libya has been an obstacle to the implementation of a similar alternative for the Syrian situation<sup>(38)</sup>. In this case there are also supporters of carrying out the intervention even without Security Council approval<sup>(39)</sup>, as in Kosovo in 1999.

From a purely military point of view, the operation seems extraordinarily complex, for two main reasons. First, it would be difficult to achieve the necessary air superiority given the modern and effective integrated defence system provided by Russia<sup>(40)</sup>. In addition, the mission would involve the deployment of large numbers of ground troops, with the risk this poses to the troops involved. Obviously, military intervention of this kind should have material support from the U. S. But in a presidential election year as the current one with the withdrawal of military forces from the Afghanistan theatre, it is very unlikely that

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<sup>(36)</sup> The «Responsibility to Protect» principle was approved by the United Nations in 2005. It seeks to ensure effective response by the international community to the imminent risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This is a controversial mechanism, as it moves away from the usual methods governing international relations: non-interference in the internal affairs of states, and prohibition on the use of force, except in the cases set out in the United Nations Charter. For an in-depth analysis of this principle, see: Laborie Iglesias, Mario Ángel. «Intervención». Ejército de Tierra Español magazine, issue no.843, June 2011. Pages 6-13.

<sup>(37)</sup> «Lavrov Guarantees 'No External Intervention' in Syria». RiaNovosti. 07/06/2012. Available at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20120607/173904943.html> Date of query 01/09/2012.

<sup>(38)</sup> Laborie Iglesias, Mario. «¿Por qué sería un error intervenir militarmente en Siria?». AteneaDigital.es. 11/05/2012. Available at: [http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/GestionNoticias\\_8566\\_ESP.asp](http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/GestionNoticias_8566_ESP.asp). Date of query 10/08/2012.

<sup>(39)</sup> See, for example: Lévy, Bernard-Henri. «Aviones para Alepo». El País. 15/08/2012. Available at: [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/15/actualidad/1345045132\\_432190.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/15/actualidad/1345045132_432190.html) Date of query 19/08/2012.

<sup>(40)</sup> On 22nd June 2012 the Syrian army's anti-aircraft forces shot down a Turkish fighter plane which had supposedly violated its airspace. «Siria asegura haber derribado un avión turco». El País. 22/06/2012. Available at [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/06/22/actualidad/1340377024\\_664834.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/06/22/actualidad/1340377024_664834.html) Fecha de la consulta 15/08/2012.

the Obama administration, like the other NATO governments, would want to be involved in an adventure with such an unforeseeable outcome.

On the other hand, a military operation against al-Assad would intensify the action of its allies, which means that it would not necessarily result in a change of regime. But even if the collapse of the government was successfully brought about, the likelihood of reaching the desired stability in the country is very remote<sup>(41)</sup>.

### ■ The Geopolitical Game

Ban Ki-moon has called the Syrian conflict a «proxy war, with regional and international players arming one side or the other»<sup>(42)</sup>. With these words, the Secretary-General of the UN made it clear that the Syrian conflict is much more than a civil war, because that strategic board is also the scene for a game for regional hegemony between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but in which others, including the US, Russia, Lebanon and Israel, are also involved.

- *The Allies of the Syrian Regime: Iran and Hezbollah*

Iran and the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah are the closest allies of the Syrian regime, which they unequivocally support. For years, Iran has relied on Syria as its bridge to the Arab world and as a key strategic partner in the fight against Israel. In a recent visit to Damascus, Saïd Jalili, Secretary of the Iran Supreme Council for National Security, said Tehran will not allow the breaking of the «axis of resistance» against Israel, considering that Syria is the key piece<sup>(43)</sup>.

The fall of al-Assad would of course mean a blow to the regime of the ayatollahs and would increase its international isolation. Also, from an internal point of view, it could act as a catalyst for the revival of the pro-democracy protests that the Iranian government has so far managed to suppress<sup>(44)</sup>.

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<sup>(41)</sup> Perhaps the post-Al-Assad scenario would be similar to Iraq after the US invasion of 2003 where, once the regime's security apparatus had disappeared, an ethnic and war based on sectarian criteria broke out, with over 100,000 Iraqi lives lost to date. Six months after the departure of the last US forces, the sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq is still raging. In the summer of 2012, over 200 people were killed in acts of violence in the country. The Iraqi authorities blame the Al-Qaeda «franchise» in the country for the wave of attacks. «Iraqi attacks kill close to 100». The Guardian. 17/08/2012. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/17/iraq-holiday-bombs-kill-93> Date of query 31/08/2012.

<sup>(42)</sup> «Ban says Syria conflict has become proxy war».The Daily Star. 03/08/2012. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Aug-03/183309-ban-says-syria-conflict-has-become-proxy-war.ashx#ixzz240a3cU3C>.Date of query 04/08/2012.

<sup>(43)</sup> «Irán asegura que el régimen de Al-Assad es un socio vital contra Israel».Europapress.es. 07/08/2012. Available at:<http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-iran-asegura-regimen-assad-socio-vital-contra-israel-20120807202640.html> Date of query 10/08/2012.

<sup>(44)</sup> Jahanbegloo, Ramin. «Teherán y la "Primavera árabe"». El País. 6/08/2012. Available at [http://elpais.com/elpais/2012/07/06/opinion/1341596479\\_010136.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2012/07/06/opinion/1341596479_010136.html) Date of query 28/08/2012.

The truth of allegations that members of the Iranian military are training the Syrian forces<sup>(45)</sup>, thereby giving a quantum leap of undeniable importance in their collaboration with al-Assad<sup>(46)</sup>, would therefore not come as a surprise. Therefore, while Iran continues to support the Syrian government, a more or less orderly change of regime can be ruled out, and any solution to the crisis must therefore have Iran's acquiescence. However, with the Persian nuclear program on the international agenda, the Western powers, with the U. S. at the fore, just like the Persian Gulf monarchies, deny any Iranian role in the conflict as a way of weakening their position.

The leader of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, has also reiterated its support for al-Assad<sup>(47)</sup>. For years, Syria has been its main sponsor, allowing the organisation to become a military force of undoubted ability, as shown in the war with Israel in 2006.

Hezbollah's position has serious implications for Lebanon, a country deeply divided by the Syrian conflict since, unlike Nasrallah, a significant portion of the Lebanese population supports the Syrian revolutionaries<sup>(48)</sup>. The war in Syria is exacerbating the armed confrontations and there is a high risk of an escalation of violence in the country<sup>(49)</sup>. It is worth remembering that Hezbollah is also the most powerful political faction in Lebanon, where the government's stability depends on its support.

- *The Arab League and Saudi Arabia*

Contrary to custom, the 22-country League of Arab States is very active on the Syrian issue. In November 2011 it suspended Syria's membership of the organisation in protest at the violent repression of the uprising, it sent an observer

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<sup>(45)</sup> «Pentagon: Iran building, training militia in Syria». CBSNews. 15/08/2012. Available at [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501706\\_162-57493401/pentagon-iran-building-training-militia-in-syria/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501706_162-57493401/pentagon-iran-building-training-militia-in-syria/) Date of query 20/08/2012.

<sup>(46)</sup> In early August, Syrian rebels kidnapped nearly fifty supposed Iranian pilgrims who, according to the rebels, were «Iranian Revolutionary Guards» supporting Al-Assad. Iran has acknowledged that some of the hostages are retired military, while maintaining that they are only Shiite faithful on their pilgrimage to the Sayda Zeinab mosque in the outskirts of Damascus. Davari, Mohammad. 08/08/2012. The Daily Star. «Retired' Revolutionary Guards among Syria hostages: Iran». Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Aug-08/183848-iran-fm-says-some-of-kidnapped-in-syria-are-retired-iranian-revolutionary-guards-iranian-students.ashx#ixzz25CkrbgaE> Date of query 29/08/2012.

<sup>(47)</sup> Dakroub, Hussein. «Nasrallah renews support for Assad». 19/07/2012. The Daily Star. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Jul-19/181129-nasrallah-renews-support-for-assad.ashx#axzz240Z4V3oW> Date of query 30/08/2012.

<sup>(48)</sup> Brahim, Alia. «Syria Street, Lebanon». Aljazeera. 19/04/2012. Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/04/2012416132131379581.html> Date of query 2/08/2012.

<sup>(49)</sup> Espinosa, Javier. «Las milicias retornan al Libano». El Mundo. 21/05/2012 Available at <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/05/21/internacional/1337620540.html> Date of query 25/08/2012.



mission to the country, it has supported the Annan peace plan, and it has called for military intervention to end Assad's regime.

This activity is consistent with the interests of Saudi Arabia, which has openly assumed the leadership of the organisation. The fall of the former Egyptian president Mubarak has caused the Saudi monarchy to reduce its dependence on the U. S. in matters of security and foreign policy. To do so, it has started to acquire a variety of weapon systems in order to strengthen its army<sup>(50)</sup>, but for now and subject to any future events, it does not seem about to embark on a nuclear program<sup>(51)</sup>. It is also using its undoubted financial capabilities to gain influence in the region.

There is nothing new in the sectarian rivalry for regional leadership between Saudis and Iranians<sup>(52)</sup>, a rivalry demonstrated mainly in Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. The crisis in Syria has provided the Saudis with an opportunity to extend that confrontation on the soil of Iran's closest ally.

- *Turkey*

Turkey, a NATO member country, is considered one of the region's main military powers. Since the coming-to-power of the Justice and Development Party, the Turkish government has given its foreign policy «a new political direction in which Turkey's European aspirations have been partially eclipsed by the rediscovery of the potential offered to it by the southern Mediterranean and Central Asia areas».<sup>(53)</sup>

For the current Turkish Prime Minister, the moderate Islamist Recep Tayyip Erdogan, this «new direction» would mean maintaining a more independent position with respect to the West, while strengthening ties with some Muslim

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<sup>(50)</sup> In December 2012 the US reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia for the sale of military equipment worth 30 billion dollars. Spain too has won a contract for the sale to the Arab country of 250 Leopard tanks, manufactured in Spain under a German license. «Venta de 250 carros de combate a Arabia Saudi». *AteneaDigital.es*. 28/05/2012. Available at: [http://www.revistatenea.es/RevistaAtenea/REVISTA/articulos/GestionNoticias\\_8742\\_ESP.asp](http://www.revistatenea.es/RevistaAtenea/REVISTA/articulos/GestionNoticias_8742_ESP.asp) Date of query 23/08/2012.

<sup>(51)</sup> Tomlinson, Hugh. «Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons to counter Iran». *The Australian News*. 11/02/2012. Available at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/saudi-arabia-to-acquire-nuclear-weapons-to-counter-iran/story-fnb64oi6-1226268171576> Date of query 23/08/2012.

<sup>(52)</sup> For Saudi Arabia, the Iranian nuclear programme is a major threat to its security. According to US diplomatic cables leaked by Wikileaks, in 2008 King Abdullah urged the US to «cut the head off the snake», launching attacks to destroy the said Iranian nuclear program. Colvin, Ross. «Cut off head of snake» Saudis told US on Iran». *Reuters*. 29/11/2010. Available at : <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/11/29/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129> Date of query 31/08/2012.

<sup>(53)</sup> Rajmil, Daniel. «Un nuevo equilibrio de poderes en Oriente Próximo». *IEEE Opinion Document*. 40/2012. 16/05/2012. Available at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2012/DIEEEO40-2012\\_Nuevo\\_equilibrioOrienteProximo\\_DRajmil.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2012/DIEEEO40-2012_Nuevo_equilibrioOrienteProximo_DRajmil.pdf) Date of query 30/08/2012.

countries in the region, particularly Egypt. In addition, the hitherto traditional good relations with Israel seem to have come to an end.

In this regard, the popular uprisings have given Turkey the opportunity to strengthen its regional policy. Since they began, Turkey has been seen as the model to be followed by the new regimes. However, since the centuries of Ottoman rule continue to cause rejection in the Middle East, Turkey acts cautiously; hence its rapprochement to Egypt.

At the beginning of the Syrian revolution, Turkey tried to maintain a position of dialogue with the government and the opposition. However, as the months passed, it hardened its position, imposing economic sanctions and an arms embargo, giving shelter to refugees and supporting the rebellion. Erdogan, who seems to have achieved a tactical alliance with Saudi Arabia against Iran as shown in his support of the Muslim Brotherhood, has repeatedly called for the resignation of al-Assad and for the creation of safe zones for civilians, which would imply military intervention, albeit of limited scope.

In any case, the Turks' main concern arising from the Syrian conflict comes from the Kurdish people's potential aspirations for independence. As described in detail in another chapter of this publication, the Syrian conflict and the realignment of power in the Middle East are exacerbating tensions on this issue.

- *Israel*

For Israel, the question is how the revolution in Syria will affect its security once the traditional parameters have ceased to be valid. The aforementioned possibility of Syrian chemical and biological weapons falling into the hands of radical groups opposed to Israel, the fragile stability in the Golan Heights and the destabilisation of Lebanon all certainly provide cause for concern for the Israeli government.

In the case of Lebanon, we cannot rule out the possibility of a cornered Hezbollah, supported by Iran, being tempted to start an escalation of hostilities against Israel in order to accumulate allies. In relation to this, the terrorist attack in Bulgaria on 18 July 2012 which killed seven Israeli tourists could be a dangerous precedent<sup>(54)</sup>.

However, perhaps the most important thing for Israel is considering the impact that the Syrian conflict could have on the Iranian nuclear program. The U. S. and Europe are trying to isolate Iran both economically and diplomatically to

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<sup>(54)</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hezbollah of being behind the terrorist attack. «Netanyahu acusa a Irán del atentado en Bulgaria». La Vanguardia. 18/07/2012. Available at <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20120718/54326471823/netanyahu-acusa-iran-atentado-bulgaria.html> Date of query 23/08/2012.

try to ensure that Tehran is unable to build a nuclear weapon<sup>(55)</sup>. There is no doubt that the conflict in Syria complicates the delicate diplomatic negotiations and makes the regional balance of power even more precarious, at a time when the possibility of Israel carrying out a pre-emptive strike, with or without U. S. support, is dangerously open<sup>(56)</sup>.

- *The United States*

The Americans have supported a political solution to the crisis, but arguing that any agreement should include al-Assad giving up power. From the beginning of the uprising, the U. S. has undertaken numerous initiatives to make the UN Security Council condemn al-Assad's actions although, as mentioned above, it has had little success. Also on the diplomatic front, the U. S. government is one of the main forces behind the «Friends of Syria» group of countries, which brings together more than 100 countries and international organisations with the aim of achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict.

On the other hand, it seems unquestionable that the U. S. is providing financial support to the Syrian opposition as well as the cooperation of its intelligence services and the provision of non-lethal equipment<sup>(57)</sup>.

The concerns of Americans in Syria focus mainly on three issues. Firstly, the possibility that the disorder and chaos will enable AlQaeda to threaten U. S. interests or those of its allies; secondly, the custody of the arsenals of weapons of mass destruction and the possibility that they could reach the hands of radical Islamist groups; and, thirdly, the possible impact of the conflict on Israel, traditionally a strategic ally of the U. S. On this last point, Washington is watching with clear concern the implications that Iran's nuclear programme could have on the stability of the region.

- *Russia*

Russia, with the support of China, still rejects foreign military intervention similar to last year's intervention in Libya. For now, it is still covering the Syri-

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<sup>(55)</sup> A recent report by the International Agency for Atomic Energy, distributed only to the States, said that, despite sanctions and the threat of an Israeli military attack, Iran continues with its nuclear programme and has increased its stocks of uranium enriched to 20%. Spillius, Alex. «UN report to detail how Iran continues nuclear programme». The Telegraph. 29/08/2012. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9506707/UN-report-to-detail-how-iran-continues-nuclear-programme.html> Date of query 30/08/2012.

<sup>(56)</sup> Rudoren, Jodi and Sanger, David E. «Report on Iran Nuclear Work Puts Israel in a Box». The New York Times. 30/08/2012. Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/31/world/middleeast/report-on-iran-nuclear-work-puts-israel-in-a-box.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/31/world/middleeast/report-on-iran-nuclear-work-puts-israel-in-a-box.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) Date of query 31/08/2012.

<sup>(57)</sup> Newton-Small, Jay. «Hillary's Little Startup: How the US is Using Technology to Aid Syria's Rebels.» Time.com, 13/06/2012. Available at <http://world.time.com/2012/06/13/hillarys-little-startup-how-the-u-s-is-using-technology-to-aid-syrias-rebels/> Date of query 25/06/2012.

an government from a diplomatic point of view and supplying weapons and essential spare parts to enable the regime to continue the fight. For Moscow, the fall of al-Assad, an ally and important trading partner, could further decrease its influence in the Middle East. We can be assured that any new government will review its relations with Russia, which – one must not forget – has in the Syrian port of Tartus its only naval base abroad.

Moscow asserts that it maintains a position of neutrality in the conflict, but the facts seem to indicate something very different, as Russian military advisers are providing technical assistance to the Syrian Army<sup>(58)</sup>. In spite of this, Russia could accept a solution that involves al-Assad giving up power while maintaining some continuity. Moscow's priority seems to be less defending the current Syrian leadership than preserving the Syrian armed forces and state apparatus. In short, Russia's strategic and commercial interests are sufficiently large to try to prevent the complete collapse of the Syrian regime.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

It is more than possible that, without foreign interference, al-Assad could already have put an end to the revolt, as his father and former president did in the 1980s. However, the increasing international polarisation in support of the various parties to the conflict shows a very different scenario.

The conflict, defined according to the sectarian division of the Syrian population, has blown up the social and political balance that sustained the Al Assad family. Now it is no longer just the regime but the powerful Alawite community, other religious minorities and the Sunni collaborators who are fighting for their survival. The Syrian Christians and Alawites fear that, if the Sunnis rise to power, this will lead to a wave of reprisals for the years of support to al-Assad, and they therefore continue to seamlessly second the regime. As the level of violence increases and the conflict becomes more radicalised, the Alawite population's cohesion and will to fight will become stronger. Furthermore, as happened in the past in Bosnia or Kosovo, for example, the confrontation will lead to the sectarian cleansing of the population with different religious beliefs.

In an effort coordinated partly by the United States and paid for by the Arab States of the Gulf, the Syrian opposition is beginning to receive more and better weapons. In addition, as the war becomes more radicalised, the loyalty of Sunni-majority units is compromised. All this will allow the opposition, in time, to continue to gain strength while the regime loses its ability to control the entire territory. But even if the regime survives for some time, it is quite clear that it will be impossible for it to go back to pre-March 2011 conditions.

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<sup>(58)</sup> «Russian military advisers have not left Syria – Gen.Makarov». *Interfax.com*. 28/08/2012. Available at <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?pg=2&id=356864> Date of query 31/08/2012.

At the same time, the Syrian crisis is producing profound changes in the region, altering the balance of power between the powers with interests in the Middle East. The clash of vital interests explains the rapid internationalisation of the Syrian conflict and the reason why, at present, a negotiated departure by al-Assad or his forceful overthrow seem highly unlikely scenarios.

As a result, Syria is heading for a long war that will bring about very significant international implications, and the risk of a slide into internal chaos and regional instability emerges as a reality. In this context, the consequences of a possible Israeli military action, with or without U.S. support, against Iran's nuclear facilities are unpredictable.

## CHAPTER V

# TURKISH KURDISTAN: INTERMINABLE CONFLICT IN A STRIFE-TORN REGION

*Francisco J. Ruiz González*

### **ABSTRACT**

The conflict in Turkish Kurdistan has deep historical roots and has caused over 30,000 deaths since the start of the violent campaign carried out by the «Kurdistan Workers' Party» against the government of Ankara in 1984. In addition, the presence of significant Kurdish minorities in other states of the shaken Middle East is another important factor, as any solution to the conflict must take into account the overall picture of regional security.

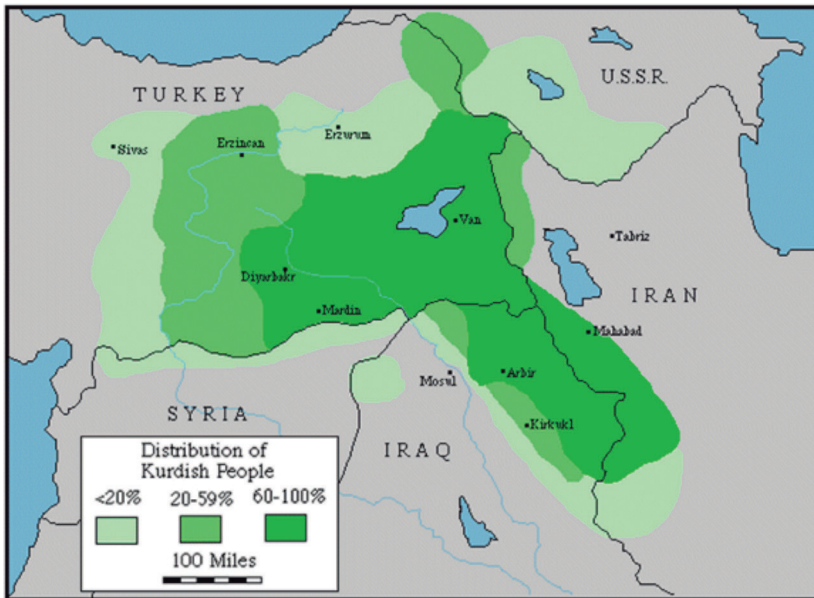
### **Keywords:**

Turkey, Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Kurdistan Workers' Party.

## ■ INTRODUCTION. KURDISTAN IN HISTORY

Kurdistan («*land of the Kurds*») is a vast region of the Middle East with undefined geographical boundaries that are matched to the areas where the Kurds comprise the majority of the population (see Figure 1). It is often referred to as the greatest nation in the world without its own State. It consists of a plateau and high mountain area spanning south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, Western Iran and northern Iraq, adding up to about 390,000 km<sup>2</sup>. There are currently about 30 million Kurds, 16 million of whom live in Turkey, seven million in Iran, four and a half million in Iraq, and one and a half million in Syria, with other minorities in countries such as Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**Figure 5.1. Geographical distribution of the areas where Kurds comprise the majority of the population**



The historical origin of the Kurdish people is a relative mystery, although several studies estimate their arrival in the region around the 10th century BC. They are Indo-European both ethnically and with regard to language (like the Armenians and Iranians), which sets them apart from their neighbours the Turks and Azeri (of Turkmen-Altaic origin) and the Arabs. They are linked to the peak period of the Medes empire, from its unification in the 8th century BC under pressure from the Assyrians, to the 6th century BC., when it fell under the power of the Emperor Cyrus and became part of the great Achaemenid Persian Empire.

The area was ruled successively by the Persian, Macedonian, Seleucid, Armenian, Roman, Byzantine and Sassanid empires. As from the 7th century it fell under the control of the successive Umayyad and Abbasid Arab caliphates, a very important fact since that is when the Kurds adopted Islam, mostly from the Shafi'i Sunni school<sup>(1)</sup>. It is worth noting that in all these historical periods Kurds played an important role but more at the level of small clans and divisions than as a nation, as they have never enjoyed real political unity<sup>(2)</sup>.

The 11th century beheld the entry into the Middle East of the Seljuk Turks, who came from the Altai in Western Siberia and who in 1071 consolidated their domination of the peninsula of Anatolia after defeating the Byzantines at Manzikert. Following new invasions of Central Asian peoples, in 1514 the Kurdish areas were definitively divided between the Turkish Ottoman Empire to the west and the Persian Safavid empire to the east. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds enjoyed relative autonomy, which was interrupted by the «Young Turks Revolution» of 1908. The nationalist nature of this movement resulted in the gradual repression of minorities such as the Kurdish, Armenian and Greek people.

The Ottoman defeat in World War I forced the Sultan to sign the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, which dismembered the empire and provided for the creation of an independent Kurdish state (see Figure 2). However, the said national and secular sectors, led by Mustafa Kemal «Ataturk», started the war of independence against the occupying powers, until the achievement in 1923 of the annulment of the Treaty of Sèvres and its replacement by the Treaty of Lausanne, which established the borders of modern-day Turkey and annulled the plan for an independent Kurdistan<sup>(3)</sup>.

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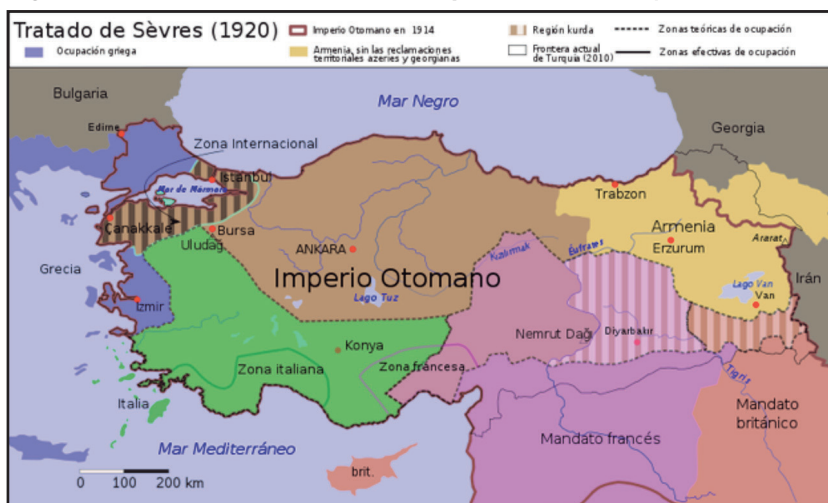
<sup>(1)</sup> The Arab conquest of Kurdistan was a bloody affair, with around 200,000 deaths in the cities of Diyarbakir and Shahrzur alone. Another important consequence was that the Kurds who had converted to Islam destroyed all vestiges of their culture before the invasion, fearing retribution for being *bad Muslims*, which has prompted the aforementioned uncertainty regarding their historical origins. KALEYISaeed, *The Kurdish conflict: Aspirations for statehood within the spirals of international relations in the 21st century*, available at <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc060910SK.html>. [Query: 24th July 2012].

<sup>(2)</sup> This lack of national conscience still exists in rural areas. As stated by Meho «*the Kurds in the mountain areas are loyal first to the immediate family clan – the cornerstone of the social system – and then to the tribe, the largest group entity in traditional Kurdish society. The cohesion of the Kurdish tribe is in turn based on a mixture of blood ties associated with strong religious loyalties, particularly to the sheikhs, the local leaders of the religious brotherhoods*». MEHOLokman I., *The Kurds and Kurdistan: a selected and annotated bibliography*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1997, 2.

<sup>(3)</sup> This independent Kurdistan was promoted by US President Woodrow Wilson as one of his *fourteen points* which were to establish a new world order after World War I. According to this, the non-Turkish nationalities of the empire should have a chance to develop independently without interference. See *President Wilson fourteen points*, available at [http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President\\_Wilson's\\_Fourteen\\_Points](http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson's_Fourteen_Points). [Query: 23rd July 2012]. Paradoxically, the Kurds supported «Ataturk» in his fight against the Armenians, as the «Treaty of Sèvres» had allocated to the latter disputed areas such as the city of Van and the region around the lake of the same name (see Figure 2).



**Figure 5.2: Distribution of the Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Sèvres (1920)**



The Kurds were therefore mainly distributed among the four above mentioned states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria), in which they would be at the centre of a number of uprisings throughout the 20th century. Leaving aside the case of Turkish Kurdistan, the conflict forming the subject matter of this chapter, the main events were:

- In Iran, in 1946 the Iraqi Mustafa Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) proclaimed the «Republic of Mahabad», which was suppressed by the Shah Reza Pahlavi a year later (Barzani fled to the Soviet Union and returned to Iraq in 1958), and in 1979, coinciding with Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution, there was a rebellion against the new regime, leading Tehran to declare a holy war against the Kurds.
- In Iraq, Barzani's KDP began a separatist revolt in 1961, which was finally defeated in 1975; in 1988 there was a slaughter of Kurds when Saddam Hussein's regime used chemical weapons against the civilian population<sup>(4)</sup>; and in 1991 a new Kurdish revolt after the first Gulf War was crushed by Baghdad. Furthermore, in the 1990s there was a Kurdish civil war in Iraqi Kurdistan between the KDP and its most left-wing section, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).
- In Syria, the regime of the single party, the *Baath* («*Renaissance*») party established in 1963, promoted a forced Arabisation of the Kurdish minority, and

<sup>(4)</sup> According to data from *Human Rights Watch*, during the Anfal campaign, the Iraqi government killed between 50,000 and 100,000 Kurdish civilians, including women and children, destroyed about 4,000 towns and villages (out of a total of 4655), and between April 1987 and August 1988 bombed 250 towns and villages with chemical weapons. A total of 1754 schools, 270 hospitals, 2450 mosques and 27 churches were destroyed in retaliation for the Kurdish support given to Iran during the war between the two countries. See ROY Sonia, «The Kurdish Issue», *Foreign Policy Journal*, 22nd April 2011, available at <http://www.foreign-policyjournal.com/2011/04/22/the-kurdish-issue/0/>. [Query: 1st September 2012].

the possibility of their expulsion from north-Western Aleppo was considered (under the *Arab belt* project). However, in 1972 the new president Hafez Al-Assad cancelled those plans, and Syria can now be considered to be the state in which the rights of the Kurds have been relatively most respected.

It is essential to highlight this issue of the division of traditional Kurdistan, because it affects the study of both the conflict and the influence of external players in it. To start with, eastern Kurdistan has invariably remained in the hands of Persia / Iran from the above mentioned distribution in the 16th century, and this was ratified in the Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne. However, the part of Kurdistan that was part of the Ottoman Empire was arbitrarily divided by the Western powers which had emerged victorious from World War I, as a result of the drawing of borders of the current Arab states that has caused so many problems<sup>(5)</sup>.

The independent Kurdistan envisaged in Sèvres in 1920 therefore did not include either the principality of Mosul, which was assigned to the British protectorate of Iraq, or the province of Hasaka, which was left in the French protectorate in Syria. An important factor in this distribution was no doubt the discovery of large oil deposits in the area, from which all the occupying powers sought to benefit.

The division was perpetuated in Lausanne in 1923, and the intended independent Kurdistan was put under the control of Ankara, with the aggravating circumstance that Articles 38 to 44 of the new Treaty established the rights of the «*non-Muslim minorities*» which Turkey undertook to respect, but that definition excluded the Kurds, who therefore lost their status as a minority within the state and became euphemistically known as the *Mountain Turks*<sup>(6)</sup>.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The 1980s were a particularly troubled time for Turkey. Under the block and ideological confrontation of the Cold War, the country saw a wave of violence between extreme right-wing forces (such as the «Grey Wolves») and the far left (such as the organisation «Revolutionary Path»), a situation which culmi-

<sup>(5)</sup> «*The collapse of the Ottoman empire brought about the creation of states with arbitrary boundaries, producing the geographic distribution of peoples into separate entities, and the union of other communities without any kind of cohesion or relationship of solidarity*». SUAREZ COLLADO Ángela, «¿Está cerrado el mapa de Oriente Medio? Objetivos y dificultades del Kurdistan iraquí y su relación con Turquía», *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*, No. 1, January – April 2007, 10, available at [http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/TEIM/Revista/reim1/reim\\_1\\_pdf/Angela\\_Suarez\\_artpdf.pdf](http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/TEIM/Revista/reim1/reim_1_pdf/Angela_Suarez_artpdf.pdf). [Query: 2nd September 2012]. Suárez Collado's work includes a very comprehensive Bibliography on the conflict in Kurdistan and Iraq's influence in it.

<sup>(6)</sup> See *Lausanne Peace Treaty*, available at [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i\\_political-clauses.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_political-clauses.en.mfa). [Query: 24th July 2012].

nated in a coup in 1980 and in the arrival in the presidency of its head, Chief of Staff Kenan Evren. It was in this environment, on 27th November 1978, when Abdullah Öcalan founded the «Kurdistan Workers' Party» (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK), whose ideology was a mixture of Marxism and Kurdish nationalism<sup>(7)</sup>.

The PKK officially began its armed fight against Turkey on 15th August 1984. It was a typical Maoist insurgency campaign, particularly suitable for rural areas, in which both the regular Turkish troops deployed in the area and the Kurds who were seen as collaborators and who, in addition, were extorted in order to finance their activities, were attacked. Violence increased exponentially after the first Gulf War in 1991, and a no-fly zone was established in Iraqi Kurdistan, as the PKK guerrillas<sup>(8)</sup> had established their bases there, and were operating freely from them.

Attempts at political resolution of the conflict by the *kemalist* regime in Ankara did not begin until General Evren, the author of the coup, was replaced in the presidency by Turgut Özal in November 1989. Özal broke the official taboo by beginning to refer to the inhabitants of south-eastern Turkey as Kurds, a denomination which became widespread in the independent media that openly discussed the specific socioeconomic problems of the 11 predominantly Kurdish provinces. In 1991 a law was passed revoking the ban on speaking Kurdish or being in possession of material in that language, although the ban on any governmental use, including education institutions, remained.

The year 1993 could thus have been key to the resolution of the conflict, since in March the PKK officially renounced its goal of an independent Kurdistan, moving to call for a federal-style territorial organisation that recognised the Kurdish situation<sup>(9)</sup>. Öcalan announced a unilateral ceasefire, a move that had been requested by Kurdish civilian leaders to see whether President Özal's promises were sincere. However, he died in April and his successor, the until then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, decided not to challenge the armed forces, which supported the use of force to end the PKK. Hostilities therefore resumed in May, with the difference in relation to the previous period that the rural guerrillas were partly replaced by acts of terrorism in town centres.

1994 marked the beginning of the most intense period of the conflict, when up to 160,000 soldiers and gendarmes were mobilised to fight against the PKK.

<sup>(7)</sup> For the origins of the PKK, see MARCUS Aliza, *Blood and belief. The Kurdish fight for independence*, New York University Press, New York, 2007, 15-88.

<sup>(8)</sup> This chapter uses the term *guerrilla fighters* in reference to PKK militants, as an intermediate term between *terrorists* (the PKK is considered a terrorist organisation by the United States and the EU) and *insurgents* (which would imply recognition of the existence of a legitimate struggle against foreign occupation).

<sup>(9)</sup> This change was significantly influenced by the fact that the PKK had lost its training camps in Iraq, from where it had operated freely since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, following a campaign against it coordinated by Turkey and by the KDP's Iraqi Kurds themselves.

They were joined by about 40,000 militiamen who preserved the safety of the locations *won* for the government's cause. Their opponents were about 15,000 PKK guerrilla fighters, backed by tens of thousands of *occasional* fighters combining armed fighting with their normal lives in Kurdistan. Ankara's counter-insurgency strategy was based on the concentration of population in urban areas, which were easier to defend. For this reason, it forced the evacuation of entire villages that were then burnt to prevent their use by the PKK. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who went to live in the suburbs of the major Turkish cities<sup>(10)</sup>.

At that stage, complaints against the authorities for torture and extrajudicial executions of those suspected of collaborating with the PKK<sup>(11)</sup>, whose guerrillas in turn committed acts of extreme violence against those accused of collaborating with the Turks (especially the mayors of the towns and the teachers who they felt favoured *assimilation*), were frequent. In any case, Ankara's strategy was effective: the situation changed from rural guerrillas controlling much of the territory in 1984-1993 to a PKK which was isolated in the more mountainous areas in 1994-1999 and which resorted to terrorist activity in Turkish cities (and even in the West) against Turkish political and economic interests.

Another strategy for fighting insurgency was the development of the «South-east Anatolia Project», under which Ankara built hundreds of dams and irrigation canals in the head of the Tigris and Euphrates basins. Although the official reason was that it was pursuing socioeconomic development in the area, the fact is that the possibility of reducing the flow to Syria and Iraq served as leverage for controlling the PKK's activities in its territory<sup>(12)</sup>.

## ■ CURRENT SITUATION OF THE CONFLICT

Following the capture of its leader Öcalan in 1999 and the terrorist actions of Al-Qaeda in the United States on 11th September 2001, the PKK greatly dropped its activity level, in practice observing a ceasefire that lasted from 1999 to 2004. With the victory of the «Justice and Development Party» (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), a moderate Islamist party, in the 2002 Turkish legislative elections, a new political era began in the country. Support for the AKP

<sup>(10)</sup> It is estimated that 3,428 Kurdish towns and villages were vacated by this method. For more information on the Turkish policy of forced population movement as part of the fight against the PKK, see *Profile of internal displacement: Turkey*, Global IDP Database of the Norwegian Refugee Council, 7th October 2005, available at [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/A0D784C014878D59802570BA00568E64/\\$file/Turkey%20-October%202005.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/A0D784C014878D59802570BA00568E64/$file/Turkey%20-October%202005.pdf). [Query: 3rd July 2012].

<sup>(11)</sup> See VAN BRUINSEN Martin, «Turkey's death squads», *Middle East Report*, No. 199, spring 1996, 20-23.

<sup>(12)</sup> The Turkish position can be summed up in the words attributed to President Özal, who stated that «We do not tell the Arabs what to do with their oil, so we will not tolerate their telling us what to do with our water».

candidate for Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was widespread in Iraqi Kurdistan, with the people considering that that party would meet their traditional requests for political autonomy and the officialisation of the Kurdish language, as opposed to the repressive position of the *Kemalist* parties which had until then been in power with the support of the armed forces.

One of the AKP's first steps was the adoption, in July 2003, of a «Reintegration Law» for imprisoned former PKK fighters who agreed to give up their armed struggle and collaborate with the law enforcement bodies. In addition, the authorities allowed some forcibly displaced Kurds to return to their villages of origin, provided they signed a document blaming the PKK for their displacement and renouncing all official support for settling back in Kurdistan. In parallel to the EU accession negotiations, Ankara has gradually relaxed its legislation. Examples of this include when, in July 2003, it repealed part of the «Terrorism Act» and authorised programmes in the «*various languages used by Turks in their daily life*» to be broadcast on radio and television.

However, there were no further significant advances in the first two terms of the AKP, and the Kurdish community's discontent has been made clear by the fall in support for Erdogan in the last legislative elections of 12th June 2011, with the election of 35 candidates from the Kurdish «Party of Peace and Democracy» (*Bartış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP)<sup>(13)</sup>. These candidates initially decided not to take their seats, as some of them had been vetoed for alleged ties to the PKK, but in mid-October they returned to Parliament in order to negotiate with the AKP the inclusion of some of the traditional Kurdish claims in the planned constitutional reform<sup>(14)</sup>.

With regard to the PKK, the organisation has been unable (or unwilling) to release itself of either its Marxist-inspired revolutionary ideology or the use of terrorist tactics to achieve its ends. If the former has weighed it down since the end of the Cold War, with the disappearance of the support it could have received from the Soviet bloc, the latter has meant that Turkey could encompass its fight against the PKK within the framework of the «Global War On Terror» (*GWOT*) declared by the US after the 9/11 attacks. If you add this to the capture and life sentencing of Öcalan in 1999, a complex picture for this group unfurls.

However, the PKK still retains significant capacity for action, partly made possible by the persistence of the Iraqi sanctuary from which it can plan its attacks and retreat after carrying them out, despite occasional clashes between Iraqi and Turk-

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<sup>(13)</sup> For more information on political movements in Turkish Kurdistan, see WATTS Nicole F., *Activists in office. Kurdish politics and protests in Turkey*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2010.

<sup>(14)</sup> Apart from the above mentioned recognition of the Kurdish language, the main demand is the removal of Article 66 of the Constitution, drafted by the military in 1982, which defines the country's citizens exclusively as Turks, leaving out the specific identity of Kurds, Armenians, Greeks and Circassians.

ish Kurds. For example, on 18th October 2011 there was a simultaneous attack on several military posts in the south-eastern Turkish province of Hakkari, which borders Iran and Iraq. The raid originated in the latter country, which is also where the attackers fled to after killing 24 soldiers and seriously wounding 18 others.

The government of Ankara reacted quickly, and Prime Minister Erdogan ordered the deployment of 22 battalions (about 10,000 troops) who, with the help of air support, chased the guerrilla fighters beyond the Iraqi border, something that had not happened since 2008.<sup>(15)</sup> Although the central government in Baghdad said that it would collaborate with Turkey, the entry into its territory naturally caused concern for the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous government<sup>(16)</sup>. Since the Kurdish movement in Turkey is far from being a monolithic block, we cannot rule out the possibility that this PKK offensive was intended to thwart the BDP's most moderate sectors' attempts at conciliation and force the release of Öcalan. In fact, the Union of Kurdish Communities (*Koma Ciwakên Kürdistan*, KCK) is increasingly being regarded as the political arm of the PKK, and it is precisely against this organisation that the repressive action from Ankara has focused since June 2010, with over 4,000 persons arrested to date according to Kurdish sources.

With regard to the PKK leader, Öcalan has changed his position in prison and now calls for a political solution that includes the creation of a «Truth and Justice Commission». In March 2005 he drafted the «Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan», in which he proposes a confederation which encompasses the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, governed, without changing the internationally recognised borders, by a threefold legislation: that of those states, EU law, and the Kurds' own laws. The proposal was included in the PKK's ideology in its «Refoundation Congress» in April 2005, and in September 2006 Öcalan called for a new ceasefire and for the opening of peace negotiations with Turkey. However, in May 2010 and in view of the complete lack of progress, he declared the process useless and declared it to be over.

Finally, and to give a clear idea of the magnitude of this conflict, according to official figures provided by the Turkish armed forces, over 32,000 PKK members, 6,482 Turkish soldiers and 5,560 civilians died between 1984 and 2008, although it appears that the number of guerrilla fighters killed was clearly exaggerated<sup>(17)</sup>. The number of currently active PKK guerrilla fighters in the border area between Turkey and Iraq is estimated at 3000 to 5000.

<sup>(15)</sup> These actions can be considered to be backed by the right to self-defence provided in Article 51 of the UN Charter, provided it is shown that Iraq, as a sovereign state, does not have the ability or the will to prevent the PKK's attacks organised in its territory and carried out from neighbouring Turkey.

<sup>(16)</sup> The Iraqi foreign minister declared on the 20th that «*The Iraqi government condemns this terrorist activity of the PKK, and expresses its sympathy with the families of Turkish soldiers*», adding that «*Iraq is committed to working with the Turkish government on security issues in order to prevent a repetition of such actions*».

<sup>(17)</sup> «Turkey: ending the PKK insurgency», *Europe Report No. 213*, International Crisis Group, 20th September 2011, 1, available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/>

## ■ THE ROLE OF OUTSIDE PARTICIPANTS

The conflict in Kurdistan has had, and continues to have, important consequences for global security and the security of the Middle East. When studying the role of outside players, one must distinguish between the following two groups: those with a significant Kurdish minority within their borders (Iraq, Iran, Syria), and those who are outside the area but who have significant interests in it, such as the United States and the European Union. The following table contains the main geopolitical indicators of the first group of states:

**Table 5.1**

<b>TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS</b>	<b>TURKEY</b>	<b>IRAQ</b>	<b>IRAN</b>	<b>SYRIA</b>
Area	783,562 Km <sup>2</sup> (37°)	438,317 km <sup>2</sup> (59°)	1,648,195 km <sup>2</sup> (18°)	185,180 km <sup>2</sup> (89°)
GDP (PPP)	US\$ 1,087,000M (17°)	US\$129,000M (62°)	US\$ 1,003,000M (18)	US\$ 107,600M (69)
Agriculture	25.5%	21.6%	25%	17%
Industry	26.2%	18.7%	31%	16%
Services	48,4%	59.8%	45%	67%
GDP per capita	US\$ 14,700 (86°)	US\$ 3,900 (162°)	US\$ 13,200 (94°)	US\$ 5,100 (151°)
GDP growth rate	8.5% (15°)	9.9% (7°)	2% (149°)	-2% (209°)
% Unemployment	9.8% (108°)	15% (147°)	15.3% (151°)	12.3% (130°)
Trade relations(Exports):	Germany 10.3%, Iraq 6.2%, United Kingdom 6%	USA 23.3%, India 19.2%, China 14%	China 21%, India 9.3%, Japan 8.9%	Iraq 38.8%, Italy 7.9%, Germany 7.1%
Trade relations (Imports):	Russia 9.9%, Germany 9.5%, China 9%	Turkey 25%, Syria 18.1%, China 11.5%	UAE 30.6%, China 17.2%, South Korea 8.4%	Saudi Arabia 14.5%, China 10.1%, UAE 7.1%
Population	79,749,000 (17°)	31,129,000 (39°)	78,868,00 (18°)	22,530,000 (53°)
% Urban population	70% (1.7% annual increase)	66% (2.6% annual increase)	71% (1.9% annual increase)	56% (2.5% annual increase)
Population growth rate	1.197% (98°)	2.35% (33°)	1.25% (93°)	-0,8% (225)

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS	TURKEY	IRAQ	IRAN	SYRIA
Ethnic groups	Turks (70-75%), Kurds (18%), other minorities (7-12%)	Arabs (75-80%), Kurds (15-20%), other minorities (5%)	Persians (61%), Azeris (16%), Kurds (10%), Lurs (6%), Baluchi (2%), Arabs (2%), other minorities (4%)	Arabs (90.3%), Kurds, Armenians and other (9.7%)
Religions	Sunni Muslims (99.8%), Christians and Jews (0.2%)	Muslims (97%) (60-65% Shiite, 32-37% Sunni), Christians and other (3%)	Muslims (98%) (89% Shiite, 9% Sunni), other (2%)	Muslims (90%) (74% Sunni, 16% Alawite and Druze), Christians (10%)
Literacy rate	87,4% (95,3% - 79,6%)	78,2% (86% - 70,6%)	77% (83,5% - 70,4%)	79,6% (86%- 73,6%)
Population below the poverty line	16,9%	25%	18,7%	11,9%
Refugees and IDP	1-1.2 million (from south-west Kurdish region to other parts of the country)	2.4 million in various countries (after the US invasion)	Shelters 900,000 Afghans and 54,000 Iraqis	Shelters 1-1.4 million Iraqis and 500,000 Palestinians
Military spending. % GDP.	5.3% (14°)	8.6% (5°)	2.5% (62°)	5.9% (11)

## ■ Iraq

Iraq is a key external player in the Turkish Kurdistan conflict. In 1991, when Saddam Hussein harshly cracked down on the Kurd uprisings in the north and the Shiite uprisings in the south, the International Community slowed down its assault on Kurdistan with the establishment of a no-fly zone north of the 36th parallel and the approval of UN Security Council Resolution No. 688<sup>(18)</sup>. As a result, the area enjoyed a degree of *de facto* independence from the government in Baghdad, with a «Kurdistan Regional Government» established in the city of Erbil in 1992, in which the KDP and the PUK have struggled for power. In turn, and as already mentioned, Iraqi Kurdistan served as a place of refuge and retreat for PKK guerrillas operating in Turkey, coinciding with the most intense part of the conflict.

<sup>(18)</sup> This Resolution made no mention of the establishment of a no-fly zone, which was established on the basis of a *flexible* interpretation by the US, the UK and France. UN Security Council Resolution No. 688 of 5th April 1991 on Iraq, available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/597/50/IMG/NR059750.pdf?OpenElement>. [Query: 25th July 2012].



This situation was later changed with the US military campaign of 2003. The Turks' refusal to allow their territory to serve as a base for the invasion of Iraq from the north lent greater importance to the Iraqi Kurds' role, since the *peshmergas* («*those who face death*») unambiguously supported the international coalition, whose intervention served them both to defeat the terrorist group *Ansar-al-Islam* (linked to Al-Qaeda and operating in Kurdistan) and to definitively depose Saddam Hussein's Sunni dictatorship and achieve greater self-government.

The Iraqi Kurds have been actively involved in the new Iraqi federal parliamentary republic, and the charismatic PUK leader Jalal Talalabani has been president of Iraq since April 2005, with the position of Prime Minister being held by the Shiite Nuri al-Maliki, of the «*Dawa*», party, since May 2006. The leader of the KDP and old rival of Talalabani Massoud Barzani (son and successor of Mustafa Barzani) has since June 2005 held the presidency of the «Kurdish Autonomous Region», which includes the provinces of Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah, the safest and economically most developed areas of the new Iraq<sup>(19)</sup>.

The country's current situation following the departure of the last American troops in December 2011 is far from stable, which can have important consequences for the Kurdish conflict. On the one hand, it took nine months to form a government after the 2010 legislative elections, and al-Maliki included in the new government the «*Iraqiyya*» platform (the winner by number of seats, led by the secular Shiite Ayad Allawi<sup>(20)</sup>), whose social base is the Sunni-Arab minority. Since then, al-Maliki has been accumulating more power, to the point of ordering the arrest of the country's vice-president, the Sunni Al-Hashmini<sup>(21)</sup>, accusing him of instigating a number of terrorist actions, and has threatened the Sunnis with a bloodbath if they demand greater autonomy for the provinces in which they are the majority (see Figure 3).

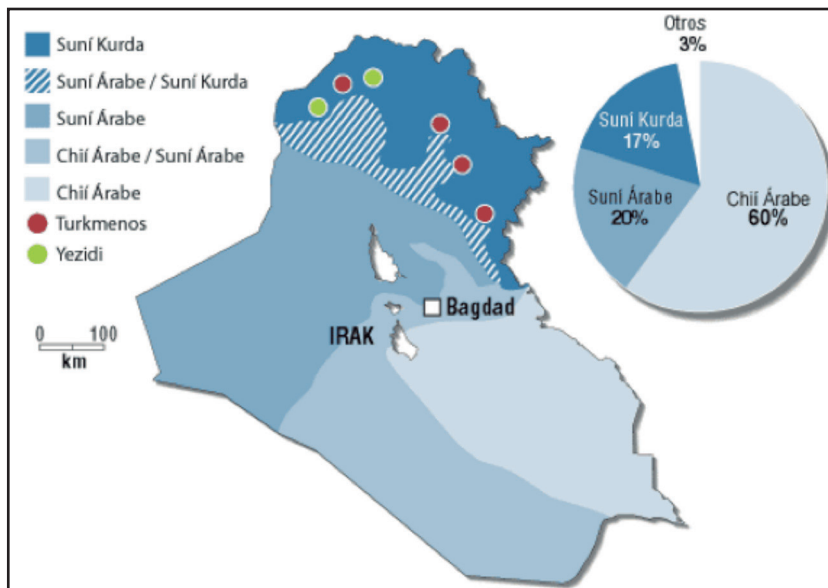
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<sup>(19)</sup> «*After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Kurds have not only established themselves as the strongest and most organised political player in the state, but their situation compared to the rest of the country has made them strengthen their loyalties as well as an increasingly Kurdish and less Iraqi view of themselves*». STANSFIELD Gareth, «The transition to democracy in Iraq. Historical legacies, resurgent identities and reactionary tendencies», in DANCHEV Alex & MACMILLAN John (Ed.), *The Iraq war and democratic policies*, Routledge, London, 2005, 144.

<sup>(20)</sup> The Government's agreement envisaged the creation of a «National Strategic Council» led by Allawi. In August 2011 the Parliament discussed the said Council's missions and composition, but Al-Maliki's unwillingness to compromise prevented their approval, and Allawi has ended up retiring from public life.

<sup>(21)</sup> Al-Hashmini fled and took refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the authorities refuse to surrender him to Al-Maliki's government, once again demonstrating its *de facto* independence. «Retreat from Bagdad», *The Guardian* (15.12.2011), available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/dec/14/iraq-retreat-baghdad-editorial>. [Query: 25th July 2012].

Figure 5-3: Ethnic distribution in Iraq



The Kurds attend this confrontation from a distance, and have begun to exploit their oil resources without Baghdad's involvement<sup>(22)</sup>, but the final status of the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk, not included in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, remains a matter of dispute with the Sunnis. The latest news point to the possibility of a referendum on independence in Iraqi Kurdistan, since Barzani openly called al-Maliki a dictator while asking the US to stop the sale of 36 F-16 fighters to Baghdad for fear that they might in future be used against the Kurds<sup>(23)</sup>.

## Iran

Iran has traditionally opposed the creation within its borders of a distinct Kurdish entity, mainly because it could act as an incentive for claims for greater autonomy from other ethnic minorities (Arabs in the southwest, Azeris in the northeast, Baluch in the southeast, see the percentages in the «Table of Geopolitical Indicators»). The only exception was during the reformist era of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, when the formation of a Kurdish parliamentary

<sup>(22)</sup> In November the autonomous Kurdish government signed a contract directly with the US oil company Exxon. Prime Minister Al-Maliki's reaction was to declare the agreements illegal and threaten to suspend Exxon's operations in the rest of the country. It is worth noting that the Kurds need the centralised pipeline system to export their oil, which is a factor against them, but that by law they control 17% of the national budget. «The Kurds' Opportunity», *The Wall Street Journal*, (12/1/2012), available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204124204577154583952347296.html>. [Query: 25th July 2012].

<sup>(23)</sup> «Kurdistán podría votar su independencia de Irak en septiembre», *ABC* (26/4/2012), available at <http://www.abc.es/20120427/internacional/abci-kurdos-independencia-201204261800.html>. [Query: 1st September 2012].

group in Tehran was authorised. Also noteworthy is the fact that the Iranian Shiite Kurds, a minority within their own Sunni community, are indeed fully integrated in the regime of the ayatollahs<sup>(24)</sup>.

For this reason, there has in the past been some coordination between Turkey and Iran in the fight against Kurdish radicals. Tehran faces the challenge of its local branch of the PKK, the so-called «Party of Free Life in Kurdistan» (*Partiya Jiyana Azada Kurdistanê*, PJAK), whose stated goal is the independence of Iranian Kurdistan and its union with the other Kurdish-majority regions, and the PKK has carried out armed attacks against economic interests common to Iran and Turkey, such as the August 2011 bombings on the pipeline that links the two countries. Iran carries out frequent military attacks against PJAK bases in the Qandil mountains, near the border with Turkey, such as the ones in summer 2011.

### ■ Syria

In Syria, after decades of discriminatory policies, in May 2011 President Bashar al-Assad gave the Kurds Syrian citizenship, something of which they had previously been deprived, and seems to have returned to the PKK the support of which his father Hafez had deprived it in 1998 (pressured by Turkey due to water resources), in revenge for Ankara's support of the uprisings against the government in Damascus.

Syrian Kurds are playing an important role in the civil war that is shaking the country. The government troops deployed in Kurdistan have been sent to other areas to fight against the rebels of the «Free Syrian Army» (FSA), which has in turn led to the People's Kurdish Protection Forces assuming a security role in cities such as Amuda, Darbasiyah or the regional capital Qamishili<sup>(25)</sup>. The Kurdish forces in turn belong to two opposing parties: the «Democratic Unity Party» (PYD, the Syrian subsidiary of the Turkish PKK), which has enjoyed the support of the regime and refuses to fight alongside the FSA rebels, and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), which is opposed to the regime in Damascus but has not reached a political agreement with the Syrian National Council (SNC) on the possible status of the region if the revolts succeed<sup>(26)</sup>.

<sup>(24)</sup> For example, the Kurdish Shiite Mohammad Reza Rahimi has been first vice-president of Iran since September 2009.

<sup>(25)</sup> See «Siria cede el control de las regiones kurdas», *El Mundo* (10/7/2012), available at <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/07/10/internacional/1341956483.html>. [Query: 1st-September 2012].

<sup>(26)</sup> PÉREZ MORENO Alberto, «Los kurdos, un nuevo elemento en la compleja dinámica siria», *Atenea Digital* (2/8/2012), available at [http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/GestionNoticias\\_9620\\_ESP.asp](http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/GestionNoticias_9620_ESP.asp). [Query: 1st September 2012]. The KNC participated in the SNC meeting held in Cairo last July but left it angrily because it felt that it was being marginalised by the Sunni Arabs.

The fact is that everything seems to suggest that the marriage of convenience between the PYD and the KNC has been promoted by the Iraqi Kurdistan government, and President Barzani himself has admitted that Syrian *peshmergas* have been trained in his territory to cover the void left by the government troops. This situation in turn raises suspicions in Ankara which, while it sees danger in the *de facto* independence of Iraqi Kurdistan, what it really fears is that this may serve as a model for Syrian Kurdistan. If this leads to Turkey intervening in Syrian territory, something which could happen if it perceives the PYD to be controlling the region<sup>(27)</sup>, this could in turn trigger a military response from Iran, which would cause the conflict to escalate with unpredictable consequences.

### ■ The US and the EU

US-Turkish relations have improved since their lowest point, which occurred with the aforementioned Turkish AKP government's refusal in 2003 to allow the Americans to invade northern Iraq from its territory. In addition, both countries have maintained somewhat conflicting positions to Iraqi Kurdistan: for Turkey, it represents a base of operations for the PKK and a dangerous precedent for a possible independent Kurdish state; for the US, its democratic, political and economic development represent one of the few successes of its invasion of Iraq, in view of the chaotic situation in the Shiite and Sunni areas.

Furthermore, the recent decision to host a US-promoted ballistic missile shield radar on Turkish territory is related to the request to Washington to supply Turkey with *Reaper* model unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), which it would use to *shoot down* PKK guerrillas in Iraqi territory, similarly to what the US does with Al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan. In December 2011 an attack by Turkish aircraft, made possible by intelligence provided by US drones, killed 35 Kurdish civilians, smugglers who were mistaken for PKK guerrilla fighters<sup>(28)</sup>.

With respect to the European Union, its influence on the Iraqi Kurdistan conflict has been collateral since, as part of the negotiation process for Turkey's accession and as already mentioned above, Ankara has been forced to change its laws on terrorism and on the rights of ethnic minorities in the country. A prime example was the change of Öcalan's death sentence to life imprisonment when Turkey abolished the death sentence in 2002<sup>(29)</sup>.

<sup>(27)</sup> Speaking to the newspaper *El Mundo*, Mesut Ozcan, deputy director of the Turkish foreign ministry's «Centre for Strategic Studies», said that the situation in Syria «*is a provocation. Syria is playing the PKK card, just like it did in the 80s and 90s [...] It is a headache and, if the PKK uses Syrian territory to attack Turkey, we will respond. Siria cede el control...*», *op. cit.*

<sup>(28)</sup> «Turquía mata a 35 civiles kurdos en un ataque en Irak», *El País* (30/12/2011), available at [http://elpais.com/diario/2011/12/30/internacional/1325199607\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2011/12/30/internacional/1325199607_850215.html). [Query: 1st September 2012].

<sup>(29)</sup> Regarding the measures on Kurdish rights taken by Turkey, on the way to Europe, see MACMILAN Adrián and NÚÑEZ Sara, *Turquía, un país entre dos mundos*, VienaEdiciones, Barcelona, 2004, 552.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

In 2005, an «International Human Rights Delegation» comprised of renowned legal experts visited Turkey to see the status of the Kurdish conflict on the field. Its final recommendations included measures such as<sup>(30)</sup>:

- The opening of direct negotiations between the government and Kurdish leaders, including Öcalan.
- The immediate cessation of all armed violence on both sides.
- The demilitarisation of Turkish institutions and the subjection of the military to the rule of law, as well as the deactivation of the popular militias.
- A territorial decentralisation process.
- The establishment of a «Truth and Reconciliation Commission».
- The release of all political prisoners, including Öcalan.
- The closing of the prison island of Imrali, where Öcalan is serving in solitary confinement, and his imprisonment under international standards.
- The unconditional return of all exiles and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

This solution is clearly very similar to that suggested by Öcalan himself from 2005, and it seems very unlikely that it will one day be accepted by Ankara. By contrast, other analysts consider the PKK to be a defeated enemy to which no concessions should be made. They highlight the porous and multifaceted nature of the ethnic boundaries in Turkey, and point out that the Kurds are not politically a single block who all want the same status, whether this is full independence, broad political autonomy, or the continuation of the current status quo<sup>(31)</sup>.

As a compromise and internally in Turkey, Ankara should use the *divide and conquer* tactic with the Kurdish rebels, in order to try to isolate the more radical elements and deprive them of the support of the population, which in fact no longer supports the PKK's indiscriminate violence. Because of this, Erdogan's government should attract the 35 Kurdish BDP deputies and properly respond to some of their proposals, such as respecting the Kurdish language (authorising its teaching in schools and its use in local government), the constitutional recognition of ethnic minorities, or the possibility of limited self-rule. This would be a torpedo in the PKK's water line, since it would deprive it of much of the legitimacy that it enjoys today.

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<sup>(30)</sup> *Report and recommendations on the Kurdish question in Turkey, by the international delegation of human rights lawyers, January 2005.*

<sup>(31)</sup> «I do not think that the legitimacy of the ethno-nationalist calls for a political status can be decided in ideal terms. A Kurdish state is no more or less entitled to exist than states based on any of the other identities that intersect and subdivide Kurdish identity [...] When identities overlap and intersect, allowing the self-determination of a particular group implies denying it to others». KOCHER Matthew, «The decline of PKK and the viability of a one-state solution in Turkey», *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2000, 3, available at <http://www.unesco.org/most/vl4n1kocher.pdf>. [Query: 2nd September 2012].

Furthermore, the evolution of the situation in Iraq is key to Turkey, since the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is the closest thing to an independent state ever enjoyed by the Kurds throughout their history. The relative weakness of the central authority in Baghdad seems to anticipate a scenario in which each ethnic minority is increasingly acting on its own, with Ankara taking any of the following two positions: either ignoring the reality of Iraqi Kurdistan, which would hamper its fight against the PKK, or trying to establish links with the Government for the development of cross-border projects that contribute to social and economic development on both sides of the border. These could include cultural and educational programmes specially aimed at Kurdish communities, with a view to increasing mutual trust<sup>(32)</sup>. The question of the final status of Kirkuk, a city claimed by Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen (the latter supported by Turkey), is considered the main source of dispute between communities.

As far as the rest of the region is concerned, the Kurdish issue is just another of the serious security problems overlapping each other and creating an extremely complex situation. In the case of Iran, in the northeast, relations with Azerbaijan have worsened, and there is always the fear in Tehran that its Azeri inhabitants could seek to reunite with their neighbours. In addition, relations with the new Iraq are key to Iran, which for the first time has an allied Shiite government in Baghdad; the challenge for independence by the Baloch in the southeast still continues (with occasional terrorist incidents) and, globally, Tehran continues to develop its nuclear program, facing opposition from the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, Israel, and the International Community as a whole, led by the US.

As if all this were not enough, Syria, which has traditionally been the most stable state for the Kurdish minority, has been mired in a civil war of unpredictable outcome since March 2011, which seems to be leading to the *de facto* independence of the Kurdish northeast, with the support of the Iraqi Kurdistan autonomous government that can use the experiences of its own political process following the US invasion of 2003. It is impossible to assess how this self-government of the Syrian Kurds will end, since it depends on the end of the war: the continued power of the Alawite minority of the Al-Assads; a rebel victory and the establishment of a Sunni regime; or even the division of the country along the lines of ethnic separation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the interest of the West in the region involves progress towards greater democracy but with stable and functional states that maintain peaceful relations with their neighbours (particularly with Israel). In this regard, the autonomous government of Iraqi Kurdistan represents a much more successful model than the experiences of other places such as Palestine, where the 2006 elections gave way to a sectarian conflict and to the taking of

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<sup>(32)</sup> In this regard, the issue of energy resources is key, since crude oil is exported from Iraqi Kurdistan primarily through pipelines running through southern Turkey to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. This oil is used by Ankara to meet the energy needs of that part of its territory, as well as providing significant profit in the form of transit fees.

power in the Gaza Strip by the terrorist movement *Hamas*, or the concerning drifting of Egypt's new Islamist government.

In view of this, in the Kurdish case it is important to make a distinction between the more radical movements that resort to indiscriminate violence and terrorism (PKK in Turkey, PJAK in Iran, PYD in Syria), and the more moderate political movements that seek greater autonomy for the Kurdish territories and respect for their culture and traditions (such as the BDP in Turkey, the KNC in Syria or the Kurdish leaders in Iraq). A combination of firmness against the former and flexibility with the latter would advance the resolution of the conflict, since returning to the extreme violence of the 1990s would not be tolerated today.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 5.2**

DATE	EVENT
27 NOV 1978	Founding congress of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)
25 DEC 1978	The Grey Wolves kill 109 Kurds in the Maras massacre
12 SEP 1980	General Evran leads a coup d'état in Turkey, PKK leaders take refuge in Syria
6 JUN 1982	Following the invasion of Lebanon, PKK guerrillas based in the Bekaa valley fight with the PLO and Syria against the Israelis
20 AUG 1982	Second PKK congress in Daraa (Syria). At this stage, several imprisoned leaders commit suicide or die after hunger strikes
15 AUG 1984	Official start of the conflict in Turkish Kurdistan, with an attack by the PKK on Gendarmerie bases in Hakkari and Erzurum provinces
19 JUL 1987	The Turkish National Assembly declares a state of emergency in the ten provinces of the south-west
5 OCT 1992	Turkey launches Operation North Iraq in support of the PDK in their armed conflict against the PKK. The conflict between Turkish Kurds and Iraqi Kurds ends with the agreement of 17 November 1992
24 MAY 1993	Following the death of Özal, the Turkish president, the PKK ceasefire ends with an attack in which 33 Turkish troops die

DATE	EVENT
20 MAR-4 MAY 1995	Turkey launches Operation Steel against the PKK in the north of Iraq.
12 MAY-7 JUL 1997	Turkey launches Operation Hammer in support of the PDK against the PKK, within the framework of the Kurdish civil war in Iraq.. Between 25 September and 15 October, this is repeated with Operation Dawn
23 APR 1998	Turkey launches Operation Murat, attacking PKK bases in the provinces of Diyarbakir and Bingöl (south-eastern Turkey) with 40,000 troops
15 FEB 1999	In 1998, Turkey threatens Syria, which expels Öcalan from its territory. He flees to Russia, Italy and Greece, and is captured in Kenya
1999-2004	Following Öcalan's capture, there is a five-year ceasefire.
12 SEP 2006	Kurdish civilians are attacked in Diyarbakir, leaving ten dead. The Turkish Revenge Brigade claims responsibility.
31 MAY-7 JUN 2007	Turkey threatens to invade Iraqi Kurdistan. Barzani announces that any incursion will be fought off by Peshmergaforces. Numerous border incidents.
17 OCT 2007	The Turkish National Assembly approves the government's proposal to cross the Iraqi border to attack Kurdish guerrillas
21 FEB 2008	Turkey launches a land raid of 10,000 troops in the north of Iraq.
7 AUG 2008	The PKK claims responsibility for the bomb attack against the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.
19 OCT 2011	The PKK kills 24 Turkish soldiers in Hakkari province, Turkey launches its largest operation in Iraqi Kurdistan since 2008
28-29 DEC 2011	35 Kurds, probably smugglers, die after a Turkish air attack, which mistook them for PKK guerrillas



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## CHAPTER VI

# IRAQ. BALANCED AT THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

*José Luis Calvo Albero*

### **ABSTRACT:**

Following the withdrawal of the US military forces at the end of 2011, Iraq is faced with a very delicate internal situation in which many of the severe problems that came to light in the most difficult years of the conflict still remain. The rivalries between the Shiites and the Sunnis, the struggle for energy resources, and Kurdish separatism are still daily concerns, amid violence that never goes away. But the situation is further aggravated because Iraq is situated in the middle of the many tension lines that now run through the Middle East. This forces the Iraq government into managing a difficult political balancing act, both internal and external, with doubtful chances of success, although there is still a margin of hope.

### **Keywords:**

Iraq, Middle East, political transition, US intervention, Sunni, Shiite, al-Maliki, al-Sadr, Jihadism.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

The withdrawal of the last US military forces from Iraq at the end of 2011 left in its wake a scenario of political uncertainty and disturbing internal instability that was in any case the common scenario when the US troops were still deployed there. As things stand, the rapid descent into chaos predicted by several analysts has not occurred, although the conditions for triggering such a scenario are still very much present.

If Iraq were in any other part of the world and another time in history, its perspectives for stability and progress would be reasonably sound, despite the numerous internal conflicts affecting its mixed population. There is a national sentiment in Iraq (particularly among the Arab population) that on occasions transcends their religious differences. There are economic resources, for example the high-quality oil fields, that have been exploited for as little as last twenty years, and which may contain the world's second largest crude oil reserves. And despite the ravages of war, some urban elites have survived in the large cities and these elites have a level of education that is superior to the usual level in the Middle East.

However, if we take into account the time and place in which Iraq is facing its difficult and traumatic transition, the chances of success are much less optimistic. The Middle East is probably going through its most turbulent period since the 1970s. And Iraq is in the middle of the main tension lines. Its divided population cannot but resent the increasingly open geopolitical struggle between the aggressive Sunni Islam, led by the Gulf monarchies, and the Shia Islam, consolidated under the flag of the increasingly isolated Iran. The harsh Syrian conflict is taking place along the sensitive north-east Iraq border, the scene of the most brutal battles during the US occupation, reviving the possibility that the confrontation between religious faiths may resume with greater fervour. And the possibility of an Israeli or US attack on the nuclear facilities in Iran would be very likely to make Iraqi territory the first line of a general conflict in the Middle East.

As if that was not enough, the disturbing development of the Kurdish problem both in Iraq and Syria, and the alarm this is causing in Turkey determined to recover the role that it once played in the region, are the cherry on the cake in which instability and violence are the main ingredients.

It is risky to assert that Iraq is now the most important piece in the Middle East situation, but the development of events in the region will largely depend on the success of the people and the Iraqi ruling class in the management of its post-war period and its complex political transition. And if success is not on their side, it is indeed very likely that Iraq will once again, despite its best efforts, become the axis of events in the Middle East.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Today's Iraq is the product of a series of disasters that successively shook the country during the last thirty-five years. The Ba'athist regime that governed from 1968 became considerably more radical when Saddam Hussein came into power, starting a war against Iran in 1980 lasting nine years in which approximately 400,000 Iraqis were killed. With no onward solution in sight, the war continued against the international coalition led by the US in 1991, after Iraq invaded Kuwait, which devastated the country's most valuable infrastructures. Furthermore, the conflict came to an end when several Shiite and Kurdish uprisings were brutally crushed, and with over ten years of international embargo in which the oppressive conduct of the Saddam regime became particularly intense.

The war that started with the US military intervention of 2003 finished off the few remaining infrastructures, because of the air raids, the sabotage of the insurgency, or simple abandonment after the collapse of the regime. The disintegration of the state administration, which was not predicted or even remedied by the occupiers, pushed the country into a state of chaos that initially encouraged an insurgency against US troops, but progressively descended into a civil war between the Sunni minority and the Shiite majority. The confrontations and mass executions were especially fierce in the areas where Sunnis and Shiites previously lived together, which in many cases underwent a process of ethnic cleansing that considerably deepened the differences between both communities. And the perspectives considered by Washington whereby the country's enormous wealth of energy resources would be used to quickly rebuild have been diluted over time and with the awful conditions of the Iraqi infrastructures.

Nine years after the military campaign led by the US, which led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the reasons that caused President George W. Bush to make such a risky strategic move are still not entirely clear. However, in light of the current situation, it would be bold to assert that any of the objectives of the Iraqi campaign have been fulfilled in a completely satisfactory manner to the United States.

The main argument for intervention was to put an end to a perverse political regime, and open the door to a process of democratisation that would serve as an example and thus produce the same change in other countries in the region. The first objective was undoubtedly achieved, and some believe that the events of the «Arab Spring» are a late manifestation of the second objective. But what happened in Iraq does not appear to have had a crucial influence on the uprisings in 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa. The inability of the authoritarian nationalist regimes to leave behind a period of stagnation that has lasted for decades, and particularly to manage the after-effects of the global

economic crisis, are more likely motives for the uprisings than the example of Iraq, whose political transition is far from being a model to be followed.

Clearly there was also a struggle for energy resources following the US intervention. In this respect, Iraq initially appeared to have excellent possibilities. With enormous untapped reserves, an Iraq allied with the US could assume the role of crude oil price regulator that has been exercised for decades by Saudi Arabia. But the disastrous condition of the country's infrastructures and the considerable violence have delayed the increased production of Iraqi crude oil, which as recently as July 2012 managed to exceed three million barrels a day<sup>(1)</sup>, which is just half a million more than production prior to US intervention.

Finally, it could be inferred that the United States was looking for a new balance of power in the area that would be favourable to its interests. An allied Iraq, driven like a wedge between Syria and Iran, would to some extent be capable of neutralising the dangerous tendency of the Gulf monarchies to religious extremism. In addition, it was to be expected that the resulting scenario would be more favourable to Israel.

Even a superficial appraisal of the current events can only lead to the conclusion that the second objective has failed. The lines of conflict now transect the Middle East in a way that has not been seen for decades, and there is even a fair chance that a medium to high intensity regional conflict may break out involving states from Iran to Israel and from Saudi Arabia to Turkey.

Nevertheless, evidence of its failure to achieve the initial objectives forced the US to adopt an increasingly realistic approach to Iraq's future, which was not aimed at creating opportunities but at avoiding disasters. In this respect, during George W. Bush's second term, US strategy was redirected to prevent Iraq from becoming a sanctuary for Jihadist groups, although this meant abandoning the possibility of a model political transition in Iraq. It also attempted to counteract the possibility of Iran becoming the greatest beneficiary of the war by replacing the bitter enemy that was Ba'athist Iraq for a religious state dominated by the Shiite majority.

These two principles guided the US military and diplomatic reaction initiated in 2007, which was popularly known as «Surge». One of the basic foundations of this strategic counter-offence was the reconversion of the initially fierce Sunni insurgency into an ally, capable on the one hand of reducing the Jihadist groups to a marginal role and, on the other, of balancing the growing power of the pro-Iran Shiite militias. General Petraeus, who was responsible for bringing about the Surge, achieved success that, although fragile, was nevertheless brilliant.

In order to achieve this partial success, it was necessary to leave many problems on the side-lines, and sometimes create new ones that are now rearing their ugly head.

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<sup>(1)</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/tag/oil-production/>.

On the one hand, in order to convert respect for law into support for military operations, the US administration was obliged to almost unconditionally support the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who was democratically elected in 2006, amid suspicions of his inclination towards Iran and a tendency to pro-Shiite sectarianism. On the other hand, the Sunni militias that had initially fought against US troops, and then both its old allies Al-Qaeda and the Shiite militias, started to operate outside the legally established government and were difficult to control and even more difficult to integrate into the state structures.

The Kurdish minority has remained one of the groups least affected by the hostilities in the country. The areas where there are a Kurdish majority were little affected by the actions of the insurgency or the sectarian confrontations. A Kurdish political entity soon formed in the north of the country, which benefited to a large extent from US support. The Kurd leaders, especially Jalal Talabani<sup>(2)</sup> and Massoud Barzani, have always been prepared to engage in dialogue, and have thus had considerable influence on pressure from Washington. Nevertheless, relations with the central government deteriorated following the withdrawal of US troops, and the situation remains complex and violent in areas of mixed population, such as the city of Kirkuk, which both Kurds and Arabs claim as their own. There has also been a lot of friction between the Baghdad government and the Kurdish leaders pertaining to the exploitation of the rich oil fields located in the north of Mosul.

The war brought a number of especially destabilising actors to the fore. From the very outset, thousands of foreign volunteers answered the call of the fundamentalist religious organisations, converting the country into the main stage for global Jihad for several years. As is usual in such cases, their action was not so much aimed at liberating Iraq from the dominance of the Western armies as to sew chaos and impose a religious and political model guided by blind fanaticism.

The Sunni insurgency, which initially consolidated around what was left of the Ba'ath party and the security institutions of the regime, gradually acquired a more tribal and uncontrollable nature. Many Sunni insurgent leaders allied themselves with the Jihadist organisations. After realising that the methods used by the Jihadists only led to blood and chaos, most of the tribal leaders cut ties with them from 2006, eventually allying themselves with the US troops in what was known as the Sunni Awakening.

However, the alliance was merely a means of survival for some militias caught between a commitment to the chaos of the Jihadists and the growing power of the Shiite militias. And not even the militia members or their leaders were able to integrate into the new Iraqi state, surviving as paramilitary organisations fi-

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<sup>(2)</sup> Talabani has held office as President of Iraq since 2005.



nanced by the US. The US withdrawal, the difficulty of reintegrating the fighters into civilian life, and the control that Prime Minister al-Maliki was gaining over the state administration led some tribal militias to take up arms again against the central government, and even support the still-active Jihadists once again<sup>(3)</sup>.

Another especially problematic actor during the years of US presence was the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. His armed militia, the «Mahdi Army», brought together many young Shiites from the most depressed areas of the country, including the immense suburb district of Sadr City in Baghdad. His resistance against US troops, which was waged despite frequently suffering terrible losses, was increasingly aligned with the sectarian attacks on the Sunni communities. The Mahdi Army was never a force that was easy to control, and in time it split into independent factions, some of which are still a threat to security today. Nevertheless, the main branch, still under the leadership of Muqtada al-Sadr, has become a moderately successful political movement.

The run-off that took place in the legislative elections of 2010 between al-Maliki's party and the secular Shiite and Sunni bloc led by the former Prime Minister Allawi, revitalised the importance of al-Sadr, whose support enabled al-Maliki to maintain his position as Prime Minister. However, despite his political orientation, al-Sadr's party still maintains an armed militia (the Promised Day Brigades<sup>(4)</sup>) and receives clear support from Iran, which is particularly discomfoting to the US, and also to the more moderate Iraqi Shiite sectors.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ The complex political situation

Politics is by its nature complex and opportunistic, but in the Arab countries these characteristics are interpreted in their most extreme sense. Iraq is a perfect example of this political focus. Alliances and counter-alliances between parties and blocs are made and unmade from one day to the next. Being a politician in Iraq means walking a fine line between groups, factions, and interests, in which not only political success but also their own personal safety is at stake. There is no doubt that the political leader who best fits this image, and who has had the most success in the Iraqi political arena in recent years is the current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Al-Maliki is a historic member of the Dawa party, a religiously inspired Shiite political formation that was outlawed by Saddam Hussein, many of whose

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<sup>(3)</sup> WILLIAMS, Timothy, *New Sunnis in Iraq allied with US re-join rebels*. New York Times, 17th October 2012. Viewed at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/world/middleeast/17awakening.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>(4)</sup> CORDESMAN Anthony H & KHAZAI Sam. *Iraq alter US withdrawal*. US Policy and the Iraqi Search for Security and Stability. CSIS. Washington DC. 2012. page 31. Viewed at [www.csis.org/burke/reports](http://www.csis.org/burke/reports).

activists, including al-Maliki himself, had to seek refuge in Iran, where they organised an armed resistance movement against Saddam. The Iranian regime granted them asylum and aid, but it also kept such a tight rein on them that many of them ended up leaving the country, thus developing a mixed approach of attraction and prevention with the Tehran authorities.

Al-Maliki's political career has been marked by his involvement in the Dawa, and identifies him as someone who is close to the Iranian regime and who has a tendency to marginalise the Sunni population for the benefit of his fellow Shiites. However, this view is slightly simplistic, as we will see below.

In 2006, the rejection of Prime Minister al-Jafaari's rule took al-Maliki to power. From the outset, his relations with US authorities were ambiguous. On the one hand, he was particularly protective of the political interests of the Shiite groups, but on the other, he undertook government action that was quite effective by the usual standards in Iraq, and was firmly committed to the struggle against armed groups under all insignia. The offensive that he ordered in 2008 against al-Sadr's militias in various cities throughout the country bolstered his credibility as a leader who was willing to put an end to the violence.

In 2009, his growing popularity enabled him to split from the main Shiite coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, and form a new electoral list with his Dawa followers called the State of Law Coalition, with which he presented himself at the regional elections of that year. The main objective of the movement was to differentiate itself from the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, also members of the United Iraqi Alliance, which suffered a major setback in the elections, while al-Maliki's list was victorious in most of the Shiite provinces.

In the legislative elections of 2010, al-Maliki faced a leader who was more popular in the more moderate sectors of the Iraqi population and with the US. This leader was Ayad Allawi, who was the Prime Minister of the interim government between 2004 and 2005 and who was now leading the Iraqi National Movement party, better known as Al Iraqiya. Allawi represents the urban, nationalist, secular, and moderate elites, both Sunni and Shiite. He is, himself, a Shiite who was part of the Ba'ath party. He was educated in the United Kingdom and joined the exiled opposition against Saddam Hussein's regime.

Allawi obtained a remarkable electoral victory, overcoming al-Maliki's party by a handful of votes and two seats. But the Prime Minister turned out to be more astute than him in making moves behind the scenes, and also took advantage of his greater control over the reins of power. Al-Maliki managed to weaken the image of his rival by playing on a fear of a return to power of the Ba'ath party (Allawi was a former Ba'athist) and wasted no time in seeking

the support of al-Sadr once again in order to achieve a government majority. Allawi qualified this move as unconstitutional but the Iraqi Supreme Court eventually ruled in favour of the acting Prime Minister.

Al-Maliki then pushed for the signature of the so-called «Erbil Agreements» which, in theory, would lead to the formation of a national coalition government among the main political groups, and brought an end to the eight-month institutional paralysis that followed the elections. But although promising, the Erbil Agreements never materialised into a new legislative body or produced new institutions such as the National Security Council, for which Allawi had been specifically nominated as president<sup>(5)</sup>.

Following his narrow victory over Allawi, al-Maliki revealed his most authoritarian and sombre face. At the end of 2011, shortly before the complete withdrawal of the US forces, he ordered a series of raids on former Ba'athist elements which led to the detention of hundreds of people. Both the reasons for the operation and the manner in which it was executed revealed many dark aspects. He claimed that there was an absurd Sunni conspiracy to carry out a coup supported by the Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi<sup>(6)</sup> (who at that time was fighting for his life in the ruins of Sirte), and many of those detained had very little or no former connection to the Ba'ath party.

But even more alarmingly, in December of the same year, the Prime Minister ordered the detention of vice-president Hashemi and his bodyguards for a conspiracy to overthrow the government by assassinating its members. Hashemi is a Sunni, a member of Al Iraqiya, who was appointed as vice-president as part of the power distribution policy established in the Erbil Agreements<sup>(7)</sup>. Following the accusation, Hashemi fled to the Kurdish autonomous region where he was granted official protection, which further aggravated the already tense relations between the Kurdish leaders and al-Maliki. Hashemi then fled to Qatar and Saudi Arabia where he issued damning statements regarding the conduct of the Iraqi Prime Minister towards the Sunni minority.

In protest at the order to detain al-Hashemi, the Sunni deputies of Al Iraqiya refused to attend Parliament, but they had to stand down from this position in January 2012 as there was a risk that al-Maliki would use their absence to gain even more control over the institutions. But this did not end with the Hashemi affair, as the former vice-president was sentenced to death in absentia by an

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<sup>(5)</sup> *Ibidem*, pages 37-38.

<sup>(6)</sup> KRAMER, Andrew E. Iraq Arrest More in Wake of Tip About Coup. *New York Times*. 31st October 2011. Viewed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/01/world/middleeast/iraq-arrests-more-in-wake-of-libyan-tip-about-coup.html>.

<sup>(7)</sup> The Prime Minister (Al Maliki) is Shiite, the president (Talaban) is Kurdish, and the vice-president (Hashemi) is Sunni.

Iraqi court in September. The charges were for running armed gangs who had committed numerous crimes against his political adversaries and the Shiite community in general. The death sentence, following a suspiciously hasty judgment, only managed to cast more doubt on the impartiality of the Iraqi courts, particularly with respect to Prime Minister Maliki.

It is difficult to know if al-Maliki's actions are motivated by genuine sectarianism against the Sunni minority or are simply a strategy to neutralise Allawi and his followers as political adversaries. Everything suggests that the second option is the most likely, as al-Maliki has also not hesitated to act with extreme force against his own Shiite allies whenever they have become a threat to his authority<sup>(8)</sup>. But the methods employed, which have become more radical since the departure of the US forces, have raised tensions considerably between the different Iraqi communities and have somewhat tarnished the image of the Iraqi government and of its Prime Minister in the face of international public opinion.

Nevertheless, al-Maliki continues to enjoy considerable popular support, which has likely grown since the 2010 elections. Aware of his popularity, the Prime Minister has not hesitated to respond to any attempt at a motion of censure with the threat of early elections, with full confidence that this would benefit the political list under his leadership. Although authoritarian, sectarian, and of political uses that are at the very least reprehensible, al-Maliki is still the leader who ruled Iraq during the only period in the last thirty years in which the population's living conditions have improved in such a significant way. In addition, at the start of 2011, he announced that he would not seek re-election in the legislative elections of 2014, which has to some extent improved his internal legitimacy as a man who is not attempting to remain in office indefinitely.

### ■ The religious factor

The Iraqi population is not known for extreme religious stances. In fact, Shiite and Sunni Muslims have lived together naturally and also with a Christian minority of various faiths. But the differences have become more pronounced over time for social and political reasons. In general, the Shiite population, essentially dedicated to agriculture in the central south area of the country, has had a more humble social status than the Sunni-Arab tribes of the north and centre, who are more focused on trade and have maintained a tradition closer to the Bedouin paramilitary model. In addition, the Shiites have always considered themselves to have suffered due to a certain reputation for collusion with Iran, frequently unfounded. During the Saddam Hussein regime, the Shiites became second-class citizens, which fostered hostility between Sunnis and Shiites leading to conflict that was more of a social and political rather than religious nature.

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<sup>(8)</sup> The most clear-cut case was the offensive that he ordered in 2008 against al-Sadr's followers in Basra, Nasiriya and Kut, which caused hundreds of deaths.

Iraq is an essential place for Shia Islam. Most of the holy places are found in Iraqi territories, where one of the two religious schools (hawzas) that define the development of Shiite religious doctrine is located. The Iraqi hawza of Najaf competes with the Iranian hawza of Qom in prestige and ancestry among the Shiite faithful.

The Iraqi Shiites uphold the original doctrine of «quietism», which advocates the separation of religious and political affairs, while in Qom some Iranian religious leaders have developed a more political-interventionist doctrine, which finally brought Ayatollah<sup>(9)</sup> Khomeini to power and installed the current Islamic regime in Tehran. This approach has never been accepted in Iraq, where the highest-ranking religious figure, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, has adopted a very different posture.

Sistani has exercised and continues to exercise considerable influence over Iraqi politics, but it could be said that he does so reluctantly. The old ayatollah has never sought a leading role and much prefers to dedicate himself to religious studies – to which he has devoted his life – before entering the complex Iraqi political arena. But perhaps it is because of this attitude of indifference, as well as his image of wisdom and saintliness, that any of his pronouncements have been taken as law, and not only by the Shiite population.

In general, Sistani always had a moderating influence in the conflict that followed US intervention. Although he condemned the foreign presence, he never supported the insurgency, and even recommended that the Shiites reject violence as a response to the attacks of the Sunni extremists. He supported the establishment of a representative political system, the formation of a unified electoral list of Shiite parties (which became the United Iraqi Alliance) and encouraged Shiites to vote and take part in democratic life. Over time, Sistani has become a little more open to the world, establishing a network of clerics who disseminate his messages, even on the Internet<sup>(10)</sup>. Nevertheless, the ayatollah is now old and his health is delicate. The death of Sistani would mean the loss of a moderating influence that has, at times, been decisive, especially among the Shiite population. His replacement by clerics who are much more aggressive and closer to Iranian doctrine, such as Muqtada al-Sadr (who completed his religious studies in recent years at the Hawza of Qom), would be an additional destabilising factor.

### ■ The plague of violence.

Statistics on violent acts and victims in Iraq have substantially improved since the extremely tough years of 2006 and 2007, when the average number of

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<sup>(9)</sup> Ayatollahs, who are also known as «marjas» (persons to imitate) are clerics who, through their knowledge and prestige, have gained access to the leadership councils of the hawzas.

<sup>(10)</sup> [www.sistani.org](http://www.sistani.org).

deaths caused by violence was over one hundred a day. That number is currently around eleven deaths a day<sup>(11)</sup>, which is nevertheless an extremely high number which would correspond to a country still deep in armed conflict. In fact, Iraq still frequently exceeds the monthly figures for victims of violence in Afghanistan.

What is most disturbing is that although the number of violent incidents substantially decreased until mid-2009, it has remained practically unchanged since then. It even slightly increased in the months following the withdrawal of the United States, although fortunately the most pessimistic forecasts, which suggested that there would be widespread resumption of violence as a result of the withdrawal, have not materialised. Many armed groups have set up deep-rooted networks in Iraqi territory after nine years of conflict, and eliminating them completely is a task that could take decades.

There is still a complex network of terrorist groups and armed militias who are active on a daily basis, but there is no coordination between them and they often defend completely different ideological positions. The first target would be the remains of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the organisation that was once led by the notorious Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and which, like all outposts of Al-Qaeda, fragmented into numerous splinter groups. The number of Jihadist volunteers still active in Iraq is not very well known, but estimates vary between several hundred and a few thousand. In any case, their number is gradually diminishing, as Iraq ceased to be the main stage for the Jihad some time ago. There are much more promising conflicts for the Jihadists in Maghreb, the Sahel, Syria, and even in Afghanistan. It is likely that the Jihadist core in Iraq is increasingly composed of personnel of Iraqi origin.

But this image of weakness is in contrast to the devastating attacks that the Islamic fundamentalists carry out in the country. On 16th August 2012, a chain of suicide attacks led to the deaths of more than 140 people throughout Iraqi territory, making it the bloodiest day since the US withdrawal. The frequency and strength of these attacks probably indicates that the Jihadists are still finding support in several areas of the population, probably among the Sunni tribes that most strongly oppose al-Maliki, or among the Sunni inhabitants in the areas that suffered the most from the ethnic cleansing committed by the Shiite militias. The attacks of the Jihadists are frequently directed against the Shiite community, and especially target the Iranian pilgrims that travel to the holy places of Shia Islam in Iraq. They also target the tribal leaders who entered into pacts with the Americans and fought against their old Jihadist allies.

Along with the capital, the Sunni areas of the country are hit by most of the acts of violence although various Shiite militias also maintain activities in the south

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<sup>(11)</sup> According to data from Iraqi Body Count, an organisation that lists the civilian victims of the conflict following US intervention in 2003, based on press reports. [www.iraqibodycount.org](http://www.iraqibodycount.org).

and centre. As is often the case in situations of prolonged violence, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between terror– or politically-motivated attacks and mere struggles for the power, influence, and economic benefit of many gangs that have made armed violence their way of life. This can be very lucrative in a country that is not poor, and where political corruption is endemic<sup>(12)</sup>.

Unlike in other countries in North Africa and the Middle East, the Arab Spring has had very little effect in Iraq, although a number of violent protests took place at the start of 2011. The reason for this low incidence is probably due to the fact that, despite the high level of corruption and violence, the experience of Iraqi citizens is the opposite of the other Arab states, as their personal and working lives have improved rather than worsened in recent years. In addition, al-Maliki's government continues to enjoy an acceptable level of legitimacy, and the last thing most Iraqis want is a popular revolt causing a return to a scenario of widespread violence.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

Despite its failure to achieve most of the strategic objectives set in 2003, Iraq is still an essential piece in US strategy in the Middle East. Washington's lack of appetite for action against Iran, or for more aggressive intervention in Syria, has a lot to do with the Iraq experience, and also the desire not to further destabilise the fragile political transition in the country.

In many respects, modern-day Iraq is an American creature, although the deeper nature of that creature has its roots in a historic and cultural tradition compared to which the entire history of the US is a grain in the sands of time. Furthermore, Washington has invested a lot in Iraq and continues to invest large sums<sup>(13)</sup>. And although contact between the two cultures has been marked by violence, both have absorbed something from the other.

Thus, the possibility of Iraq eventually becoming a valuable ally in the Middle East is still very real. Although perhaps it could not be expected to become an unconditional ally, Iraq can still be an excellent liaison and mediator in the area.

For Iraq, US support is still essential in many respects, especially for its capability of guaranteeing its security. It is impossible for the Iraqi government

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<sup>(12)</sup> Iraq is in 175th place on a list of 183 states listed by the organisation Transparency International from least to most corrupt. Viewed at: <http://www.transparency.org/country#IRQ>.

<sup>(13)</sup> The State Department has set a budget of \$4.8 billion in the 2013 fiscal year for the embassy in Baghdad, in addition to the approximately \$4.5 billion set for the budget of the Department of Defense.

CORDESMAN Anthony H & KHAZAI Sam. *Iraq alter US withdrawal. US Policy and the Iraqi Search for Security and Stability*. CSIS. Washington DC. 2012. pages 85-94. Viewed at [www.csis.org/burke/reports](http://www.csis.org/burke/reports).

to fund its own immense security forces, which number one million military and police personnel. And the relationship with the United States also provides access to military technology that is difficult to procure from other suppliers. In fact, Iraq has already received M-1 Abrams battle tanks, and the purchase of an as yet undetermined number of fully-equipped F-16 aircraft (at least 36), as well as a pilot training program in the US attended by about 60 Iraqi officers, has been approved<sup>(14)</sup>.

The special relationship with the US is the only way that Iraq can maintain its sovereignty in the turbulent scenario in the Middle East, and is especially useful for balancing the growing influence of Iran. Certainly, the current Baghdad government sympathises with its Iranian neighbour, and the country's economy is dependent on relations with Iran to a large extent, but this does not mean that there is not also a significant undercurrent of mistrust. It has already been noted how, despite close relations between Iraqi and Iranian Shia Islam, both maintain divergent positions regarding the religious and political model to be followed. And Arab cultural and ethnic sentiment still sits opposite the Persian identity of Iran. Furthermore, Tehran's attempts to directly influence the events of the Iraqi conflict have always caused unease.

The balance that Iraq has to maintain between the two most influential powers in the country is reflected in the calculated ambiguity of Prime Minister al-Maliki's actions. Al-Maliki tries to obtain the maximum benefit from both, while preventing both from gaining excessive control over events in Iraq. This explains why the Prime Minister quite naturally travels to both Washington and Tehran, or firmly opposes the continued presence of US troops in the country beyond 2011 while exerting considerable pressure on the armed Shiite groups closest to Iran. The key to this political strategy is based on upholding maximum Iraqi sovereignty, while avoiding a commitment to either of the two powers to the point of alarming the other.

Although it has quite a good relationship with the US, one cannot really say the same of its relationship with the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia. For the Saudi monarchy, Shiite dominance in Iraq is a geopolitical tragedy, which fuels the strength of its archenemy Iran, and which may gradually lead to rebellion between the Zaidi Shiite minorities that inhabit the Saudi coast of the Persian Gulf. In this respect, Riyadh will never forgive its US ally for the Iraq invasion.

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring has provided an excellent opportunity to settle scores and reorganise the geopolitical space of the Middle East in favour of the Gulf States. The open rebellion against the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, essentially led by the Sunni population, has enabled Riyadh to contribute to a large-scale strategic operation. The possible collapse of the Syrian regime,

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<sup>(14)</sup> *Ibidem*, pages 108-109.



and its replacement by a Sunni government, would leave Hezbollah isolated in Lebanon and enable the Sunni minority in Iraq to feel greater support in order to confront the Shiite political hegemony. The entire chain of influence painstakingly built up by Iran over the last thirty years, and which the US intervention in Iraq inadvertently helped to consolidate, would come crashing down.

Turkey is another state that may find it hard to forgive Washington for its adventure in Iraq. The resurgence of the Kurdish insurgency by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was inevitable following the chaos that shook Iraq over the last decade, and the consolidation of a Kurdish entity in the north of the country. The aerial and terrestrial incursions of the Turkish army into Iraqi territory became common, but were unable to reverse the increasing frequency and strength of PKK attacks. The death of 24 Turkish soldiers in a particularly deadly ambush in 2011 led to a significant escalation of the conflict.

However, despite strained relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan for many years, the situation has changed somewhat over the last two years. The Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan visited Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, and the Kurdish Prime Minister visited Ankara. And most importantly, both signed an oil pipeline construction agreement that could enable Iraqi Kurds to export their crude oil without submitting to the monopoly of Iraqi infrastructures.

The improved relations are connected to Turkey's belief that the PKK can only be defeated with the cooperation of the moderate Iraqi Kurds. It is probably also connected to the fact that the Syrian conflict has led to Syrian Kurdish militias controlling most of the extensive border with Turkey. The last thing that Ankara wants is the possible cooperation between autonomous Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish governments in support of the Turkish Kurdish minority's claims. The establishment of economic links with the government of Iraqi Kurdistan is one way of partially neutralising that threat.

Clearly the construction of oil pipelines that enable Iraqi Kurdistan to export its oil autonomously is a hard blow for the Baghdad government, especially for one as centralist as that of al-Maliki<sup>(15)</sup>. In this respect, the Iraqi government's relationship with the Turkish government is becoming increasingly strained, with a habitual exchange of criticism in which Ankara accuses the Iraqi government of dependency on Iran.

In relation to the Syria crisis, al-Maliki's government has completely distanced itself from any criticism of the al-Assad regime. It has not imposed any of the international economic sanctions on Syria; it has permitted flights from Iran probably transporting military equipment to the Syrian regime, despite American protests; and it has strongly criticised the behaviour of the Syrian rebels

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<sup>(15)</sup> ARRAF, Jane. *Kurdish oil line stirs Iraqi tensions*. Al Jazeera. 21st May 2012. Viewed at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/201252111272873513.html>.

who took control of various posts along the border with Iraq. It is also true that Baghdad issued an official protest when Syrian aircraft penetrated Iraqi airspace to bomb the occupants of the same border posts, which highlights Iraq's need not to appear to be involved with any of the parties to the conflict. But it is clear that the fall of al-Assad would be quite a serious threat to Iraqi stability, and a greater cause of alarm to a Shiite majority government, which could see a resurgence of the Sunni insurgency and Kurdish separatism in all their harsh reality.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The current situation in Iraq could be qualified as highly precarious, and could be easily and dramatically altered by the widespread instability in the region. As already mentioned in the introduction, Iraq is at the centre of most of the tension lines in the region, from the confrontation between Sunnis and Shiites through the struggle for energy resources to the Kurdish problem. In certain respects, Iraq is an amalgamation of all the problems currently affecting the Middle East.

The consequences of a deterioration of the situation in the country could be extremely negative. Its division into territories controlled by its various ethnic and religious groups would open a Pandora's box in a Middle East that is largely an artificial construct of poorly coordinated states, hastily cobbled together after the First World War.

Nevertheless, Iraq has a few aces in the hole. One of them is that, despite the accumulation of bad news in the region and the withdrawal of the US troops, the internal situation has not significantly worsened. This may be largely due to the fact that the Iraqi people are fed up of conflicts, a situation that in many cases is the best guarantee of peace. The management of al-Maliki's government, with all its good and bad points, is also a positive sign. The continued balance between Iran and the United States and a moderate and conciliatory foreign policy are steps in the right direction.

Unfortunately, clever moves in foreign policy are sullied by the growing tendency towards sectarianism and authoritarianism at home. Al-Maliki is faced with the same temptation that affected the nationalist Arab leaders of the 1950s and 1960s. Confronted with extremely complex problems, they opted for an extremely authoritarian line, supported by related social and ethnic groups, which led to their conversion into corrupt and inefficient hereditary regimes that are now dropping like flies in the face of the popular revolts. Upholding democratic principles in the operation of the state institutions is the main goal of the current government, and it can be said that the success of the Iraqi experiment is largely depends on this.

An increase in crude oil production would be another point in favour. Nobody believes the official forecasts that the country can produce ten million barrels a day by 2017, which would essentially put them on a par with Saudi Arabia. But even if production is only five or six million barrels, the benefits in a period of energy crisis could be astonishing. The problem is that most of the fields are in areas dominated by the Kurdish minority and the Shiites. If the benefits of the oil are used to accentuate the differences between human groups, instead of being seen as an investment in future national progress, a unique opportunity to achieve normality and prosperity will have been wasted.

The future of Iraq also largely depends on what happens in Syria and Iran. If the Syrian regime falls, the possibilities for instability will increase, although the extent of that increase will depend in many ways on the international management of the Syrian conflict. If the Syrians are simply left to their fate, in a repetition of what happened in Libya last year, the country will end up becoming a black hole in which all kinds of destabilising movements could thrive. But if a reasonably orderly succession of power takes place, the new Syria could help to stabilise the situation in new Iraq.

An attack on Iran could also constitute a considerable threat to the stability of Iraq. But again, the extent of such destabilisation is relative. A short and selective aerial campaign against Iranian nuclear facilities would undoubtedly provoke a response from Tehran in the form of missile attacks against Israel, the US bases in the Middle East, or the countries that allow their airspace to be used for the attack, and even a terrorist campaign by pro-Iranian organisations. But in any case, the consequences would be limited and manageable. The problem is the temptation of using the attack on the nuclear facilities as an excuse to attempt to overthrow the regime of the ayatollahs, or settle the old struggle between Shiites and Sunnis in favour of the Gulf States. This would cause a prolonged conflict with potentially devastating consequences, and Iraq would be at the front line.

In short, one cannot be overly optimistic about the future of the Iraqi conflict, as the country is facing numerous challenges of a magnitude that is beyond the means of still weak institutions and resources. But nor can we be entirely pessimistic, as there are resources, attitudes, and tendencies that make it possible to avoid or at least mitigate a disaster. The attitude of the International Community will have a lot to do with what eventually happens. In this respect, we should always remember that, historically, disasters have less to do with mistaken actions as with a complete lack of action.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 6.1: Geopolitical Indicators**

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS*		IRAQ
Area		438,317 km <sup>2</sup> (59°)
GDP		US\$129.300M (62°)
Structure.	Agriculture	9.7%- 21.6%
GDP/ Active population	Industry	29.3% - 18,.%
	Services	45,.% - 59,.%
GDP per capita		US\$ 3,900 (162°)
GDP growth rate		9.9% (7°)
% Unemployment		15% (147°)
Trade relations (Exports):		USA 23.3%, India 19.2%, China 14%, South Korea 12.2% (2011)
Trade relations (Imports):		Turkey 25%, Syria 18.1%, China 11.5%, US 7.3% (2011)
Crude oil production		3.02 million barrels per day (July 2012) (9°)
Pipelines (Km)		2447 gas, 5104 oil, 918 combined, 1637 for by-products.
Population		31,121,225 (39°)
% Urban population		66% (2.6% annual increase)
Age structure	0-14	38 %
	15-64	58,9%
	Over 65	3.1%
Population growth rate		2.345% (33°)
Ethnic groups		Arabs 75-80%, Kurds 15-20%, Assyrian and other 5%
Religions		Muslims (60-65% Shiite, 32-37% Sunni), Christians (3%)
Literacy rate		78,.% (86% - 70.6%)
Population below the poverty line		25%
Refugees		Approximately 45,000, mainly Iranian, Palestinian and Turkish Kurds
Displaced persons		1.3 million
Military spending. % GDP.		5% (US\$ 6.000 million) (2011)

\* The CIA World Factbook. Consultado en <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

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## CHAPTER VII

# IRAN FOREIGN POLICY AND CONFLICT

*Federico Aznar Fernández Montesinos*

### **ABSTRACT**

Iran, a country of contradictions and paradoxes, with an imperial past and a cultured, vigorous and diverse society, aims to achieve the regional hegemony and become the leader of the Shiism and of the Islamic world as a whole. It expresses its political aspirations through religion with a harsh and vindictive rhetoric that uses the commonplaces of Shiism but is, in fact, pragmatic in its application. Its nuclear defiance is but a way of expressing such aspirations.

### **Keywords:**

Iran, Middle East, nuclear.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

It is common when analysing human groups, to identify any of their essential features as the cornerstone of their behaviour, obviating the need for analysis of other factors as well as the context in which the groups are embedded.

This, coupled with a groupthink that revolves around dualistic and simplistic models, sometimes created intentionally, can explain the emergence of an anti-Islamic scholasticism that demonises and despises what it does not understand, ignoring the chromatic variety and wealth of human reality.

A policy cannot be confined to merely managing the present, but must also find a balance with the design of the future, since it is a bridge between the two. There is no boundary between a country's foreign and domestic policies; one is a continuation of the other and both feed each other, being, as they are parts of the general policy of a State. The keys to reading them are not ours but theirs, and therefore the analysis of one reading cannot be extrapolated to another, nor can our platitudes be applied carelessly.

There are no irrational parties, only people with their own rationality; moreover, when someone makes a statement of this kind, they imply they do not understand the other party, which does not speak well of the analysis they have made. Ideology and pragmatism are not mutually exclusive terms. This is even more true when it comes from a culture with an ancient tradition in negotiation.

Iran, literally the *«land of the Aryans»* is a nation of contradictions and archetypes and a paradox in itself, supposedly constantly demanding purity. Iran has been a recurring issue because of its use of a rhetoric that is more challenging and radical than the deeds themselves and that, being alien, distances the country from the International Community relegating the country to the realm of alternative and opportunistic relationships when it not simply ostracised. This populist messianism toward the Islamic world and with Third World aspects outside it, disturbs a multipolar region whose equilibrium is fragile.

Persian culture is primarily a specific and differentiated one within the Muslim world; it transcends ethnicity and religion, it is a nationalism that provides its own answers and which uses the symbolic language of Shiism and its myths to convey a message that is connected to the dominant culture of the popular classes, a *Basij* rhetoric. But it was also an Islamic response, an example against the region's corrupt regimes.<sup>(1)</sup>

The public sees the sensationalism rather than the facts. The question is whether it is acceptable for a state that handles its relations using such

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<sup>(1)</sup> Maleki, Abbas. «¿A dónde va Irán?» Various Authors in *La Vanguardia Dossier* no. 24/2007 «Irán por dentro» p. 29.

challenging rhetoric can be a significant regional player and have nuclear weapons.

Emerging, after a revolutionary process in the aftermath of the Cold War, under the arch formed by the opposing blocs and that made politics possible, for more than a few Muslims, the success of the Iranian Revolution showed that the proposal to Islamise modernity was not a utopia, but a feasible reality.

Iran is an thousand-year-old political structure that, going back to the Achaemenids, finds its legitimacy in both Shiism (89% of Iranians are Shiite, 10% are Sunni and 1% of other religions<sup>(2)</sup>) and the revolution; but it is neither monolithic nor immutable over time but, on the contrary, is a diverse society, thriving and tumultuous.<sup>(3)</sup>

And, throughout history, several empires have settled on Iranian territory, and this means the country has incorporated a variety of ethnic groups of which the most important are the Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, 8% Gilakis, Kurds 7%, Arabs 3%, Lurs 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%<sup>(4)</sup>, and, incidentally, the most important Jewish community in the area outside of Israel. There are also multiple languages, of which Farsi is the most important, being the mother tongue of at least half the Iranians and used by all. In addition, there are Farsi dialects in neighbouring countries.

This diversity introduces tensions in the political life of the country, in which nationalist movements and even insurrections appear. And on the contrary, it means that Iranian interests go beyond the current political boundaries of the state, extending into other countries formerly part of its empire, its cultural sphere and the Shiite world generally. However, Iranian foreign policy claims to have no territorial ambitions.

Iran occupies a vast area (1,650 km<sup>2</sup>, three times the size of Spain) that occupies a space traversed by several fault lines (religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural). Until the creation of the State of Afghanistan in 1747, (its consolidation as a buffer state is due to the Great Game) it was a border of the Indian, Turkish, Russian, and Chinese empires. It is on the route to the Middle East, the Caspian, Caucasus and Central Asia, in fact, it currently has 17 land and sea borders. The Persian empire covered the area between China and the Byzantine Empire, its great historic rival.

To this is added the world's second largest proven reserves of oil and gas (now fourth largest producer and fifth exporter) and the country's GDP is 33rd in the world. With its 75 million inhabitants (just over 1% of world population)

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<sup>(2)</sup> Various authors «Dossier Irán 2010». [www.maec.es](http://www.maec.es).

<sup>(3)</sup> KEDDLE, Niikki R. *El Irán moderno*. Verticales de bolsillo, Barcelona 2009.

<sup>(4)</sup> Various authors «Dossier Irán 2010». [www.maec.es](http://www.maec.es).



it occupies a central space in the growing Shiite community and it is willingly becoming a reference point for that secular religious minority. These circumstances make Iran an object of international attention, a kind of fault that is not only geological in nature (periodically catastrophic earthquakes occur in the country) straddling several worlds, what Brzezinski identified as one of the five geopolitical pivots of Eurasia, a strategic crossroads.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ Elements of Iranian Foreign Policy.

To understand a foreign policy it is essential to analyse those elements that determine it.

- *The Revolution of 1979*

Throughout the 19th century the interference of Western powers in Iran's political life was continuous. Persia was part of the Great Game and suffered territorial amputations. Less advanced than the neighbouring countries, its railways were not effectively operational until 1911.

But the events leading up to the Revolution can be traced back to the replacement in 1921 of the Qajar dynasty by the Pahlavi dynasty. A military coup, unlike the one in Turkey, did not establish a republic; this meant that the new regime did not have the legitimacy of Atatürk and that it also had to face a stronger and better organised religious power (Shiism is more structured than the Sunni world) without having the means to control it.<sup>(5)</sup> Thus, its capacity for modernisation –that is Westernisation– was more limited.

The overthrow by the Western powers of Dr Mosadeq in 1953 and the return of the Shah's powers are among the early causes of the Revolution of 1979 and is a determinant of the vision of the US. Thus, the Westernisation, undertaken by the Shah after 1963 with the name of «*White Revolution*» was identified with a dictatorial and corrupt regime working for the benefit of the privileged minorities and supervised by US interests; this coincided with the decline of secular nationalism. The Revolution brought down a heavily armed state with virtually no fighting

The answer to how the Revolution could gestate without being noticed lies in the fact that the country, despite its rapid development, retained its traditional structures intact, a power capable of facing up to Westernisation.<sup>(6)</sup>

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<sup>(5)</sup> HALLIDAY, Fred. «Contexto Sociopolítico: La política interna en Irán y efectos en su política exterior» various authors *Irán, potencia emergente en Oriente Medio. Implicaciones en la estabilidad del Mediterraneo*. Strategic Dossier N° 137, Ministry of Defence 2007, p. 28.

<sup>(6)</sup> DE PLANHOL, Javier. *Las naciones del Profeta*. Biblioteca del islam contemporáneo, Ediciones Bellaterra, Barcelona 1988, p. 667.

The Revolution owes much to the personal stamp of Khomeini who knew how to reconcile different aspirations and manage the opportunity to seize power and perpetuate himself as supreme leader. In 1980, he launched a cultural revolution that removed the Left in favour of the Islamists. The Iran-Iraq War, with its combination of revolutionary internationalism, nationalism and cult of martyrdom<sup>(7)</sup>, served to consolidate his regime and demonstrated the strength of a country treated cruelly by the silence of the International Community. The end of the war left one million dead, and a country plunged into economic chaos and greatly weakened militarily.<sup>(8)</sup>

The four ideological pillars of the Islamic Republic represent a proposal for an intense educational effort: the inseparability of religion and politics, the recovery of Islam, a cultural revolution and the establishment of the Islamic man.<sup>(9)</sup>

This results in a change in reference from national to transnational. Iran becomes the freed portion of the *Umma*,<sup>(10)</sup> while the resurgence of religious values is widely associated with national sentiment, an antidote to the loss of identity. The result is that whatever was Islamic became Iranian, giving the revolution a new identity.<sup>(11)</sup>

170 | Giving Islam a revolutionary dimension freed it from being seen as a factor that held the country back, while the West and its values were no longer equivalent to modernisation.<sup>(12)</sup> It was the first «*Revenge of God*» to use the terminology of Gilles Kepel.

Shiism (which in 1501 served to consolidate the country as a state under the Safavid dynasty) provides a significant contribution to the revolutionary political vision at different levels. It gives the discourse a messianic sense of narrative and rhetoric, an entire language for response to which is added the sense of grievance and humiliation of a persecuted minority (for some Muslims Shiism is a deviation, a heresy)<sup>(13)</sup>.

- *The Institutional System*

Cultures have a complete value system, a way of looking at the world. It must be understood that their values are almost identical, without major changes:

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<sup>(7)</sup> HALLIDAY, Fred. Op. cit., p.41.

<sup>(8)</sup> NÚÑEZ GARCÍA-SAUICO, Antonio. «Introducción» in VV.AA. *Irán como pivote geopolítico*. Ministry of Defence, 2010.

<sup>(9)</sup> TOSCANO, Roberto. «Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran: National Pride, Regime Prejudice» in Middle East US. Occasional Paper, 2011.

<sup>(10)</sup> DE PLANHOL, Javier. Op. cit., p. 667-669.

<sup>(11)</sup> Ibid, p. 667.

<sup>(12)</sup> Ibid, p.669.

<sup>(13)</sup> YANN, Richard. *El islam shii*. Ediciones Bellaterra, Madrid 1998.

what is varies in each is the way they are ordered. Consequently, each one incorporates its own systems for distributing power. Islamic democracy aims to bring modernity to these mechanisms.

It comes as the point where Islam and democracy are compatible because the Western conception of democracy is modified from a religious perspective, freeing it of Western preconceptions and resulting in a system of government in which political freedoms are made compatible with the religious nature of public space.

Thus, the existence of political parties and even the freedom of the press is possible, providing always that one assumes and does not question Islamic principles, values and norms. That is the crux, since the frame can be enlarged or reduced at will, making the religious sphere more or less extensive at the expense of the public sphere.

This debate emerged when secularism was associated with the voluntarism of authoritarian post-colonial leaders, which is why, in the Muslim world, conflict occurs between democracy and secularism.

Khomeini's proposal, in his famous work «*Velayat e Faqih*» (The guardian jurist) falls in line with this, a kind of political theology that brings political and spiritual issues closer together– it also secularises religion and ends by putting the interests of the state first through bodies such as the Council for the Discernment of State Interests: the jurist in power can ignore the Sharia in the name of reality. Clerics are thus well embedded in the structure of the State<sup>(14)</sup> and subject to its reasons.

A Governor is not only the autocrat who interprets and applies the laws, but, in a sense, has the same powers as the Prophet and accommodates the rules to the circumstances, all of which fits well with Shiite esotericism, which is much more flexible in religious interpretation than most of Islam.<sup>(15)</sup> The pragmatism of Islamic politicians is not less than that of other politicians and also carries a religious endorsement.

- *Political Life*

The criticism that can be made of this system is that it creates a deficit of legitimacy by placing some issues beyond politics and submitting them to a filter made by non-democratic candidates. Thus, not all ideas are represented and this leads to political-clerical control of the regime that prevents the entry of peripheral elements and thus regeneration. To this must be added an electoral

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<sup>(14)</sup> YANN, Richard. Op. cit.

<sup>(15)</sup> KHALAJI, Mehdi. «El declive de la ideología islámica» in VV.AA La Vanguardia Dossier N. 24/ 2007 «Iran por dentro» pp.36-40.

control system whose means and singularities make fraud or, at least, doubt possible.

Moreover, it happens that democratically elected leaders are subject to the authority of others who have been selected by religious power, thus turning the regime into a theocracy, an «*impossible republic*» in which authoritarian features dominate the democratic ones and religion is used to impose a political regime.

It is also true that all this occurs within the framework of a set of institutional counterweights and balances which are intended to promote the culture of internal consensus within the clerical-political elite to avoid any shadow of personalistic absolutism.<sup>(16)</sup>

However, the Iranian regime is far from monolithic; in shaping its policies multiple factions, organisations and personalities are involved, each with specific interests.<sup>(17)</sup>

For example, the Iranian foreign policy complex consists of three decision-making levels. First, formal decision-makers, second informal decision-makers, and thirdly influences.<sup>(18)</sup> Thus, multiple power centres are incorporated: the Supreme Leader's office, Parliament, the Presidency, the IRGC (Ahmadinejad was a Pasdaran volunteer and he has made his clientele from this organisation<sup>(19)</sup>), the religious establishment, but also organisations and again formal and informal councils.<sup>(20)</sup>

Although they are solid, these consensus-made decisions look chaotic.<sup>(21)</sup> They have always balanced regional, international and internal circumstances. A balance subject to fluctuation and one which generates uncertainties but which has managed to maintain a degree of consistency in external action.<sup>(22)</sup>

As a result of this, some authors speak of an «*oligarchic republic*» «a mesocracy unresponsive to Western standards based on clientelism and the distribution of oil revenues

Thus, in addition to the Revolutionary Guard, other beneficiaries of oil dividends are *Basij*, who constitute a force capable of mobilising several hundreds

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<sup>(16)</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano. «Irán: sociedad, política y economía» in VV.AA. *Irán como pivote geopolítico*. Ministry of Defence, 2010.

<sup>(17)</sup> NASR, Vali «La nueva potencia hegemónica» VV.AA *La Vanguardia Dossier N. 24/ 2007 «Iran por dentro» pp.18-26-26.*

<sup>(18)</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano. Op. cit.

<sup>(19)</sup> KHOSROKHAVAR, Farhad «La nueva sociedad iraní y el poder político conservador» in VV.AA *La Vanguardia Dossier N. 24/2007 «Iran por dentro» p. 13.*

<sup>(20)</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano. Op. cit.

<sup>(21)</sup> NASR, Vali Op. cit. pp.18-26

<sup>(22)</sup> HALLIDAY, Fred. Op. cit., p. 46-47.

of thousands of men( some say the figure is 10 million). These are the 21st century *sans-culottes*, the proletariat of the cities (Tehran has at least 8.5 million people), the moral force of the regime, or the revolutionary foundations that have great influence as they control around 25% of GDP and do not pay taxes.<sup>(23)</sup>

In turn, these organisations and networks are controlled by people connected with the other members of the clerical-political-military elite by family, economic, regional and political ties, making it difficult to untangle the web of relationships that keeps the political system running.<sup>(24)</sup>

Another issue is that the lines of demarcation of political parties do not match those of their Western counterparts and exceed the left-right dichotomy, composing a plural and diverse mosaic. As local activist wrote when describing his family:

*«My father is a clergyman, but he does not believe in theocracy. One of my brothers is a veteran who was wounded in the Iran-Iraq War, my other brother is a member of the Basij [militia] and I am a Marxist ... the day when the officials came to arrest me, they thought they had gone to the wrong address, because on the wall was a picture of Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as a photograph of Ayatollah Khamenei.. A photo of Ahmadinejad had been there until recently, but my brother broke it into pieces when Ahmadinejad did not kiss Khamenei's hand during the ceremony for his presidential inauguration in 2009»<sup>(25)</sup>.*

## ■ Society and Economy in Iran

The history of Iran has created a unique and syncretic culture where East and West, secularity and religion, urban and rural were mixed and served to accelerate the construction of a nation-state; it was based in the Persian speaking cities, which caused it to come quite often into conflict with particular identities.<sup>(26)</sup>

Iranian society is a young one (its population has doubled since the revolution; there are around 35 million Iranians under 20 years old), and it is strong, cultured and contradictory. It is not a monolithic society (races and different languages mean it is necessarily diverse) nor is it static: it has undergone remarkable changes since the Revolution (for example, a process of urbanisation that has led to the urban population to grow from 40 to 69%, which in turn brought

<sup>(23)</sup> SCHIRAZI, Asghar «Una republica imposible» en VV.AA. La Vanguardia Dossier núm. 24/ 2007 «Iran por dentro» pp.18-26.

<sup>(24)</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano. Op. cit.

<sup>(25)</sup> Quoted by REKONDO, Txente. «El pulso político tras el telón electoral en Irán» en [www.rebelión.org](http://www.rebelión.org).

<sup>(26)</sup> DE PLANHOL, Javier. Op. cit., p. 667-669.

its proletarianisation), a process which, incidentally, has been institutionalised and so somewhat held back.

And, if Iranian society apparently satisfies the rules, the facts do not match; the incorporation of women into the labour market is striking, despite the minor role to which they seemed relegated (65% of the teachers and students are female), or the presence of between 2 and 3 million drug addicts<sup>(27)</sup>, (possibly 4, 60% of prisoners are in jail for drug-related offences). There is also talk of a loss of the sense of religiosity that may be related to government campaigns to preserve and monitor the adapting of personal conduct to its moral prescriptions. One of the debates in the 2009 election was the weight of the clergy in the political system, which the «*Conservative*» Ahmadinejad was trying to reduce.

A society that, despite apparently being closed (satellite dishes are banned and Internet access controlled) Persian is one of the major languages on the Internet, and is used by around 22 million Iranians. Moreover, the better educated and trained people emigrate, which, although taking its toll, guarantees a connection to the outside world.

Some authors point to a split between the political system and real society, that political Islam is in decline, but the policy keeps its Islamist slant. What is not at all debatable is that the regime is stable. In short, the political scene is still depicted in black and white, with two major trends, the official one and the opposition, ignoring the complex heterogeneity of ideological and political fields.

And there are many problems that beset the country, including unemployment of about 20%<sup>(28)</sup> in 2011, which some sources put at 30%; in 2011 inflation was 21%<sup>(29)</sup>, rising to 27% for the whole of 2012, forcing devaluation. Some sources place it at 40%. The economy is short on food (30%, a serious strategic dependence, making the country vulnerable) and, as a result of sanctions, access to technology is limited; Iran, for example, must import the gasoline it consumes. All this is combined with an uneven distribution of oil wealth<sup>(30)</sup> placing more than 18.7% (2007)<sup>(31)</sup> of the population below the poverty line.

Nevertheless, President Ahmadinejad's decision to abolish state subsidies («*bring oil revenues to the table*» in his language) and to replace them by di-

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<sup>(27)</sup> VATANCA, Alex. «Republic enemy. US policy and Iranian elections». *Janes Intelligence Review*, 2008 p. 8.

<sup>(28)</sup> KHAJEHPOUR, Bijan. «The Impacts of Internal and External Tensions on the Iranian Economy» in *Middle East Program. Occasional Paper*, 2011.

<sup>(29)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>(30)</sup> Income is monopolized by a minority. The 10% of the population with the highest income has 30% of income, while the poorest 10%, has only 1.6%.

<sup>(31)</sup> *CIA World Fact Book*.

rect payments in cash based on income, has earned the gratitude of the lower classes, but has impoverished the middle class and widened the serious gap between rich and poor.<sup>(32)</sup>

Its inefficient economic system tends towards the centralised model. The State is omnipresent, controlling between 67 and 88%<sup>(33)</sup> of the GDP. In addition, between 80 and 85% of export earnings and 70% of state revenues in 2007 depended on oil, giving rise to an investment economy<sup>(34)</sup> and growth which is accused of impoverishing the nation by promoting a culture of subsidy and discouraging innovation.

Iran, was a developing state before the Revolution, and between 1960 and 1979 grew 9% per annum. After the severe economic recession in the years after the revolution and the war with Iraq, Iran grew 7.5% between 1989 and 2003, while in recent years this growth has declined significantly as a result primarily of economic sanctions, especially financial ones, imposed because of its nuclear<sup>(35)</sup> programme. Growth remains positive, however (in 2011 grew was 3.2% to March and for the same period of 2012 it is expected to be 2.5%).

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

The praxis of Iran's foreign policy is difficult to discern from its domestic policy, as the two overlap. Ahmadinejad's election, for example, was an internal issue, but its consequences have been abroad.

The keys to Iran's policies are different from ours; the linear and mechanistic thinking stemming from interpreting it using our patterns does not work, which does not make it irrational, but of a different rationale, its own. A bazaar policy, in arabesque, that moves forwards and backwards and in which various actors, not always in the same line, make statements.

Iran's foreign policy is a «dual policy» *combining export of revolution with national interests*; a debate on the primacy of Islam or Iran, an issue on which<sup>(36)</sup> successive leaders have tried to find a balance –not always easy or stable– between that vision and a pragmatic approach to international relations based on political calculations and interests.

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<sup>(32)</sup> MARTIN, Javier. «Teherán y Riad guerra entre bambalinas» <http://www.fp-es.org/teheran-y-riad-guerra-entre-bambalinas>.

<sup>(33)</sup> MALEKI, Abbas. Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>(34)</sup> HAKIMINIAN, Hassan «La economía después de la revolución» in VV.AA La Vanguardia Dossier núm. 24/2007 «Inside Iran» p. 75.

<sup>(35)</sup> KHOSROKHAVAR, Farhad. Op. cit., p. 8-15.

<sup>(36)</sup> HALLIDAY, Fred Op. cit., p. 35.

The analysis covers a wide range of aspects; consequently attempts are made to subsume them into a triple field: global, regional and those referred to their cultural environment. Iran's foreign policy should be made from a triple imperial, revolutionary and religious<sup>(37)</sup> dimension distinguishing between form and content, without forgetting the interrelationship of the two.

Iran has renounced recovery of the territories lost throughout the 19th century. There is no desire for territorial expansion but, occasionally, sporadic claims arise on Bahrain, recalling that it was a province of ancient Persia and that it holds three islands of the United Arab Emirates occupied since the days of the Shah. Iran is presented as a *'soft power'* «constructive and compounder in the cultural sphere.

Iranian foreign policy can be divided into three phases; the first is the export of the revolution that covers the period from 1979 to 1989. The revolutionary movement's Termidor with its incorporation into the international system, first at the hand of President Rafsanjani and then that of President Khatami which lasted until 2005, when the ascent of Ahmadinejad marked a new rhetoric of confrontation.

The Guide (since 1989) Khamenei is pragmatic and seeks to integrate Iran into its regional environment: collaboration on common security issues, financial aid without conditioning factors and facilities to use the territory as a strategic corridor. Khatami proposed a dialogue of civilisations, respect for the territorial integrity of the countries and the right to non-interference in internal affairs, while ratifying his position on Palestine.<sup>(38)</sup>

Overall there are three aspects of Ahmadinejad's policy that must be carefully analysed, namely, the export of the revolutionary model, the challenge to the West and the nuclear issue. Their combination defines the place the country should occupy in the world, in Islam and the region.

Iran has transferred the vindictive Shiite feeling to Islam, and is presented as the champion of a persecuted Islam and guardian of its essences. The point is that the bridges between Sunnis and Shiites can also contribute to the strategic isolation of Saudi Arabia

Salman Rushdie's case is paradigmatic. Ayatollah Khomeini's condemnation of a Sunni writer of Indian descent (naturalized British) for his book was a challenge to the West. It set Khomeini at the forefront of the Islamic world, consolidated him in power and built a bridge between Shiites and Sunnis. Through this act, he recovered the initiative and once again put Iran and its revolution on the international scene, giving it presence and visibility. It was

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<sup>(37)</sup> HALLIDAY, Fred Op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>(38)</sup> ZACCARA, Luciano «Irán y sus vecinos árabes» in *Revista Nación Árabe* Verano 2002 p. 87.



like a lighthouse pointing the way for all Muslims, and a defiant and combative staging that gave them back their dignity.<sup>(39)</sup> Ahmadinejad's rhetoric has made him very popular in the Sunni world.

The result is a paradox: Iran, to Western eyes, is the champion of the Arab world when it is actually Persian; it is the leader of the Islamic world when Shiism is a minority branch that has been persecuted for centuries.

The challenge to the West is declared part of the country's anti-imperialism, so is its staunch defence of the principle of '*no interference*'; at the same time it conducted activities outside its own territory. Its support for groups like Hezbollah or Hamas, both on the lists of terrorist organisations in some countries, must be mentioned, as well as the country's past and proven involvement in terrorist activities in Germany and Argentina.

The issue of human rights is another level of confrontation that serves to demonise the regime. The violation of fundamental rights such as the right to assembly, petition, freedom of opinion and religion and intimacy, violence in the performance of law enforcement, torture and public –and even publicized executions– (used as a challenge) using procedures from the past (including minors and homosexuals) have raised international condemnation on many occasions.

Another crucial aspect is the nuclear issue. In 1957, the US signed an agreement with Iran planning the installation of 23 nuclear power plants by the end of the 20th century.<sup>(40)</sup> Khomeini was opposed to nuclear weapons and abandoned these projects. In 2002, satellite pictures showed two clandestine nuclear sites and, in 2003, President Khatami announced Iran would abandon its uranium enrichment programme. The coming-to-power of Ahmadinejad in 2005 marked the return of nuclear aspirations and the clash with the International Community as a whole.

Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; the country has the right to use this technology for civilian purposes, but its conduct has not proved reliable (however, the guide Khamenei reiterated his will not acquire the weapon<sup>(41)</sup>). This, together with Iran's anti-Israeli rhetoric makes the matter even trickier. His statement is the essence of the challenge. He uses it as a lever to change status in the region; it is not likely that he can – or wants – to get the weapon as North Korea did, before the eyes of the impotent West that stands by in humiliation, watching how the problem is chopped into successive slices like a piece of salami. But Iran, is not Korea, the Middle East or Northeast Asia.

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<sup>(39)</sup> YANN, Richard. *El islam shií*. Op. cit.

<sup>(40)</sup> CARPINTERO, Natividad. «Introducción» in VV.AA. *Irán como pivote geopolítico*. Ministry of Defence, 2010.

<sup>(41)</sup> [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/30/actualidad/1346313608\\_928272.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/08/30/actualidad/1346313608_928272.html).

If there is something that all members of the Security Council and Germany (Group 5 +1) agree on, it is that Iran should not have nuclear weapons<sup>(42)</sup>. A nuclear Iran would upset the balance in the area and could lead to an arms race in the region (Saudi Arabia and possibly Turkey would add to it), and it would put more stress on Israel.

Iran, with its programme is trying to take the technological (and industrial) leadership according to a nationalism that needs results. Iran has been successful in fields such as computer science, nanotechnology or the military industry, and is among the nine countries in the world capable of putting a satellite and launch vehicle into orbit; its «*Shahab 3*» missiles have a 1300 km range. This same logic of credibility leads to the country's naval presence in the Horn of Africa as part of the efforts to combat piracy.

US relations with Iran intensified in the second half of the 20th century, after the departure of the British and the nationalisation of the «*Anglo Iranian Oil Company*». As noted above, in 1953 and in the context of the Cold War, the US sponsored a coup leading to a strategic relationship, which, for 29 years, made Iran the gendarme of the West in the region.

After the revolution, Khomeini demonised the US – «the Great Satan»– *for having supported the former regime*. And when the US temporarily admitted the Shah, its embassy staff were kidnapped and held them for 444 days. All this shocked the Middle East; this period coincided with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. At the time, President Carter was accused of losing Iran as Truman had lost China.<sup>(43)</sup>

The problems with Iran go beyond the rational terrain and enter into the emotional sphere. However, some people suggest that in part this is due to the absence of communication channels that contribute to détente, as happened during the Cold War itself.<sup>(44)</sup>

But it is also true that since the first Gulf War in 1991 the US has come to surround Iran by moving forces (to a greater or lesser extent, temporarily or permanently) to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq led to major American presence on the Iranian border itself. A well-known joke in Iran says that Canada and Iran are the only countries in the world whose only boundary is the US.<sup>(45)</sup>

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<sup>(42)</sup> SOLANA, Javier. «Hacia un consenso en Siria» <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/toward-a-syria-consensus-by-javier-solana/spanish>.

<sup>(43)</sup> CLAWSON, Patrick. «The red lines. How to progress in US Iran Policy» The Washington Institute Working paper. 2010 [www.washingtoninstitute.org](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org).

<sup>(44)</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>(45)</sup> PATRIKARAKOS, David. «Iranian Impasse». ISN, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Switzerland 2010.

The disagreement with the US has been attributed to the nuclear issue, Iran's opposition to the peace process or to Iranian support for international terrorism. Iran calls on the US not to interfere in its internal affairs, accept the legitimacy of the revolution and build their relations on respect and equality. It wants Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to be accepted as within Iran's area of influence<sup>(46)</sup>, making it the greatest Islamic power, definitely displacing Turkey or Saudi Arabia.

As a result, the US helped Iraq during the war (1980-1988), further isolating Iran diplomatically. In 1996, the Amato law imposed sanctions on foreign companies that invested in Iran's energy sector.

In 2002 the US placed Iran on the «*Axis of Evil*» while Khatami was trying to bring the countries closer by tacitly supporting the US invasion of Afghanistan; this statement was answered from Iran with a joint appearance of all the regime's representative lines including the spiritual leader Khamenei (supported by the hard-line fundamentalists), Khatami (reformist) and Rafsanjani (technocrat and former president).<sup>(47)</sup> Iran, meanwhile, has not lagged behind and has continued to add more tension to the region, putting pressure on the Gulf countries and hindering American initiatives within its strategic environment.

Iran has transferred its historical hatred of Russia and the UK to the US, making it the target of Iran's imperialist and anti-colonial rhetoric, but also trying to measure its importance by that of its rivals and thus becoming leader of the Islamic world. Hence also Iran's confrontation with the '*Small Satan*' «(Israel) who Iran fights indirectly by supporting organisations like Hezbollah or Hamas in the complex Middle East scenario, achieving political capital and leadership in the eyes of the Islamic world.

The EU, whose borders would reach Iran if Turkey enters the Community, has maintained a firm, open hand policy towards this country. Strict sanctions, such as the oil embargo, the consequences of which are geopolitical in nature, although they oblige the sanctioning countries to find new suppliers, altering the balance established. The EU, which maintains its differences with US (the Venus and Mars policy in the words of Kagan), has overcome Iran's attempts to fracture their concerted action in this country (such as its proposal to negotiate the oil market in Euros).

Spanish policy toward Iran is subservient to European policy; thus, the Alliance of Civilisations proposal made jointly by Spain and Turkey, taking up one of Khatami's ideas on «*Dialogue of Civilisations*» should be remembered; so should the Spanish Security Strategy that views with concern the attitude of Iran on the nuclear issue.

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<sup>(46)</sup> NASR, Vali Op. cit. pp.18-26.

<sup>(47)</sup> AMUZEGAR, Jahangir «*Iran crumbling Revolution*» en *Foreign Affairs Magazine* January/February 2003 p. 47-50.

The BRIC understand the reconfiguration of regional powers best simply because they are taking part in them. Thus, Russia and China make Iranian politics move towards the north and east to counter the influence of the US.<sup>(48)</sup> However, the red lines of these countries are clear: a nuclear-free Iran, peace in the Middle East and a stable business partner who can ensure its energy supplies. It should be noted that Chinese pragmatism has provided significant military supplies to Iran and is well positioned in the oil market.

The problem of the pipelines is of geopolitical importance because they free the EU from its dependence on Russian gas. The «*Persian pipeline*» that would link with the Nabucco pipeline and among whose detractors are Russia and Saudi Arabia, is affected by these political difficulties. Another relevant pipeline would link Iran with Pakistan and India to ensure supply to that emerging economy.

Turkey and Iran are two competing empires. Turkey is no longer a pariah and has become an essential model and actor because of its relevance and spectrum of relationships.<sup>(49)</sup> The Turkish resurgence is seen as a threat by both Saudis and Iranians.<sup>(50)</sup> Both involve antithetical Islamisation proposals, Turkey is re-Islamisation from below and Iran, re-Islamisation from above. However, the model that seems to have been most widely accepted during the Arab Spring is the Turkish AKP.

Along with shared problems, such as the Kurdish issue, there is a struggle between Turkey and Iran over market penetration by the Caucasus' first country, taking advantage of the fact that they are all Turkmen peoples. At the same time, Turkey's relations with Israel are viewed with disfavour from Iran and used by anti-Turkish elements in the country to limit Turkey's access to the Iranian market.<sup>(51)</sup>

Despite sharing a general cause, the heterogeneous phenomenon called the Arab Spring encompasses many different cases. The Iranian government regarded it favourably (Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen ...) in so far as it involved a re-Islamisation of politics in line with the values it upheld. The Syrian case was an exception, as far as it was in tune with Iran thus making it face its own contradictions.

Syria, a country with low average income (ranked 119 in the Human Development Index, 2011), ruled since 1963 by the Ba'ath as a property regime. The

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<sup>(48)</sup> [http://www.rferl.org/content/Irán\\_azerbaijan\\_caucasus\\_georgia\\_assassinations/24487468.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Irán_azerbaijan_caucasus_georgia_assassinations/24487468.html).

<sup>(49)</sup> OZKAN, Mekmet «Significance of Turkey-Brazil Nuclear Deal with Iran» Working Paper. <http://www.caluniv.ac.in/ifps/Article1/ozkan%20web%20article.pdf>.

<sup>(50)</sup> GÓMEZ ÁNGEL, Catalina «Arabia Saudí-Irán guerra fría entre musulmanes» in *Política Exterior*, November/December 2011 p.148.

<sup>(51)</sup> *Ibidem*.

Ba'ath party defines itself as Arab nationalist and socialist, and was founded by a Christian and Alawite (70% of the population is Sunni while the Alawites are in power) has made secularism and Arabism its rallying point.

Despite ideological incompatibilities with a secular regime, Iran has maintained a strategic relationship with Syria since the Revolution. Syria supported Iran during the Iraq war, and Iran does not forget it. Syria is seen from Tehran as a gateway to the Sunni and Arab world that breaks its strategic encirclement. Syria and Iran united against the US and Israel. The point is that the civil war has begun and can spread to countries such as the Lebanon; it is also importing Jihadists. The attitude taken by Hezbollah is key.

Thus, the Arab Spring in Syria brings Iran face to face with its contradictions. The Muslim Brotherhood, the base of the Hamas party installed in the Gaza Strip and Iran's allies are now the country's enemies in Syria. Its re-islamisation rhetoric does not work when it supports a secular regime.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia support the rebels. The Ba'ath government can already consider the war to be lost in the short or medium term; all that is needed is the agreement of Russia and China. The issue is to provide an outlet so the forces currently in power do not entrench themselves.<sup>(52)</sup>

In other cases, such as Bahrain (base of the V Fleet), this movement affected the country's Shiite majority, under the authority of Sunni rulers who treated Shiites as second class citizens (in fact, the rulers have for years admitted Sunnis as citizens to offset the population unbalance); protests brought the temporary movement of troops from Saudi Arabia to try to control the movement, and Iran was accused of instigating the protests. Bahrain gives control of the eastern Persian Gulf.<sup>(53)</sup>

The Gulf countries maintain ambivalent relations with Iran, a result of the presence of large Shiite populations (Bahrain (60%), Iraq (62%), Kuwait (33%), Yemen (45%) and the UAE (17%).<sup>(54)</sup> Thus, Iran is considered a strategic threat that Saudi Arabia, despite its enormous investments in security cannot compensate – in 1981 the Gulf Cooperation Council was established to address this issue – but Iran is also a privileged business partner: trade has increased sevenfold between 2000 and 2007.

The dual nature of the relationship is of someone who can neither give way nor challenge and this inevitably opens the door to the entry of the US (and NATO) in the region to restore its balance. So, in 2009, Oman and Iran signed an agree.

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<sup>(52)</sup> SOLANA, Javier. Op. cit.

<sup>(53)</sup> TALT, Robert. «Iran still center of middle east great game» en [http://www.rferl.org/content/is\\_irán\\_still\\_center\\_of\\_mideast\\_great\\_game/3556457.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/is_irán_still_center_of_mideast_great_game/3556457.html).

<sup>(54)</sup> Various authors «Dossier Irán 2010». [www.maec.es](http://www.maec.es).

ment on security cooperation. Kuwait has said it will not allow its territory to be used for military action against Iran. The United Arab Emirates spend billions to defend themselves against an alleged Iranian threat, while enjoying a solid business relationship with the country. Qatar has openly opposed Iran's nuclear enrichment programme but has rejected sanctions as counterproductive. To add to the complexity of the situation, we can mention the tensions in relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar that, in turn, affects the latter's relations with Iran.

Saudi Arabia, following the Iranian Revolution replaced Iran as guardian of Western interests in the Middle East, signing an unnatural alliance (complementary to those signed in 1945 on the battleship Quincy) which, although it gives the country strength, according to quite a few local people, it inevitably subtracts from its legitimacy and leadership in the area.

Head of the Sunni world and with an important Shiite community in their territories, Saudi Arabia is Iran's strategic rival in the region; this rivalry is exacerbated by the historic disaffection between Shiites and Sunnis, something which is also used internally. Saudi Arabia tried to break the Iranian-Syrian axis created in 1988 to deal with Saddam Hussein by supporting the opposition and Islamist movements and stands as champion among the Sunni rulers of the Gulf States. But it is also a country with serious internal imbalances that add to its sclerotic political system.

The defeat of the Taliban to the east (supported by the Saudis) and of Iraq freed Iran from two traditional enemies. Iraq is one of the countries in the area that has undergone the greatest changes over the past decade, for well-known reasons. In fact, it has followed a reciprocal route to Syria (a Sunni country controlled by an Alawite minority, in contrast to Iraq, which was a Shi'a country controlled by a Sunni minority until it was occupied).

The result is that the country has been influenced at all levels by Iran with whom it has signed major economic agreements but which, however, has hosted major Western military forces. The Iraqi Shiites, however, feel that above all they are Iraqis and Arabs. Moreover, a Shiite power in Iraq could shift the Shiite focus from Iran and bring it to its founding Arab origin. And it should be remembered that it was the Shiite majorities from both countries that fought against each other in the eighties.

The lie of the land complicates Iran's borders and favours the actions of terrorists and guerrilla groups, such as the insurgency in north-Western Azerbaijan, Jondollah terrorists in the East, or the smugglers and traffickers of Afghan opium, which all together cause public order problems, and a huge cost in resources and human lives.

Iran sees Afghanistan and Pakistan as artificial states . In fact, much of Afghanistan and Iran shared the same political space until 1857, that is, for some 2500 years; Persian was the Afghan court language until it was replaced by Afghan Pashtun after the Second World War.

During the Soviet occupation insurgency, Iran supported the Persian language insurgency and was an actor behind the scenes during the Civil War (1992-1996) when it confronted Taliban forces, backed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. When the Taliban took power, Iran was on the brink of armed conflict with them. Since the invasion in 2001, Iran has promoted dialogue and understanding by supporting reconstruction and promoting Persian culture and its religious viewpoint.

The issue of refugees remains an outstanding question. In early 2007, Iran declared its intention to deport a million Afghans within one year, causing a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and a major domestic political crisis. Currently, there are more than one million refugees on Iranian territory.

The Baloch are a Sunni minority living mainly in south-eastern Iran and on both sides of the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are the ethnic majority in the Sistan and Baluchestan province (numbering about 600,000 in the mid-eighties). The Baloch speak Indo-Iranian, different from Persian and more like Pashto, and are mostly Sunni. These ethnic-religious differences have been a source of tension, and has Iran has been accused of ethnic-religious persecution.

As mentioned, the terrorist group «Jondollah» *that operates in the area finds refuge in Pakistan. The group seeks reunification with its Pakistani and Afghani brethren and the creation of the» Greater Baluchistan.*» Kurdish terrorism cooperates with the Baloch and other minorities. But the PJAK, who also has operational bases in Iraq, seeks greater autonomy for the 7 million Kurds living in Iran; both are Sunni groups, the difference being that the PJAK is based on socialist roots.<sup>(55)</sup>

In the South Caucasus is Azerbaijan, a Shiite country that was part of Iran's empire but with a more secular consciousness than their southern neighbours; within its political make-up are pro-Iranian and pro-Turkish parties. It should be noted that 21 million Azeris live in Iran, three times more than in Azerbaijan (Mousavi, Ahmadinejad's election rival in 2009 was of this ethnic group).

As a living expression of pragmatism in its foreign policy, it should be said that during the Nagorno Karabakh war, Iran, along with Russia, forgetting any pan-Shiite sentiment, supported Christian Armenia against Turkey. This calls into question many current constructs on a unified Shiite movement driven by Iran.

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<sup>(55)</sup> VATANCA, Alex. Op. cit., p 7.

Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan are in turn strained because of NLM-SA's activities (*National Liberation Movement of Southern Azerbaijan*), a terrorist group in northern Iran that seeks the secession of the three provinces with Iranian Azeri population, and their union with Azerbaijan. The group's activities are condemned by Baku, but not with the intensity that Tehran would wish; today relations with the country have improved but they are not free from tensions and mutual accusations.

Iran is also present in Central Asia where it is a leading player for historical, cultural and economic reasons. To this must be added the presence of ethnic minorities on either side of the border, forcing complex equilibriums with both countries and with all of them together. It competes for domination in this region with Turkey and Russia.

This is an area on the Caspian Sea (there is disagreement on the distribution of this maritime space and, subsequently, of the wealth it houses) from which it considers it can escape the siege of the Western powers and which it identifies as one of its backyards. These countries value the strategic situation of Iran and the possibility of access to the southern seas, an escape route from the Russian Empire

Tajikistan is the only country from the former Soviet Union whose peoples speak a dialect of Farsi. Iran has been present in its political life, playing a peacekeeping role in past conflicts. In Uzbekistan, nationalists' fear the development of Tajik culture linked to separatism leads it to depict itself to the West as a dam against the expansionism of the Russian and Persian empires. Relations with Kyrgyzstan are fluid,<sup>(56)</sup> as they are with Turkmenistan (Iran was the first country to recognise it after independence in 1991) with which it has fruitful economic relations.

It has also established relationships with alternative players in the geopolitical periphery to break the blockade to which it is subjected. Venezuela is the most important country with which it shares anti-imperialist rhetoric, rejection of the current international order; it also has a seat in OPEC. This relationship involves political and economic cooperation and contributes to open the Americas to Iran. Along with Venezuela, other countries from the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) such as Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua share the same viewpoint. To these are added Argentina and Brazil that have important trade relations with Iran, but these countries avoid giving them any visibility that could harm their relations with the US<sup>(57)</sup>

Outside Latin America, we must mention relations with African countries, although they are weaker because of factionalism, the complexities of domestic

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<sup>(56)</sup> JANI, Feruza «Relations between Iran and Central Asia» en <http://enews.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2520>

<sup>(57)</sup> CORDESMAN, Anthony H. «U.S. and Iranian Strategic competition: the impact of Latin America, Africa and other peripheral States.» [www.csic.org/burke/reports/](http://www.csic.org/burke/reports/)



policy, and lack of continuity of political leadership of those countries. Senegal, Gambia<sup>(58)</sup>, Zimbabwe and South Africa maintain most relations with Iran. The West's efforts have weakened the development of relations with Zimbabwe, whose President Robert Mugabe uses the same kind of rhetoric as President Chavez.<sup>(59)</sup>

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

After the era of bipolarity and after a prolonged internal crisis, Iran joins what Fareed Zakaria calls «the rise of the others» and seeks its place as a regional power, altering existing paradigms and balances, while contributing an added uncertainty to a troubled area.

The Middle East has multiple centres of power that maintain interlaced relations, a kind of Ouija. However, it seems the Syrian issue will be resolved in the short to medium term, thus significantly altering regional balances.

Iran looks to the East and North as its natural and historical development space, where it can compensate, together with others, the forces that try to limit it and escape from its traditional rivals.

The problem with Iran is not a religious one, although sometimes the demands are expressed on this plane, but of power and influence. As if it were an Achaemenid archer, Iran tries to fire into the second sector, over the obstacles posed to the country's ambitions; through its nuclear challenge it aims to redefine the country's status, hence its singular desire for visibility. It banks on the East to rebalance the set of forces and aims to be the definitive Islamic force, displacing powerful countries like Turkey, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, and aspiring to a status equivalent to that of India.

It presents itself as Shiite world leader, which goes beyond Iran's ethnic and territorial boundaries (Shiism is installed in Iraq, the Gulf States, Afghanistan) and has its holy sites in another country (Iraq). Its anti-imperialist rhetoric identifies Iran as representative of the wretched of the earth, in Halliday's words, «Shiism did not imply both abstention from the world and from politics so much as a rebellious compromise with them.»<sup>(60)</sup>

Moreover, after more than thirty years, the revolution has ossified, imposing its rigidities on a culturally dynamic society that has undergone profound changes since 1979. This can be seen, in negative terms, by the regime's attempts to

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<sup>(58)</sup> TAIT, Robert. «Iran Dealt Losing Hand In Gambia» Radio Free Europe Nov. 2010.

<sup>(59)</sup> CORDESMAN, Anthony H. Op. cit.

<sup>(60)</sup> SÁNCHEZ, Encarnación. «La revolución iraní. Una retrospectiva histórica en su 33 aniversario» <http://encarnahernandez.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/>.

control access to the Internet or presence of satellite dishes. But, islands are not possible in the 21st century, the Iranian diaspora, for example, which includes the most qualified segment of the population, will eventually impose new ideas.

No culture is monolithic, but internally contradictory and susceptible to develop in different directions, and no regime, not even this one can ignore the reality of society on which it is installed. A regime can be reformed by democratic means, without violence, but that does not mean the absence of tension. If a re-Islamisation of the bases must correspond with a re-Islamisation of the leadership, an equal movement must occur during secularisation. Nevertheless, this requires such deep structural reforms that, if they were carried out, would alter the balance of the state (by affecting the religious establishment and the nomenclature) and might destabilise the regime and precipitate its fall<sup>(61)</sup>, as happened in the opposite case in Algeria in 1987.

This regime uses repression effectively<sup>(62)</sup> and derives its legitimacy from religion; this, combined with the lack of political leadership of the opposition, makes it difficult that Iran might succumb to movements like the Arab Spring. The green tide of 2009 only demanded democratic reforms—in contrast to cases like Egypt and Tunisia which addressed economic problems or corruption even if Iran is not far behind in these aspects<sup>(63)</sup>—and it was violently suppressed.

The Iranian nationalist character prevents the solution its problems coming from outside, any attempt to interfere directly in its internal affairs, as has been done so far,<sup>(64)</sup> will fail. Acting on the fracture lines (ethnic, political or religious) may have some success,<sup>(65)</sup> but if done openly the effort will be wasted. The dialectical nature of international relations means that leaving open a door will assist the Democrats in their struggle, while closing it will only serve to consolidate the power of the hard-liners. Therefore, to continue negotiations without forgetting the past and the meaning of the negotiations themselves is the route to be taken.

The economy is the Achilles heel of a heavily oil-dependent Iran that also suffers from wealth distribution problems (Ahmadinejad's Basijidis course is aimed at the underprivileged). However, notable efforts have been made to diversify sources of income. In this sense, the oil embargo hurts those groups whose income is from oil, and these are the people who are currently the re-

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<sup>(61)</sup> MALEKI, Abbas. Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>(62)</sup> WILNER, Alexander. «US and Iranian Strategic competition: Iran's Perceptions of its Internal Developments and their Implications for Strategic Competition with the U.S. in the Gulf», [www.csic.org/burke/reports/](http://www.csic.org/burke/reports/)

<sup>(63)</sup> JAHAN BEGLOO, Ramin. «Teherán y la Primavera Árabe» El Pais Newspaper, 6th August, p. 25.

<sup>(64)</sup> AMUZEGAR, Jahangir Op. cit. p. 44.

<sup>(65)</sup> CLAWSON, Patrick. Op. cit.

gime's main supporters. The problem is that, because oil is a critical and market regulated resource, a project of this type can be like trying to command the tides in the long term.

And as CIA Director Leon Panetta said in 2011, the embargo can weaken Iran but may not be enough to make it abandon its ambitions;<sup>(66)</sup> however, it is also true that no regime suffering from a deficit of legitimacy can also afford to be ineffectual. And yet (as well as other technological measures and those relating to capital) the resolution with which the International Community has adopted them, they will end up hurting the economy, the bazaar, the regime's support. It requires time, firmness of will but also the cohesion of the International Community.

The military option, unless it were a full-scale invasion –and supposing it were successful might delay the programme, but no more. Iran, given the precedents, will have taken all necessary precautions and prepared for retaliation. The consequences could be a generalisation of conflict and Iranian military action on the Strait of Hormuz, through which flows 17% of the world's oil, causing a rise in its price and exacerbating the current global recession. But an act of this kind cannot be sustained for long and can have high costs. And the question of who would be most affected by the closure should be weighed carefully, because everything points to the Asian economies suffering more than any other. Military adventurism by either party would not benefit either of them.

Khomeini said that a revolution was not staged to change the price of watermelon. Iran can hold out, if the country persists in it, but it can also change as in their day the Chinese-American relations did; it is only a matter of pragmatism and time, but the shadow of the Ayatollah is long. The battle for the soul of Islam is closed. Today the model for the regimes that emerge from the Arab Spring is the Turkish model, the Iranian lighthouse, permanent revolution, for all its approaches to the Sunni world, seems to be exhausted and finally extinguished.

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<sup>(66)</sup> Statements made on 27th June 2011: «I think the sanctions will have some impact. . . It could help weaken the regime. it could create some serious economic problems. Will it deter them from their ambitions with regard to nuclear capability? Probably not.» CLAWSON, Patrick. Op. cit.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

Table 7.1

640 B.C.	The Persian Empire is founded by Cyrus the Great
522 B.C.	The period of greatest expansion of the Persian Empire under Darius I
331 B.C.	Battle of Gaugamela. Victory for Alexander the Great.
634 A.D.	Start of the Arab invasion of the Persian Empire
9th century	Farsi is consolidated as the main language
1221	Mongol occupation
1501	Shiism proclaimed as the state religion
1639	The war with Turkey ends after 150 years
19th century	Rivalry between Russia and Britain over Persia.
1828	The Caucasus are ceded to Russia.
1921	Coup d'état by Reza Khan, crowned emperor in 1925
1935	Persia changes its name to Iran.
1941	Reza Khan overthrown, due to his pro-German stance. Start of Reza Pahlevi's reign
1951	The oil industry is nationalised
1953	Prime Minister Mosadeq is overthrown
1963	The White Revolution, the Shah imposes westernisation.
1979	Islamic Revolution.
1981	The hostage crisis ends
1980-1988	Iran Iraq War
1989	Khomeini dies. He is succeeded by Ali Khamenei. The technocrat, Rafsanjani, becomes the new president. He is re-elected in 1993.
1995	The USA imposes sanctions on Iran for its support of terrorism.
1997	The reformer, Khatami, becomes the new president. He is re-elected in 2001.
2002	The USA adds Iran to the Axis of Evil
2003	Iran announces suspension of its uranium enrichment programme.
2005	Ahmadinejad is elected president of Iran. The uranium enrichment programme re-starts.
2006	Iran achieves uranium enrichment at 3.5%. The United Nations Security Council votes to impose sanctions.
2009	Ahmadinejad is re-elected. Green Tide. Street protests.
2010	Iran starts a programme to enrich uranium at 20%. Escalation. The international community steps up sanctions.
2012	The European Union imposes an embargo on Iranian oil products

Table 7.2

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		REPUBLIC OF IRAN
Area		1,648,195 km <sup>2</sup> (18)
GDP		482400 millones \$ (2011 Est.)
Structure.  GDP/Active population	Agriculture	10.4% (2011 est.)
	Industry	37.7%
	Services	51.8%
GDP per capita		US\$ 6,400
GDP growth rate		2% (2011 Est)
% Unemployment		15.3% (2011 est.)  Official
Trade relations (Exports):		1. China* 17.2% 2. Iraq 17.1% 3. Emirates 12.5% 4. India 6.8% 5. Afghanistan 5.1% 6. Turkey 3.9% 25. Spain 0.7%  MAIN PURCHASERS OF OIL  China, Japan, Korea, India  (2010-2011)
Trade relations (Imports):		1. Emirates 32.8% 2. China 9% 3. Germany 7.1 % 4. Turkey 6.2% 5. Switzerland 5.8.% 6. Korea 5.6 %  21 Spain 0.8%
Population		78,868,711 (18) (2012)
% Urban population		71 % (2010)
Age structure	0-14	24,1% (2012)
	15-64	70,9%
	Over 65	5%
Population growth rate		1.247%
Ethnic groups		Persians (61%), Azeris (16%), Kurds (10%), Lurs (6%), Baluchi (2%), Arabs (2%), Turkmen and Turks 2%, other 1%

<b>TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS</b>	<b>REPUBLIC OF IRAN</b>
Religions	Muslim 98% (Shia 89%, Sunni 9%), other (including Zoroastran, Jews, Christians and Baha'i) 2%
Literacy rate	77% (men. 83.5%, women: 70.4%) (2002 est.)
Population below the poverty line	18.7% (2007 est..)
Refugees	1,027,577 (Afghanistan); 3,511 (Iraq) (2012)
GINI index	0,.7
Military spending. % GDP.	2.5% of GDP (2006)

## CHAPTER VIII

# DARFUR: SUDAN'S FORGOTTEN CONFLICT

*Jesús Díez Alcalde*

### **ABSTRACT**

Out of the international media spotlight, Darfur is entering its tenth year of conflict. Since 2003, progress on the ground and international efforts to achieve peace have been significant, but violence and the humanitarian crisis are still very present in this troubled region of Sudan. The new rebel alliances, the increase in tribal disputes and the appearance of new battle fronts, with South Sudan in the background, now mark the conflict's evolution and dynamic. Also, the permanent and uncontrolled arms trafficking in the region is continuously adding fuel to the fighting, thus becoming the main obstacle for ending confrontation between the Sudan government and the divided rebel groups. In this complex setting, the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, signed in April 2011, is the only channel which remains open to put an end to the conflict. It is a peace agreement facing numerous difficulties and needs the International Community's solid support, with the United Nations at the lead. However, only the determined will and commitment of the sides in combat will enable peace to become a reality for Darfur.

### **Keywords**

Sudan, Darfur, Khartoum, Al Bashir, SLA-MM, SLA-AW, JEM, LJM, Darfur Regional Authority, Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, AMIS, UNAMID, conflict, tribes.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

The Darfur conflict, which definitively ignited in February 2003, is inextricably connected to the bloody war that endured for decades between Sudan's Arab north and its black and Christian south, and is particularly connected to the peace process, which concluded with the independence of South Sudan, on 9th July 2011.

The reasons that brought both regions to confront the Al Bashir government, in power since June 1989, are different, as are the objectives of their struggle. At a time when the South was seeking and fighting for its independence, from the very day that the state of Sudan was founded, on 1st September 1956, the inhabitants of the region of Darfur were seeking a more equitable distribution of the political power and riches within Sudan, and fairer governance for the region.

Even so, the segregation of this region was never certain, and remains uncertain even today, on the roadmap of fighters from Darfur's black tribes. Among other reasons, this is because the region's population is predominantly Arab and, even with enormous discrepancies, is loyal to the Khartoum government.

Nor had Darfur's black tribes taken up arms against government forces before the current conflict began. Despite this, violence has been a constant feature since Darfur was forcibly joined to Sudan in 1956, after the end of the colonial British government. It is a running conflict fundamentally provoked by ethnic rivalries between Arabs and black Africans, which drastically intensified in the mid-80s, when subsistence became the main motivation.

Nevertheless, Darfur's black tribes realised that the southern rebel movements were starting to achieve their aims at the beginning of this century, and they assumed that the only way to fulfil their aspirations was an armed struggle against the Sudanese government. For this reason, it is no coincidence that in February 2003, only a few months after the signing of the Machakos Protocol (Kenya) between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the armed conflict in Darfur ignited in a violent and almost surprising way.

Just as the International Community was beginning to see the benefit of many years of mediation between the North and South of Sudan, the black tribes of Darfur took up arms and started a fight that, from its beginning, demonstrated an unprecedented cruelty and soon created an extremely serious humanitarian crisis. After almost ten years of fighting, it is now a conflict with barely any international media visibility and is entering a new stage after the signing of the



Doha Peace Document for Darfur in April 2011. Many other failed peace processes have preceded it, but the political and social circumstances surrounding this new hope for Darfur are now significantly different.

In this analysis we will look at the conflict's causes, evolution and current situation, though not going into the detail that it merits. We will also address the constant international initiatives and the deployment of peace forces by the African Union and United Nations which, in parallel, have framed Darfur's progress, principally in the last decade.

Perhaps there is no longer any real hope of a rapid resolution to the conflict and permanent eradication of the violence, but without doubt, the International Community must apply all efforts to consolidate this new opportunity for peace – Darfur's population cannot allow this to continue much longer.

**Figure 8.1: Territorial organisation of Sudan (January 2012) and South Sudan (July 2011)**



SOURCE: The author

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The history of Darfur as a political entity dates back to the 16th century, when the African Sultanate of the Fur established itself in the extreme west of current Sudan. Linked, from its origins, to the Arab tribes that were beginning to arrive in the region, the Sultanate remained independent until 1916

when it was incorporated into the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. From then it became a province of Sudan, directly governed by British power under the «Closed District» system, which kept it isolated from the influence of Khartoum, but also kept it underdeveloped. From the origins of the Sultanate, in the periods of transhumance, the Arabs from northern Darfur took their livestock to the South's most fertile areas, inhabited by farmers from different black African tribes. These migrations became an important cohesive factor, along with the Arab language and Muslim religion adopted by the Fur, and this enabled centuries of unity and peaceful coexistence.

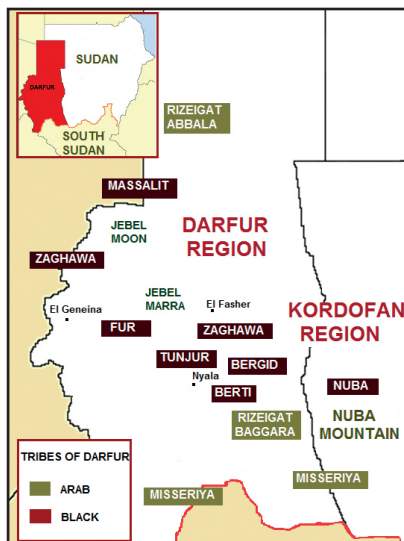
With the arrival of Sudanese independence in 1956, and the installation of Arab power throughout the country, Darfur remained neglected, and rebel movements began to spring up, claiming their share of power in constructing the new, free Sudan. In 1964, the black tribes united their claims in the Darfur Rebirth Movement, which upset the region's Arab tribal majority. Tribal rivalry intensified and began to take the form of an ethnic and racial conflict that greatly exceeded the struggle for subsistence. Also, in 1970, President Numeiry's decision to abolish the native Darfur administration further exacerbated the conflict by leaving the tribes without their ancestral method for peacefully resolving disputes.

Confrontations intensified in 1989 when Al Bashir came to power and began the radical Islamisation of Sudan –particularly in the south–along with persecution of those opposed to Khartoum's centralised, military regime. In Darfur, added to the radicalisation of Arab power was a demographic explosion, extremely diverse tribes (see figure 8.2) with their own interests, and continuous droughts and desertification of the north of the region. These pressing problems caused strong migratory movements that increased the violence and confrontations:

In this scenario, Khartoum tipped the balance in favour of Darfur's Arabs and adopted a policy of tribal group division, which made the situation ungovernable. It also launched the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), reorganised to deal with political dissent, act against the black tribes, and sow the seeds of a bloody rivalry that still holds sway in the region. But the majority of the soldiers making up these forces came from Darfur and refused to fight against their kith and kin.

It was then that a number of uniquely Arab militia began to form, armed by Khartoum –something that President Al Bashir has always denied–, which gradually replaced the PDF in the region. These militias, formed mainly of Rizeigat Baggara guerrillas from northern Darfur, were named the *janjaweed* by the black population, which translates as «armed horsemen» or «the Devil's armed riders», and they soon became Sudan's most bloodthirsty Arab group.

Figure 8.2: Main locations of tribes in Darfur



SOURCE: The author

### ■ Beginning of the Black Insurgency in Darfur

In the nineties the continuous and bloody attacks of the *janjaweed*, among others, killed a huge number of Fur and Zhagawa, and hundreds of thousands were forced to leave their devastated villages, mainly in the Jebel Marra area, to take refuge in improvised displaced persons camps or flee to neighbouring Chad.

In the face of the serious oppression of their people, the black tribes reacted and joined forces to combat the Arab fighters. Arms began to arrive from different sources, especially from Chad, with the backing of its President Idriss Deby, from Eritrea, via the SPLM in the south of Sudan, and from Libya, across North Darfur's porous border, funded by Colonel Gaddafi.

Better armed and organised, from 2001, the Fur and the Zaghawa were able to more effectively repel the *janjaweed* militias and government forces, and they stepped up their attacks on police stations and military convoys. From then on, the government's response in Darfur began to take on the character of ethnic cleansing. Aiming to combine forces and present a solid front, the Fur, Massalit and Zhagawa fighters founded the Darfur Liberation Front under the orders of Fur leader Abdel Wahid Mohamed Nur, with Zaghawa fighter Minni Minawi as second-in-command.

- *First phase of the conflict (2003-2006): a reckoning of the violence in Darfur*

On 25th February the black insurrection in Darfur began emphatically, and with it the Darfur conflict. The African rebels from the Liberation Front launched

a surprise attack against the Golo<sup>(1)</sup> military garrison, the main military centre in the Jebel Marra district, during which more than 100 government troops died. Khartoum, surprised by the intensity and success of the guerrilla attacks, ordered massive ground and air assaults against the black population. Furthermore, lacking confidence in its own forces, it accelerated the recruitment of Arab fighters and provided them with sufficient arms to repel attacks and to terrorise Darfur. The war spread and so began the greatest humanitarian crisis the world has seen this century, under the astonished and impotent gaze of the International Community, which was then focusing on the peace process in the south of Sudan.

After the first and successful rebel attack, and as an expression of tribal union, in March 2003 the Front renamed itself the Sudan Liberation Army / Movement (SLA/M), under the military leadership of Abdallah Abakkar<sup>(2)</sup>, and extended its attacks to, among other places, the border with Chad. In this period of unbroken union, which only lasted for three years, the SLA/M was the most powerful and largest movement in terms of numbers in Darfur. Its ideology did not include ambitions of independence; on the contrary, it focused on the consolidation of a united, democratic Sudan with an equitable distribution of the nation's wealth and political power<sup>(3)</sup>.

In this initial period of fighting, the second rebel front appears on the battlefield: the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), led by the Zaghawa Khalil Ibrahim until his death in a disputed air attack<sup>(4)</sup> on 25th December 2011, when forced out of his Libyan sanctuary. This armed group –majority Zaghawa and smaller than the SLA/M, but more cohesive even up to now–originated from a split in the National Islamic Front<sup>(5)</sup>, when its ideological leader, Al Turabi, was expelled from the party in 2000. It then decided to take the fight to the Al Bashir government, uniting its demands with those of the SLA/M. Both groups denounce the isolation and lack of political

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<sup>(1)</sup> FLINT, J. and DE WALL, A. *Darfur: A brief history of a long war*, Barcelona: Intermoon Oxfam, 2007, p. 27.

<sup>(2)</sup> An experienced Zaghawa fighter who helped Idriss Debyorganise the Patriotic Salvation Movement, fight against the then President of Chad, Hissene Habré, and become President of Chad in December 1990. From then until 2008 Idriss Deby returned the favour to his Sudanese supporters, providing assistance for their armed struggle against Al Bashir.

<sup>(3)</sup> PLAUT, M. *Who are Sudan's Darfur rebels?* BBC News. 05/05/2006. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3702242.stm>. Reference date: 26/02/2007.

<sup>(4)</sup> According to JEM leaders, Ibrahim's death occurred in an air attack deploying missiles against his camp. Although the real causes have not been clarified, his death was a great victory for the Sudanese government which, for years, had wanted to capture the elusive rebel leader. BBC News. *Sudan Darfur rebel Khalil Ibrahim killed*. 25/12/2011. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16328441>. Reference date: 25/05/2012.

<sup>(5)</sup> The National Islamic Front (NIF) was created by the pragmatic and controversial Sudanese leader, Al Turabi, in 1985, and incorporated the great majority of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood. Al Bashir came to power in 1989, and his position was one of backing political Islam, with strict imposition of Sharia law.

power<sup>(6)</sup> in the Darfur region, and do not demand its independence. Even so, there were certainly differences regarding their Islamic conception of Sudan, with the SLA/M demanding separation of politics and religion, and the JEM not supporting a secular State, and not wanting the imposition of *Sharia* law in Sudan.

However, they never formed a single armed group, and without doubt they would have been better positioned for presenting their demands to Khartoum and presenting a single position to the International Community, if they had managed to coordinate their attacks against the government forces and militia. Their most effective action was the joint attack on the Al Fashir airport, in the capital of North Darfur, on 25th April 2003, killing 75 soldiers, destroying planes and helicopters, and kidnapping the airbase chief, who was later freed. This attack humiliated Al Bashir and his Armed Forces, and began an all-out war on all fronts. Under the state of emergency, the Arab militias, particularly the *janjaweed*, were given authorisation to indiscriminately attack Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa territory in the rebel movements' rear.

#### ■ The Darfur humanitarian crisis and the beginning of international support

Despite the already growing international pressure, the war intensified enormously in Darfur and turned into an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. At the end of 2007, the results of the conflict were alarming figures of more than 200,000 deaths due to starvation, sickness and violence, and almost 2.5 million internally displaced persons in Darfur<sup>(7)</sup>.

During those initial years of fighting, centred in the Jebel Marra and Jebel Moon area, the *janjaweed* attacks were especially bloody, supported by SAF artillery and air forces, along the border with Chad or in the Shatayya area, in the northern part of the state of South Darfur. At that time, practically all the Fur and Zhagawa villages had been plundered, destroyed and burnt to the ground, and had remained unpopulated.

While the armed struggle increased on the ground, there began a greater international involvement in the conflict, though the lack of coordination between

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<sup>(6)</sup> In 2000, an anonymous manuscript vitally important to understanding the political and civil demands of those Sudanese states marginalised by Khartoum – particularly Darfur and south Sudan – was distributed. *Black Book of Sudan: Imbalance of power and wealth in Sudan* is a thorough enunciation of Khartoum's ruthless political control, and inspired the armed struggle of all the rebel groups.

<sup>(7)</sup> Source: UNAMID/United Nations (<http://www.un.org/es/peacekeeping/missions/unamid/>). UNHCR estimates that 1.7 million Darfurians are still languishing in internal displaced persons (IDP) camps, while there are more than 350,000 refugees in Chad and the Central African Republic. *UNHCR Global Trends 2011*. Available at <http://www.acnur.org/t3/>. Reference date: 22/06/2012

the different external actors did little to help towards putting an end to the violence. The volatile and violated ceasefire agreements hosted by Chad –in September 2003 between the SLA/M and the Sudanese government, and in April 2004, this time including the JEM– were never effective. Both agreements included Khartoum's unfulfilled commitment to disarm the *janjaweed* militias<sup>(8)</sup>, and the spiral of violence –increased by an alarming amount of arms trafficking across the porous borders– was still far from a cessation in Darfuran territory.

For its part, the United Nations strengthened its peace-making role and began reaching agreements to stop the massacre in Darfur. The 1556 Security Council Resolution, of 30th July 2004, demanded that Khartoum «stop the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, the sexual violence, the forced displacements and the acts of violence, especially those with an ethnic dimension». At the time, the grave humanitarian crisis caused by the extreme violence in the region provoked enormous media attention, which is now practically non-existent.

- *AMIS in Darfur: The African Union's first military mission*

The African Union (AU), leading the «African solution to African problems», continued to seek consensus between the parties in order to arrive at a peace agreement. Owing to the generally worsening situation, it deployed the first African peacekeeping force in Darfur. At the end of 2004, the African Union Mission in Sudan<sup>(9)</sup> (AMIS) had more than 3,000 military and police on the ground, but from the beginning it became a predictable failure, due to the total absence of operability, military procedures and materials, as well as a complete lack of experience in peacekeeping missions. Despite military assistance from the Atlantic Alliance, economic support from the European Union, and reinforcement of military capabilities via the United Nations Mission in the south of Sudan (UNMIS<sup>(10)</sup>) the African force found itself in the middle of a complex conflict which it was incapable of resolving, or even alleviating.

In 2005, AMIS increased its deployment to 9,000 personnel, but the violence was too widespread for such a small contingent. Faced with Darfur's grave situation, which did not improve even after the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2006, the first joint collaboration between the African

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<sup>(8)</sup> DÍEZ J. and VACAS, F. *op.cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>(9)</sup> The African Union Peace and Security Council agreed, after the first ceasefire agreement of April 2004, to establish the African Union Monitoring Mission in Darfur (AMIS). Months later, and with the agreement of all parties, the AU decided to increase its deployment to 3,320 personnel (AMIS II). *Ibid*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>(10)</sup> After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 between the southern rebel forces (SPLM) and the Sudanese government, the United Nations agreed (Resolution 1590, of 24th March 2005) to deploy the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). This mission also became an indirect form of support for Darfur, by supplying logistical support and military advice to AMIS.

Union and the United Nations was formed, which was initially strongly rejected by Khartoum<sup>(11)</sup>. Even so, subject to increasing international pressure and investigated by the International Criminal Court<sup>(12)</sup> for war crimes and genocide in Darfur, the pragmatic President Al Bashir ended up conceding, in June 2007, the proposal of both organisations to deploy a joint force in the region.

It is important to underline that AMIS was the African Union's first military mission in its own continent, though this peace effort never overcame its huge operational inadequacies. The 59 AMIS peacekeepers killed in Darfur over its four years of deployment, with special mention for the September 2007 attack at Haskanita, are clear signs of the mission's difficulty and risk.

### ■ The Darfur Peace Agreement 2006: second phase of the conflict (2006-2010)

In July 2005, and under the auspices of the African Union, all parties again sat down to negotiate in Abuja (Nigeria), and agreed to sign a Statement of Principles in which they recognised, among other matters, that a federal regime should be established in Sudan, and that it was necessary to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth and power.

However, far from eradicating the violence, the direct consequence of this agreement was a schism in the armed groups, particularly the SLA/M, fostered by the Sudanese government's firm intention to divide the armed groups, as a strategy to bring about victory. In November 2005 there was a sharpening of the separation of Darfur's largest rebel group<sup>(13)</sup>, which created the following factions: the SLA-MM – from the initials of its leader Minni Minnawi (MM)–, majority and first and foremost Zhagawa; and the SLA-AW, led by Abdel Wahid (AW), clearly in the minority and eminently Fur. At the end of 2005, Darfur was facing a war of everyone against each other.

In this atmosphere of chaos and destruction, the African Union's mediation succeeded in securing the signing of the most important peace agreement since the conflict's inception. In May 2006, again in Abuja, the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was ratified, but with the SLA-MM as the only rebel signatory.

<sup>(11)</sup> *El Mundo Sudan roundly rejects deployment of a United Nations peace mission in Darfur.* Available at <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2006/08/25/internacional/1156463206.html>. Reference date: 30/06/2012.

<sup>(12)</sup> In March 2005, the United Nations Security Council (resolution 1593) agreed to send the Darfur situation to the International Criminal Court in order to investigate possible war crimes and human rights violations in Darfur and, if applicable, to try the perpetrators. On 4th March 2009, the International Criminal Court accused President Al Bashir of being the main culprit, and ordered his capture for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Darfur region.

<sup>(13)</sup> HSBA. *Sudan Liberation Army-MinniMinawi (SLA-MM)*. Available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>. Reference date: 17/06/2012.

The other groups, particularly the SLA-AW and the JEM, demonstrated their strong opposition to this agreement, and dismissed Minni Minnawi of only protecting his own interests and betraying the Darfurian people. Even so, and unlike preceding agreements, the DPA recognised a new administration for the region, headed by a Transitional Darfur Regional Authority, led by Minni Minnawi.

The putative regional authority brought into being by the new agreement enabled Minni Minnawi and the Zaghawa<sup>(14)</sup> tribe to control the population in east Darfur, in the name of the Sudanese government, and launch attacks, with the support of governmental forces, against other minority black tribes (the Bergid, Berti and Tunjur) living in that area. In reality, his actual power was insignificant, but the situation moved the conflict into a new phase characterised more by a growing rivalry between tribes, both African and Arab, than by effective armed struggle against Sudan's Armed Forces. Paradoxically, Al Bashir was winning against the black insurgency in Darfur with a new version of his «*Peace from Within*» strategy, this time not only encouraging division between the rebels but also fighting between brother tribes.

In this second phase of the conflict<sup>(15)</sup>, which lasted from 2006 to 2010, Darfur became a convoluted battle ground, where almost no-one was free and safe from being subject to attack, and where anyone could become a killer. While the rate of deaths and displacement reduced, the latter still running annually into the hundreds of thousands, resolution of the internal and tribal crisis became extremely complicated.

The fighting between Arab herding tribes and black agricultural tribes intensified fundamentally in the centre and east of Darfur; the Arab tribes also attacked government military forces, perceiving themselves to have been betrayed by the Sudanese government after conceding regional power to a Zhagawa; and between the Baggara and Abbala tribes, confrontations increased in order to attain greater control of the land or to steal livestock. Furthermore, and despite the alliance with Khartoum, the SLA-MM did not cease fighting against government forces, largely due to constant non-fulfilment of DPA provisions; and the SAF responded with indiscriminate air attacks, tacitly prohibited by the United Nations since 2004<sup>(16)</sup>.

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<sup>(14)</sup> Though the Zhagawa tribe originates from western Darfur, from 1940 it began its exodus towards the more fertile lands of eastern Darfur. This migration increased in the droughts of the 70s and 80s, and they ended up being the predominant tribe in the region. There they were recruited as a majority into the original SLA/M. They fought in the mountains of Jebel Marra and along the Chad border from 2003, but ground and air harassment by the SAF forced them to return to the east, seeking the support of its population.

<sup>(15)</sup> GRAMIZZI, C. and TUBIANA, J. *Forgotten Darfur: Old Tactics and New Players*. Geneva: HSBA Working Paper 28, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>(16)</sup> Resolution 1556 of the United Nations Security Council, of 30th July 2004.



At the end of 2010, Minni Minnawi abandoned his role in the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority<sup>(17)</sup>. After four years of failed collaboration, and with the Darfuran people faced with, and disappointed at, the failed peace agreement, the SLA-MM again openly took up arms – which it had never abandoned – and returned to rebellion. From its strongholds in cities such as Shangal Tobay and Dar es Salaam, they marched to the Jebel Marra mountains to unite with other armed groups, like the SLA-Justice faction, which had remained outside the Khartoum alliances. From there they began launching quick attacks against military and civil convoys travelling on the highway that joins Al Fashir and Nyala. Behind them they left the hatred of other black tribes, vilely attacked during the SLA-MM's control, and who now saw their opportunity for revenge against the feared Zhagawa.

On returning to armed opposition, the SLA-MM also had to regain the trust of other rebel movements, which it had lost since its alliance with the government. Since then, it has tried to build bridges with other Zaghawa groups and, to some extent, it has recovered its military relevance on the ground, though very weak in comparison to the start of the conflict in 2003.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ New Fronts: Third Phase of the Conflict

In December 2010, with the clear collapse of the Abuja Peace Agreement, the Darfur conflict entered a new phase. On the one hand, the ethnic and political base supporting the armed struggle had changed substantially; and on the other hand, new fronts opened up, with unheard-of alliances between rebel groups, while guerrilla tactics had hardly progressed. Also, the independence of South Sudan, on 9th July 2011, was of great influence in this new phase. Specifically, the following aspects today mark the conflict's evolution<sup>(18)</sup>:

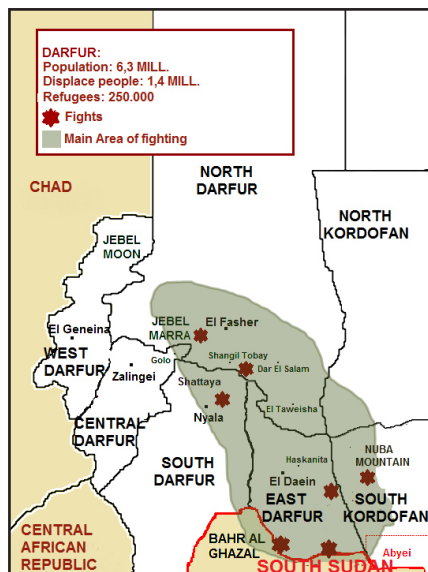
- Confrontation of the black tribes of eastern Darfur, recruited into the Popular Defence Forces, against the Zhagawa, as vengeance for the blood years of Minni Minnawi's control.
- Alliance of Darfur's armed groups with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM-N), with the support of South Sudan, in the Sudan Revolutionary Front.
- Increased fighting in South Kordofan and in the south of Darfur, on the border with South Sudan, between rebel factions and government forces.
- New political scenario after the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), and the responsibility assumed by the African Union and the United Nations to advance the peace and political process in Darfur.

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<sup>(17)</sup> AL JAZEERA, *Darfur leader 'ready to do battle'*. 13/12/2010. Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/12/2010121364520272117.html>. Reference date: 25/05/2012.

<sup>(18)</sup> GRAMIZZI, C. and TUBIANA, J. *Op.cit.*, pp. 55-69.

Figure 8.3: Map of the conflict in Darfur 2012



SOURCE: The author

- *Offensive against the SLA-MM: fighting between black tribes*

The reaction against the SLA-MM rebel group and, by extension, all Zhagawa, in the east of Darfur was massive from December 2010. The black tribes originating from the region, especially the Bergid, the Berti and the Tunjur, had formed the minority faction SLA-*Free Will*, and joined the 2006 DPA to benefit from support from Khartoum. However, the four years of SLA-MM control in the region created enormous tribal hatred of the Zaghawa<sup>(19)</sup>, and now was the time for vengeance.

The Sudanese government, aiming to increase tribal division and expel the Zaghawa from the east of the Darfur region, reorganised the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), but with a clear differentiating aspect from its original 1989 members. Those had been predominantly Arabs, whereas the current members were made up of the non-Zhagawa black tribes from eastern Darfur. Armed from Khartoum, and trained and supported by the SAF, the new PDF launched real ethnic cleansing against the Zaghawa under the slogan «they were all killers».

Up to April 2011, the PDF caused the greatest amount of displacement since the conflict's beginning: the indiscriminate attacks against civilian settlements resulted in hundreds of dead and injured, and more than 70,000 Zaghawa were expelled from the area between Al Fasher and Nyala. On 22nd May 2011, the murder of the Tunjur businessman Abdelmajid Ismail Tibin in a Zhagawa at-

<sup>(19)</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 19-30.

tack awoke the ire of rival black tribes, who reacted with massive reprisals in the Abu Zerega area. Those attacks, with air support from the SAF, culminated in the bloody execution of 17 Zhagawa. Since then, the struggle between the black tribes has increased, spreading towards the border zones with the states of Kordofan; and these persist on the ground. Nevertheless, a new area of fighting has been established in eastern Darfur, where the worrying idea has taken root that only the tribal, local armies will be able to defend the interests of the community, including protection from attacks by other tribes who had previously fought with them against the Sudanese government.

- *Sudan Revolutionary Front: Unheard-of Rebel Alliance*

In September 2011, led by the SPLA-N –a rebel faction located in South Kordofan, which defends the inclusion of the Abyei border zone in South Sudan–, Darfur's main guerrilla leaders accepted an alliance to form a unified fighting front. Under the name Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)<sup>(20)</sup>; the SLA-MM, SLA-AW and JEM groups, along with other minority factions that split from the original SLA, united with the SPLA-N to undertake joint and coordinated actions that would lead to the overthrow of the Al Bashir regime. Darfur's armed groups, which had become increasingly weak and fragmented, saw this new rebel alliance as a lifeline for their cause on the international stage. At the same time, they were rejecting any possibility of adhering to the recently signed Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, leaving only the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) in alliance with the Sudanese government.

The immediate consequence of this alliance was the increase in attacks, independent or coordinated, more focused between Darfur and Kordofan and in the south of Darfur, along the border with the states of Bahr el Ghazal of South Sudan<sup>(21)</sup>. In a new version of subsidiary or proxy war, the rebel groups profited from each other to make advances in their own struggle while supporting the common cause against Khartoum.

Although nothing guarantees the future success of the Revolutionary Front, in particular due to the extremely individual character of the insurrection leaders, this new alliance challenges the Khartoum government's strategy, which has always presented Darfur's armed movements as local groups without a national agenda, and as caught up in tribal disputes difficult to resolve. On the other hand, if this new Front is consolidated, the Darfur rebels trust they will receive great support via the SPLM-N, from South Sudan.

However, this alliance faces many difficulties, particularly due to the different groups' ideological and religious differences, having a different understanding

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<sup>(20)</sup> Visible Darfur. *Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)*.25/04/2012. Available at [http://www.darfurvisible.org/protagonistas\\_ficha.php?uuid=27](http://www.darfurvisible.org/protagonistas_ficha.php?uuid=27). Reference date: 26/06/2012

<sup>(21)</sup> GRAMIZZI, C. and TUBIANA, J. *Op.cit.*, p. 63.

of the State; as well as the enormous challenges to establish effective military cooperation due to the SPLM-N's great superiority in tactics and in military means; and due to the historical rivalry between this group and the JEM, for recruitment of the Misseriya Arabs. Also, after succeeding his fallen brother Khalil in December 2011, the new JEM leader, Gibril Ibrahim, will have to demonstrate his ability to keep the armed group together and lead it, as well as position it within the new, open political and international scene in Sudan after the Doha agreements.

#### ■ Joint cooperation of the United Nations and the African Union for Darfur

Generally, this new phase of the conflict in Darfur has registered significant advances in the peace process. However, the climate of violence continues in the region, though of less intensity, with continuous fighting between different forces. Also, to be added to this are the actions undertaken by the SRF, an alliance still difficult to predict, and which further complicates the situation of crisis and disintegration in Sudan. On the other hand, there are also attacks and kidnappings directed against staff of international organisations and the hybrid mission of the United Nations and the African Union (UNAMID), which has still not attained the operational efficacy to prevent rebel insurgency attacks and protect Darfur's population.

UNAMID is a special operation in every respect. Firstly, it is the first time that both international organisations have deployed jointly, despite the enormous differences between them, in order to alleviate an alarming situation of crisis and conflict. On the other hand, it is the largest mission that the United Nations has deployed in its whole history, with more than 26,000 authorised personnel, and it has also suffered the largest number of mortalities, 117 from start of deployment<sup>(22)</sup>. Regarding the origin of its personnel, the majority are Africans, as demanded by Al Bashir, though there are also military personnel from China, Arab countries, Asia and, much less, from Europe.

After the signing of the 2006 Peace Agreement, the United Nations presented the Sudanese government with its proposal for strengthening the African AMIS operation with the capabilities and means that would increase its operational efficacy. After a long period of negotiations, Al Bashir accepted the deployment of a joint operation in July 2007. Without doubt, what lay behind this authorisation was his complete discrediting on the international scene, particularly the open case at the International Criminal Court for the massive crimes in Darfur. Al Bashir, in a demonstration more of his great pragmatism, sought the support of the Security Council in order to paralyse the proceedings against him at The Hague, and accepting this peacekeeping force could be very advantageous to him. Nevertheless, none of this hap-

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<sup>(22)</sup> Available at <http://www.un.org/es/peacekeeping/missions/unamid/>. Reference date: 23/05/2012.

pened, and since the deployment of UNAMID the President of Sudan has continuously and covertly tried to undermine the work of the international soldiers deployed in the region.

So, with its 1769 resolution of 31st July 2007, the United Nations Security Council gave the green light to UNAMID, with its main mandate being to protect civilians, contribute to security for the humanitarian aid, verify the application of the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, and control security on the borders with Chad and the Central African Republic. By means of different resolutions that have systematically extended its deployment, this international operation has involved in these five years in order to adapt itself to the progress of events in the region.

After the failure of the mentioned Agreement, UNAMID focused on its role as a mediator in order to arrive at a more inclusive new peace process, while increasing its military capabilities in order to strengthen its operational efficacy; and to avoid, with a more evident presence on the ground, the continuous attacks of the rebel groups, the Arab militias and the government forces against the people of Darfur.

The signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), on 14th July 2011, has raised UNAMID's level of ambition, and it has assumed the principal role of guaranteeing this process, particularly monitoring of the cease fire, while continuing its mediation work to make it more inclusive. In July 2012, resolution 2063 extended the deployment of the force until July 2013; and decided on a reduction of the contingent to 19,000 personnel in the medium term, a proactive military deployment, and increased patrols in the higher risk areas. These are measures that seek to strengthen protection of the population and to enable almost two million Darfurians, still suffering in the displaced persons camps of Darfur, or the refugee camps in Chad and the Central African Republic<sup>(23)</sup>, to return to their homes.

### ■ Towards Peace in Darfur? The 2011 Doha Agreement

In September 2008, a resolution of the Arab League, made the Emirate of Qatar the main sponsor of peace in Darfur. Since then, there have been intermittent negotiations with the rebel movements, which repeatedly failed. In November 2009, representatives of Darfur's civil society were called to Doha for the first time, with the intention of giving the real victims of the conflict a voice in the different forums of debate, which happened until 2011.

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<sup>(23)</sup> In 2007 the MINURCAT operation was deployed, in Darfur's border areas with both countries, and for a year this had the ground support of the European Union's EUROFORTCHAD/RCA mission. MINURCAT, a mission without political mandate, provided protection to the civilians in the refugee camps in order to facilitate their return to Darfur. The operation finished on 31st December 2010, at the request of the Chad government.

On 14th July 2011, a new agreement, named the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD)<sup>(24)</sup>, was signed, which, for the moment, is the only hope for peace. This peace process has strong backing and support from the International Community but, unfortunately, may end up like the failed 2006 Agreement. Also, this time, only one rebel group signed the agreement: the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM). This movement, led by Al-Tijani al-Sissi, was constituted in Doha in February 2010, by the union of the Groups of Tripoli and Addis Ababa<sup>(25)</sup>, with the purpose of unifying criteria before the peace dialogue with the Sudanese government. This movement never had the backing of the main armed groups due to its lack of representation and real commitment to the armed struggle. For these reasons the latter do not recognise the validity of or respect the decisions coming out of this peace process, particularly the establishment of a Darfur Regional Authority with full political and social powers in the region.

Despite the similarities to the 2006 Agreement, both in content, as well as having a single rebel signatory group, the Doha Document has more ambitious provisions relating to the distribution of power and wealth – including oil –, and includes the distribution of funds among Darfurians, with a pre-established schedule<sup>(26)</sup> which will enable compensation to be paid to the victims of the conflict, and thus obtain greater popular backing.

It also contains the holding of a regional referendum in order that Darfurians can decide on their own future within Sudan, and which should be held at a future point yet to be decided. Regarding the new political administration, it establishes the Darfur Regional Authority as principal guarantor of the peace process and social reconciliation. This Authority was founded in January 2012, under the presidency of Al-Tijani al-Sissi, while Darfur was being divided into five states.

The Doha Document concludes with the commitment to achieve a permanent cessation to the violence and a sure end to the conflict, reaffirming that peace cannot be achieved using the military option, but rather by a comprehensive political process in the whole region and in Sudan.

Finally, and as chief regulatory, monitoring and sponsoring body for the process, the Agreement establishes the Implementation Monitoring Commis-

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<sup>(24)</sup> *Doha Document for Peace in Darfur*. Qatar, 2011. Available at <http://www.smallarmssurvey Sudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/darfur-peace-process/DDPD.pdf>.

<sup>(25)</sup> Both groups formed in 2009. The Tripoli Group, with the union of minority rebel groups, gave birth to the Sudan Liberation Revolutionary Forces. For its part, the Addis Ababa Group was created by the US envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, with five factions split from the SLM/A.

<sup>(26)</sup> The DDPD expressly includes a transfer of two billion dollars as a reconstruction and development fund for Darfur, as well as 225 million for guaranteeing the supply of basic social services. As for the distribution schedule, at the moment it is not being complied with, as was foreseeable, with the precision and regularity provided for in the Doha agreement, but at least it has started.

sion<sup>(27)</sup> for the peace agreement, which already holds periodical meetings in Al Fasher. It is responsible for monitoring and driving forward all the actions and provisions collected in the agreement, and for proposing initiatives for improving its progress and execution, always providing encouragement for Darfur's other guerrilla groups to join the accord in order to bring about permanent peace.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

The relations of countries and international organisations with Sudan, both regionally as well as outside of Africa, have been more focused on the long conflict with South Sudan than the Darfur region, which has been managed outside of the media spotlight and practically absent from the International Community's agenda. In this section we highlight only those actors that, directly or indirectly, have a significant influence on the progress and resolution of this crisis.

### ■ South Sudan

From the start of the conflict, the relationship of the SPLA/M from current South Sudan, with the armed groups in Darfur has been ambiguous, marked on occasions by tacit and interested support, and on many other occasions by total rejection due to their great division and inability to present a common fighting force. Also, to this scene marred by disagreements, one can add a historical mistrust that began in the 80s when the SPLA/M's deceased leader, John Garang, sought to open a battle front and extend it to Darfur, which was rejected by the leaders of the region's black tribes.

Currently, and after its independence in July 2011, the president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, maintains an ambivalent position. On the one hand, he is inclined to support the Darfurian movements in order to weaken the Khartoum government<sup>(28)</sup>; and on the other hand he wants to avoid the risk of undermining international support in his conflict with Sudan. Furthermore, he currently does not have a real ability to provide support to operations in Darfur. Despite this, there is evidence that he has granted asylum and provided logistical support to the leaders of the SLA-MM and the JEM, but has not provided them with military material. Even so, and for now, there is no doubt that South Sudan's government particularly backs the new Sudan Revolutionary Front.

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<sup>(27)</sup> The Commission currently comprises the signatory parties, along with representatives of the African Union, United Nations, UNAMID, Arab League, European Union and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, plus representatives from Canada, France, Japan, China, Chad, the Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States.

<sup>(28)</sup> CLOTTEY, P. *Sudan Rebel Group Welcomes SalvaKiir's Mediation Role*. Voice of America. 14/06/2010. Available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/sudan-rebel-group-welcomes-salva-kiirs-mediation-role--98557254/155365.html>. Reference date: 29/07/2011.

## ■ Chad and Libya

In the Darfur crisis, Libya and Chad are the neighbouring countries that have had most influence on the conflict. From its beginning, they provided economic resources, arms and logistical material to the rebel groups and granted asylum to their leaders. Although official support from the governments in Tripoli and Yamena has now ceased, arms trafficking across the porous borders still continues.

Political relations between Saddam and Chad have fluctuated between open declaration of war and the current relationship of good neighbourliness. Since the presidents of both countries came to power, they have accused each other of supporting the armed insurrections which, from the sanctuary of the neighbouring country, launched attacks against their governments. Even so, this has not prevented Chad, since the start of the conflict, from hosting successive failed peace processes. In 2008, Al Bashir and Deby resumed diplomatic relations, and in 2009 they agreed in Doha to prevent the movement of guerrillas and arms across the common border. Since March 2010, they have deployed a joint force to strengthen border security.

With regard to Libya, the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's *Jamahiriya* in October 2011 ended the official support for Darfur's armed groups, and resulted in the expulsion of JEM leader, Khalil Ibrahim in December of the same year. Until then, relations between Libya and Sudan were very erratic, always marked by Gaddafi's desire to increase his power over Khartoum's Muslim government. During Libya's 2011 revolution, Al Bashir deployed his forces on the border to avoid arms smuggling between the rebel factions and the regime's supporters. And, with the clear purpose of establishing close relations with the new Libyan regime, Sudan's Intelligence Service was decisive in the capture of Gaddafi's son, Saif al Islam<sup>(29)</sup>, in October 2011.

## ■ China and Russia

The influence of countries such as China and Russia on the armed conflict is indirect but palpable on the ground, since the large majority of arms used in Darfur come from both countries<sup>(30)</sup>, which are the main providers of war materials to the Sudan Armed Forces, from light arms to aircraft. Currently the two powers state that since 2005 they have observed the embargo restrictions established by the United Nations, and that their current exports are legal and small-scale. Furthermore, on many occasions and independently of their origin, the arms of Sudanese government forces have

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<sup>(29)</sup> RiaNovosti. *Sudan's Intelligence Services cooperated with Libyan rebels to capture Gaddafi's second son*. 21/11/2011 Available at <http://sp.rian.ru/international/20111121/151664463.html>. Reference date: 17/08/2012

<sup>(30)</sup> Afrol News. *Russia and China supply arms to Darfur*. 09/02/2012. Available at <http://www.afrol.com/es/articulos/37878>. Reference date: 02/08/2012.



ended up in the hands of the rebels, after their attacks on military convoys or military forces in Darfur.

In the political arena, both countries have been great supporters of Sudan at the United Nations Security Council. China and Russia<sup>(31)</sup> currently do not back the International Criminal Court's order to capture Al Bashir, since they consider it would be prejudicial to the resolution of the Sudanese conflicts. On the other hand, they support the Khartoum government's constructive moves towards resolving the Darfur crisis, but without ever interfering in its internal politics, and they call upon the International Community to cooperate with the Doha process in which neither has played an active part. Unlike Russia, China has deployed personnel in Darfur (engineers and medical teams) in the UNAMID operation.

On the other hand, China's relationship with Sudan is more focused on trade relations, since it is currently the largest recipient of Sudanese oil, and has directly funded oil production by constructing the nation's only pipeline. China also has concessions in Darfur yet to be used.

#### ■ **United States**

The United States is the most strident country in its condemnation of the atrocities committed by Khartoum in Darfur. From the start of the conflict, it described the killing of black people by the Arab militias<sup>(32)</sup> as genocide, and it defended the case against Al Bashir at the International Criminal Court, despite not being a signatory nation to the Rome Statute. It has been especially important and active in its mediation role in all the negotiations between the government and armed factions since 2004.

It also encouraged and supported the international embargo imposed by the United Nations on Sudan in 2005 in order to avoid arms trading affecting Darfur. The United States has unilaterally maintained strict sanctions and restrictions since 1993, when it included Sudan in the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, for giving refuge and support to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Hamas.

#### ■ **United Nations and African Union**

Since 2003, the United Nations and the African Union have accepted a decisive role in resolving the conflict, and, since 2007 they have been engaged in joint

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<sup>(31)</sup> Montagna, N. *The List: Friendship for Self-interest*. Foreign Policy in Spanish (FRIDE), 13/08/2012 Available at <http://www.fp-es.org/la-lista-amistad-por-interes>. Reference date: 15/08/2012.

<sup>(32)</sup> RUIZ, C *Geopolitical implications of the Darfur conflict*, Madrid: El Cano Royal Institute, ARI 141, 2004.

mediation to arrive at a definitive peace agreement between the parties. For both international organisations, Darfur is a real testing ground. The African Union deployed its first peacekeeping force with determination, but without operational effectiveness. For its part, the United Nations, also for the first time, undertook to follow a path closely coordinated with a regional organisation, which took the form of deploying the UNAMID joint operation.

In the political arena, the United Nations initiative of sending the Darfur conflict to the International Criminal Court has not been unanimously supported within the African Union. In fact, countries such as Chad and Malawi have received President Al Bashir, not complying with the obligation to arrest him after the capture order issued by the Court in 2009.

Finally, in 2005 the Security Council imposed an arms embargo<sup>(33)</sup>, which expanded on that of 2004, demanding that states prevent the sale or supply of arms to the parties involved, including the Sudanese government, which would affect Darfur. It is not an absolute embargo on the trade of arms with Sudan because, among other reasons, China and Russia opposed it at the Council.

#### ■ Arab League

At the end of 2008, the Arab League became the principal mediator for ratifying the 2011 Doha Document. It is also present –represented by Qatar– in the joint monitoring commissions for full implementation of the peace agreement.

In the future, and more committed to the peace in Darfur than to the process bringing independence to South Sudan, the Arab League will do everything possible to avoid the disintegration of Sudan, and this includes the donation of economic funds. On the other hand, this Arab organisation is unanimously against the Sudanese president being arrested by the International Criminal Court<sup>(34)</sup>, at least for the moment.

#### ■ European Union

The European Union has driven and, in many cases, participated in the different initiatives and rounds of negotiation for achieving full peace for Darfur. Regarding the DDPD<sup>(35)</sup>, it was present in the process from its beginning; resolutely supporting the view that it should be the basis for an agreement that includes the non-signatory rebel movements in the near future; and it is represented on the commissions established for its real implementation on the ground.

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<sup>(33)</sup> Resolution 1591 of the United Nations Security Council, 25th March 2005.

<sup>(34)</sup> ESPINOSA, A. *Arab League leaders defend Sudan's president*. El País. Available at [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2009/03/30/actualidad/1238364004\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2009/03/30/actualidad/1238364004_850215.html). Reference date: 18th May 2012.

<sup>(35)</sup> Small Arms Survey. *A peace process balance*. 25/11/2011. Available at <http://www.darfur-visible.org/actualidad/articulo.php?id=actualidad&uuid=389>. Reference date: 26/08/2012.

Regarding operational support, it deployed the EUFOR TCHAD/RC operation for one year (March 2008/2009) in Chad and the Central African Republic next to the borders with Darfur, in order to contribute to the protection of civilians and refugees, and to facilitate humanitarian aid. With regard to UNAMID, its participation is at a minority level, above all due to Al Bashir's refusal to include European contingents in the operation.

In the political arena, it demands that Al Bashir be delivered to the Court at The Hague, and it encourages signatory nations to comply with their obligations and arrest the Sudanese president if he enters their national territory. Since 1994, it has maintained a total embargo on arms to Sudan, much more restrictive than that sanctioned by the United Nations.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Darfur conflict is entering its tenth year, marked by the cruelty of the armed struggle and with some dramatic consequences on the ground, with more than 400,000 dead and 3 million displaced persons. Since 2003, there have been intense and continuous diplomatic initiatives, both national and international, to bring peace to Darfur. However, none of these have yet been decisive in definitively eradicating the violence, stopping the conflict and beginning a political process that will correct all the economic and social inequalities suffered by this region of Sudan.

Without doubt, the current violence in Darfur means that all the efforts made have not been sufficient and there is still much left to do, yet it is far from being the failure of the International Community which some accuse it of. Among other reasons, to affirm this would devalue the work and dedication of many international actors, including the peacekeeping troops and the humanitarian workers who have lost their lives trying to bring about peace.

From April 2011, all genuine hopes for a possible peace in Darfur are based on the Doha Document, which came into being with the huge problem of having been ratified only by the Al Bashir government and one rebel movement. Therefore, it is an indispensable priority, with the solid support of the whole International Community, to get all the non-signatory armed groups to join this peace process in order to generate support among Darfur's population.

This Doha Agreement reaches Sudan, and by extension the whole region, at a more favourable moment than previous initiatives and peace processes, especially the failed 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement. The circumstances, political and otherwise, are now substantially different and are determined by, among others, the following factors:

- President Al Bashir is completely discredited within the International Community, especially due to the charges of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity brought at the International Criminal Court.
- The United Nations and the African Union underline their firm determination for the DDPD to be the single basis for resolving the conflict, and they encourage the International Community not to create a different peace initiative.
- The rebel groups in Darfur are divided and decimated, in numbers and by their limited ability to fight government forces, although they continue to wreak enormous damage on the population.
- The Arab League has greater clout in Sudan than the African Union itself, and its role as principal mediator to bring about the Doha Agreement has enormous relevance in the region.
- The establishment of the Darfur Regional Authority and the arrival of the first economic contributions to alleviate its underdevelopment and miserable living conditions have generated more trust among Darfur's population.

Even so, this peace process faces numerous dangers, which even run the risk of making it another failure with unpredictable consequences. In order to avoid this, the roadmap must be presided over by a determination to tackle the challenges ahead. To that end, the International Community must unite to support the Doha peace process and provide economic funds for reconstructing Darfur; and all the parties must accede to negotiations, with the DDPD as a basis, and without prior conditions.

In order to eradicate the violence on the ground, the International Community must strictly observe the international embargo imposed upon Sudan, which is necessary for putting an end to the arms trafficking, the Sudanese government must cease any offensive action in Darfur, particularly the air and artillery strikes against the population. Also, South Sudan must avoid providing any support to Darfur's armed groups and extending the conflict to its Western border with Sudan. It is also necessary to increase the UNAMID mission's operational capability, revise the mandate and focus upon a redeployment, in order to guarantee greater protection of the population and thus ensure that it is fully involved in the peace process.

Finally, it is of vital importance that international public opinion committed to peace in Darfur is again generated. To this end, the media must remove the conflict from its current state of marginalisation and give it international visibility as was achieved in 2003, giving it the same degree of interest provided to South Sudan.

Progress on the ground is very significant in all respects. The level of violence is much less than its peak era; the pathway opened in Doha is much more solid

and ambitious than other previous peace agreements; and Darfur's population is rather more involved and actively participating in the region's political and peace process. Finally, the International Community is also more coordinated and united in its aim to eradicate the violence and deliver peace. Nevertheless, there are still many obstacles to overcome in order to solve, as soon as possible – though still too late –, the conflict and the humanitarian crisis which, for too long, has been inflicting misery upon Darfur.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

Table 8-1

SUDAN GOVERNMENT FORCES			
FUERZA	Description Deployment	Material	Troops in Darfur (estimated)
Armed Forces of Sudan	Mostly gathered at the border with South Sudan. Central control in Khartoum. The 6th Division in El Fasher directs operations in Darfur, where there are more than 250 barracks.	Weapons AK-47/G-3 Artillery Mi-17 and 32 helicopters Sukho, Mig-29 and A-5 (China) aircraft. Antonov 26	40.000
Border Intelligence Brigade	Way of incorporating rebels into the Armed Forces. Received arms and logistics from the SAF.	Weapons AK-47/G-3 Grenade launchers Heavy arms for operations only.	11.000
Central Police Reserve	Deployed in Darfur since 2004. Excess to police tasks. Accused by the United Nations of attacking camps for displaced persons	Light weapons 82 mm mortars Artillery (105/130 mm) Light vehicles	21.000
Popular Defence Force	Formed by Arabs since 1989. In 2011, they are established with black tribes. They fight against opponents of the regime and local defence.	Light weapons Rocket launchers SA-7 land-air missiles D-30 projectiles	37.000

REBEL FACTIONS			
REBEL GROUP	Description Zone of action	Material	Rebels (estimated) Leader
Sudan Liberation Army - Minni Minnawi (SLA-MM)	A splinter from the original SLA in 2005. Dominated by the Zaghawa tribe. Sole signatory to the 2006 Peace Agreement. Allied with the government until 2010. The strongest armed group, and currently the most debilitated. Jebel Marra.	Light weapons Vehicles Land Cruiser with rocket launcher	550 Minni Minnawi
Sudan Liberation Army-Abdel Wahid – (SLA-AW)	A splinter from the original SLA in 2005. Dominated by the Fur tribe. Its leader resided in Paris until the end of 2010, and lost a great deal of support in Darfur. Jebel Marra and north Darfur		1.000 Abdel Wahid

REBEL FACTIONS			
REBEL GROUP	Description Zone of action	Material	Rebels (estimated) Leader
Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)	Formed in 2002. Dominated by the Zaghawa tribe. Includes Misseriya arabs. Received support from Chad and Libya. Original leader: Khalil Ibrahim (in Libya until 2011). Nuba mountains and south Darfur.	Light weapons Vehicles Land Cruiser with rocket launcher	2.000 Gibril Ibrahim
Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM)	Formed through international mediation in 2010. A union between leaders of the SLA and JEM factions. Currently a government ally since the Doha Agreement in 2011		2.000 Al Tijai al- Sesse
Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)	Formed in September 2011 in South Kordofan by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.North (SPLM-N), and the SLA-MM, SLA-AW, the JEM and the Beja Congress. Coordinated activities in Kordofan (Nuba mountains) and the western border of South Sudan and Darfur. The Sudanese government accuses South Sudan of supporting this Front. Leader of the SPLM-N and the SRF: Malik Agar		
Other minority armed groups/leaders in Darfur: SLM-Juba (Abdel Shafi), SLM-Unity (Ali Haroun Dud), SLM- Justice (Ali Abdallah "Kerubino")			

**Table 8-2**

MOVING TO THE DARFUR CONFLICT		
DATE	EVENT	
1956	1 January	Independence of Sudan Al Azhari becomes the first president of Sudan.
1958	November	Coup d'état led by General Abboud. Authoritarian military regime installed.
1964		The Darfur Renaissance Movement is formed
1965	April	General elections. The Mahgoub government. Return of the parliamentary process
1969	May	Coup d'état by Numeiry. Power is centralised
1983		Islamic law (Sharia) is implemented in Sudan.
1985	April	General Al Dahab overthrows president Numeiry. Democracy is established in Sudan.
1989	October	Coup d'état by Omar Hassan Al Bashir. An Islamic regime is established in Sudan.

MOVING TO THE DARFUR CONFLICT		
DATE		EVENT
1999		First oil exports through Port Sudan
2000		The Black Book proliferates in the peripheral regions of Sudan: Unequal balance of power and wealth in Sudan
2001		Abdul Wahid's Darfur Liberation Front is formed
2002	July	The Machakos Protocol is signed. Start of the peace process between the Sudan government and SPLMA of southern Sudan.
		Khalil Ibrahim forms the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

THE DARFUR CONFLICT		
DATE		EVENT
FIRST PHASE OF THE CONFLICT: 2003-2006		
2003	February	Darfur rebels attack the military garrison at Golo. Start of the conflict.
	March	The Darfur Liberation Front renames itself the Sudan Liberation Army and Movement (SLA/M).
2004	April	First Darfur peace agreement in Abuja (Nigeria), between the Sudan government and groups from the JEM and SLA.
	June	Deployment of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)
2005	January	The Sudan government and SPLM sign a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Kenya for southern Sudan.
	November	The SLA splits into two factions: SLA-Abdul Wahid (AW) and SLA-Minni Minnawi (MM)
2006	May	The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) is signed in Abuja between the Sudan government and the SLA-MM group.
	July	Minni Minawi is appointed leader of the Darfur Regional Transition Government (established in Khartoum in July 2007).
	December	The Sudan government ratifies its plan to disarm the <i>janjaweed</i> militias.
SECOND PHASE OF THE DARFUR CONFLICT: 2007-2010		
2007	June	President Al Bashir accepts deployment of a joint United Nations and African Union force
	September	AMIS is attacked in Haskanita (10 peace troops killed)
	December	Transfer of power from AMIS to the Hybrid Mission of the United Nations and African Union (UNAMID)
2008		The situation in Sudan deteriorates. JEM launches attacks outside Darfur.
	July	The International War Crimes Tribunal accused Al Bashir of genocide, and war crimes against humanity in Darfur.
	November	Diplomatic relations are restored between Sudan and Chad.



<b>THE DARFUR CONFLICT</b>		
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	
2010	February	The Sudan government and JEM sign a ceasefire agreement in Doha (Qatar).
	March	Confrontations between Arabic Rizeigat and Misseriya tribes escalates. Heavy attack against UNAMID.
	December	Minni Minnawi breaks off relations with the Sudan government, leaves the Transitional Authority and takes up arms again.
<b>THIRD PHASE OF THE DARFUR CONFLICT: 2011-</b>		
2011	9 July	Independence of South Sudan
	14 July	The government and Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) sign the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur
		Attacks on UNAMID increase (7 dead) during the year. Confrontations between black tribes and the Zaghawa.
	September	The Revolutionary Front of Sudan is established in Kordofan by the SPLA-N, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and JEM.
	December	The JEM leader, Khalil Ibrahim, dies allegedly by an attack from the Sudan army.
2012	January	Al Bashir divides the Darfur region into five states
	February	The Darfur Regional Authority is established in El Fasher, headed by the leader of the LJM. Al-Sissi
	August	Over 25,000 displaced persons flee armed attacks on the Kotom camp (North Darfur).

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## CHAPTER IX

# NIGERIA AND THE GULF OF GUINEA: SHADOWY PROTAGONISTS OF AFRICAN INSTABILITY

*Jorge Bolaños Martínez*

### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea have been highlighted in Western countries' security strategies as a region presenting important challenges to international security. Part of global energy supply depends on how the region evolves in the near future, considering it is conditioned by institutional vulnerability, the presence of international organised crime, piracy and numerous ethnic, political and religious conflicts.

### **Keywords**

Nigeria, Gulf of Guinea, West Africa, piracy, institutional vulnerability, energy supply, insecurity, ethnic conflicts, Jihadism, Boko Haram

## ■ INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Guinea extends from Cape Palmas in Liberia to Cape Lopez in Gabon. Its coastal areas feature the marshy plains of the Niger Delta. Out to sea are Fernando Po and several dozen small islands. Inland are mountain foothills.

The territory was made up of historical kingdoms, which retreated with the expansion of Islam and European colonialism. The Bights of Benin and Biafra hold bitter memories of being the epicentre of slave traffic to the Americas. Many ethnic groups have their roots here, including the Yoruba of Brazil and the Caribbean, who preserve the ancestral music and rhythms of their distinctive African culture. The region gave birth to Liberia, the first nation state to be governed by its indigenous population.

The countries of the Gulf of Guinea produce goods such as cocoa (accounting for almost all of global production), diamonds, minerals and fossil fuels. It is these rich resources that have set the stage for long conflicts;

These are exacerbated by highly vulnerable institutions, ethnic rivalries dating back to pre-colonial times, strife between political and economic groups, and religious fanaticism.

Of the Gulf of Guinea's coastal countries, Gabon and Benin are relatively peaceful. The others live in expectation of the next uprising, attack or outbreak of violence, or suffer from institutional despotism and perennial corruption.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ Long conflicts continually prevent the region from fulfilling its potential

A palpable example is the civil war that took place in Liberia between 1989 and 2003. There have also been explosions of ethnic or political violence (Ivory Coast), despotic dictatorships (Togo and the two Guineas), and religious and territorial conflicts (Nigeria). The opportunity to forge a stable and prosperous future depends on the parties involved in each conflict resolutely moving towards peace and stability<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Gulf of Guinea has been flagged up on security strategy maps as an area of high risk and threat. There is a consensus among analysts in identifying the most critical issues:

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<sup>(1)</sup> See (Various Authors) *Strategic Panorama 2011-2012*. Madrid, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defence, 2012.

1. Rapid approach of Al-Qaeda, from the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, to destabilise the region, exploiting enmities and disseminating Islamic law as a model of social organisation.
2. International organised crime networks. A great deal of the drugs consumed in Europe reach there via the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea, being sent from Latin American producer countries. Drug cartels have significant infrastructure in West Africa, taking advantage of the favourable terrain, and the connivance of politicians, security bodies and officials. Likewise, traffickers of people, arms, diamonds or oil are well established in the Gulf of Guinea. The possibility of Jihadism and organised crime forging a solid collaboration has provoked a wave of concern in Washington and Brussels.
3. Piracy in the region has picked up since 2010. The number of incidents off these coasts now exceeds those of the renowned piracy in the Indian Ocean.
4. Vulnerability of institutions and serious governability problems. Elections are often subject to delays or cancellation, sometimes without a new date being provided, or there are riots between supporters of opposing parties and security forces, almost always with tragic results.
5. Finally, internal conflicts that erode coexistence and nascent democracy.

Even so, the image of chaos, ruin and violence does not show the positive side of these countries. The enterprise and creativity of their inhabitants – just as important as natural resources for generating wealth – have helped maintain very high growth figures in recent years, despite living in conditions unfavourable to fully developing any productive activity. The health of these economies during the worst of the global financial crisis is great news for the region, encouraging optimism for the future.

On the other hand, some governments are sincerely trying to improve the institutional climate, reduce political tension and strengthen democratic reforms. While these are, in principle, imperceptible, they can be consolidated if a favourable climate is generated.

### ■ **Nigeria**

In its geographical, ethnic, religious and economic diversity, Nigeria embodies the realities of all the conflicts mentioned above.

It is an emergent economy with great potential, backed up by sustained growth in recent years. With great possibilities for continued progress in the medium term, it will have to overcome the challenges imposed by Jihadist terrorism, the social tensions attributable to poverty –which affects millions of families–, the rivalry between the Christians of the south and the Muslims of the north, and large-scale oil smuggling.

The territory occupied by the State of Nigeria has always been a trade route, a thoroughfare and a place of exchange. For centuries it was a connecting zone between West Africa and the Sahara.

Between the 11th and 14th centuries, the trans-Saharan trade routes reached their highpoint. During that period the Hausa, who now make up the majority in the north and are a fifth of the total Nigerian population, established themselves in locations which would later become city-states. After the arrival of the first Portuguese expeditions, in the 15th century, the degrading slave trade began along the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea. This was the first blow dealt to the ancient kingdoms, which would later have to face the expansion of Islam.

In the 19th century the British began their conquest of Nigeria, which remained decidedly under their control until the early 20th century.

Just as in the majority of African states, the division caused by the colonial era has had an influence on Nigeria's recent evolution. The religious and ethnic differences have remained on the map, which reveals a contrast between a Christian, Yoruban south and a Muslim north made up of Hausa and Fulani<sup>(2)</sup>.

Nigeria's establishment as a Federal state, inherited from a colonial Constitution, was the option chosen to try to guarantee peaceful coexistence and equal participation in its political institutions. However, the formula has not had the intended results.

There are examples of peaceful coexistence, but reluctance and mistrust have played too great a role. There has been a quest for greater political and economic power, favourable treatment of the governing power's own community, application of ethnic criteria to government, rivalries and old disputes.

In 1967, the nascent State faced its first important conflict, located in the secessionist region of Biafra, its Igbo majority unhappy with the federal government of Hausa and Fulani. The war lasted until 1970, with hundreds of thousands of casualties. Many died from starvation, due to the region being besieged by government troops.

In 1987, 1992 and 2000, clashes which killed hundreds were provoked by disagreements over land ownership or were due to decisions taken to be offensive to particular ethnic groups.

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<sup>(2)</sup> These are the major ethnic groups, although more than 400 groups are identified.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

In the 2011 presidential elections, the ills that Nigeria has faced since its creation surfaced yet again, the buried and recurring conflicts that rock the country with waves of violence, worsening one's own position and seeking internal enemies on whom anger and frustration can be unleashed.

Breaking the tacit agreement on alternation of Presidents' religion, Goodluck Jonathan – a southern Christian – came to power. This is one of the factors that have contributed to the escalation of violence in the north, increasing insecurity and even putting the governability of those States by the central government at risk.

In Nigeria there is a considerable socioeconomic division; with the natural resources – above all, the hydrocarbons – being concentrated in the south. Furthermore, the majority of the population is poor, and has yet to see the longed-for benefits of economic growth.

In the north a traditional economy lives on, bound up in livestock and the production of palm oil and other crops.

Nigeria is a densely populated country, with about 150 million inhabitants, a figure that makes it Africa's most populous nation. The metropolitan area of Lagos, the old capital on the Niger Delta, bears the most negative consequences of overpopulation.

## ■ Boko Haram

«*Western education is prohibited*». Thus can one translate the name chosen by this armed group, composed of radical Islamists of Hausa ethnicity, who represent the majority in the north of Nigeria, and who are inspired by the Jihad that began at the start of the 19th century<sup>(3)</sup>. Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio was an ideologue, writer and Islamist fighter. He led the Fulani expansion, establishing the Sokoto Caliphate, at the expense of the power which had hitherto been in the hands of the Hausa warlords, and who had incorporated animist rites into Islam. In 1804, he began a military campaign to conquer the warlords, as well as non-Muslim Fulani.

In 1980, the Maitatsine sect, using a Hausa term that translates as 'the one who damns', a name chosen by its founder, the cleric Mohammed Marwa, encouraged fighting in northern Nigeria. Emulating the warriors of the Sokoto

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<sup>(3)</sup> See Laborie Iglesias, Mario. «Boko Haram: Jihadist terrorism in northern Nigeria», Background Paper 39/2011, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_informativos/2011/DIEEEI39-2011\\_Boko\\_HaramTerrorismoYihadista\\_MarioLaborie.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_informativos/2011/DIEEEI39-2011_Boko_HaramTerrorismoYihadista_MarioLaborie.pdf). With access from 27th August.

Caliphate, the sect attacked the Nigerian state, Western culture and those who did not share its interpretation of the Koran. The attacks, fighting and subsequent intervention of the army caused more than 5,000 deaths, including that of Maitatsine himself. His followers featured in several replicated episodes of sectarian violence, such as those of 1982 and 1994.

Boko Haram arose as a current within the orbit of this belligerent sect. Suspecting that the values attributed to Western education would pervert and destroy Islam's moral principles, in 2002 Mohammed Yusuf, and other Salafist radicals, founded '*Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*' (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings), also known as Boko Haram.

From its ideology and modus operandi, the group is considered to be a Taliban replica, on the west coast of Africa. It began its terrorist activity almost a decade ago, first by means of isolated attacks, from which it has progressed to systematic violence. In 2007, 12 Nigerian police and a civilian died when an Islamist detachment burst into a police station in the city of Kano. Applying the Maitatsine doctrine, the group's fighters have punished those who do not follow a rigid interpretation of Islamic law. They have brought down various Muslim clerics opposed to violence and to the radical version of religion professed by Boko Haram. A further step in its violent strategy was to target Church congregations, thus contradicting those who did not foresee attacks against Christian civilians in the group's armed strategy. Meanwhile, they have stepped up their hostage-taking of military personnel, police officers and officials. In August 2011, they made a big impact on international public opinion with their attack against the United Nations in Abuja, killing 25<sup>(4)</sup>. The attack introduced suicide terrorism to the region, while being a further step towards adopting the tactics of Al-Qaeda. They wanted to demonstrate that they were now even more active than prior to the army's intervention, in 2009, which pushed the Salafist faction to the verge of destruction.

Another consequence of the collaboration provided by Al-Qaeda is the use of improvised explosives, a favourite weapon of Jihadist terrorism.

The group's appearance is also motivated by the historical division with respect to the thriving southern states. The north is not experiencing the formation of an emergent middle class that generates economic activity. The north has also been constrained by the tension and conflicts of previous decades.

Boko Haram is able to attract followers among discontented and impoverished youth, prone to radicalism. Furthermore, violence can also be used in power

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<sup>(4)</sup> Information on the attack and tributes to the deceased UN personnel can be read at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42750&Cr=terror&Cr2=terrorism>. With access from 21st August 2012.



struggles entered into by diverse interest groups. Nevertheless, the nature of Boko Haram, a continuance of Maitatsine, and heir to Dan Fodio, is religious and anti-Western. This character has been reinforced with the approach of Al-Qaeda from the far bank of the Red Sea, a potential ally to all African Islamist groups. Establishing links with the latter widens its presence and strengthens its position in the continent.

To date, the facts support arguments favouring the importance of religion in Boko Haram's violence<sup>(5)</sup>.

As happened again in the 2011 presidential elections, the vote follows geographical and religious criteria. The attacks on Christians and those of the last year correspond with Boko Haram's increasing participation in international Jihadism, at least with regard to its objectives and strategies<sup>(6)</sup>. They have managed to spread the conflict to the central states, where, in a variegated mix of ethnicities there coexist Muslims, Christians and Animists. It would be easy for them to flourish there too, if some parties insist on fostering discord.

The instability associated with the conflict erodes the government's presence in the north, which favours Boko Haram and its allies.

If the north is lagging behind economically, this will only be exacerbated if the escalation of violence worsens the situation. We should not forget that extreme poverty is also a consequence of chronic violence and the absence of social and political institutions, and that violence hinders recovery, obstructing the development of productive activity.

On the other hand, Boko Haram has justified its escalation of violence on the back of the loss or arrest of its leaders and fighters. The most notable case was the death in 2009, on police premises, of Mohammed Yusuf. There is reasonable doubt over the cause of his death, along with that of seven other terrorists, during interrogation in prison.

The Nigerian army has always had a severe response to terrorism, pursuing a strategy of removing its leaders<sup>(7)</sup>. Several international organisations have ac-

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<sup>(5)</sup> See the interview carried out by Nigerian daily, *The Tribune*, with senator Ita Solomon Enang, «Boko Haram war more religious than social». Published on 26th July 2012, available at <http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/politics/43106-boko-haram-war-more-religious-than-social-enang>. With access from 18th August.

<sup>(6)</sup> See Mayangwa, Benjamin and UfoOkekeUzodike. «The changing dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorism», Aljazeera Center for Studies Reports, 31st July 2012. Available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2012/7/31/20127316843815734The%20Changing%20Dynamics%20of%20Boko%20Haram%20Terrorism.pdf>. With access from 23rd August 2012.

<sup>(7)</sup> An example of the debate about the results of such a strategy is the following article: Price, Brian C. «Leadership decapitation and the end of terrorist groups», Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. May 2012.

cused the Nigerian military of regularly resorting to extrajudicial executions<sup>(8)</sup>. In September 2012, Boko Haram's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, also died during a skirmish with the army, near Kano.

Regarding the presence of Boko Haram in Nigerian politics, political leaders in the north have been accused of permitting – or financing – the terrorists<sup>(9)</sup>.

Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda have permanent channels of collaboration between them<sup>(10)</sup>.

These range from training in how to manufacture explosives, to sending fighters when some Islamist group needs brothers in faith. Such happened in the Ansar Dine offensive in rebellious Azawad, Mali, where Nigerian Jihadists participated.

After consolidating its position, Al-Qaeda will try to intensify the conflict in Nigeria as an entry point to its permanent establishment in the Gulf of Guinea. Endangering the production of hydrocarbons and supply to the West is a spur to the Islamists. Likewise, controlling the smuggling of fuel, minerals and diamonds, and partaking of the profits of trafficking drugs and people will give the terrorists an important source of income.

There are analysts who point to some factors impeding full integration of Boko Haram as the Nigerian version of Al-Qaeda. They contend that the group has little structure, and this is an unknown for many experts in the region<sup>(11)</sup>. There is also speculation about a schism within radical Nigerian Islamism.

To achieve the objective of creating an Islamic state in the north, Boko Haram has embarked on an escalation of violence that has covered the northern half of the country, including the central states. The government has found that Boko Haram also intends to establish itself in the south, in the Christian zone, in order to spread religious violence through the whole country<sup>(12)</sup>.

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<sup>(8)</sup> See Walker, Andrew. «What is Boko Haram?», Report published in 2011 by the US Institute of Peace. Available at <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR308.pdf>. With access from 19th August.

<sup>(9)</sup> On this matter Jane's published an article entitled «Boko Haram names political 'sponsors'», available at <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Terrorism-And-Security-Monitor-2012/Boko-Haram-names-political-sponsors.html>

<sup>(10)</sup> According to a Boko Haram spokesman, in an interview given in January 2012 to the Guardian. You can read the full text at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/27/boko-haram-nigeria-sharia-law>. With access from 9th August.

<sup>(11)</sup> See «On the trail of Boko Haram», the Independent and International Crisis Group, 12th March 2012. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/op-eds/stroehlein-nigeria-on-the-trail-of-boko-haram.aspx>. With access from 17th August 2012.

<sup>(12)</sup> See «Raids at bomb factory in Nigeria's Kogi State highlight southern expansion of militant group», Jane's Intelligence Weekly, 23rd August 2012.

From the first attack attributed to it, Boko Haram has been responsible for several hundred deaths and for more than 1000 in 2012 alone<sup>(13)</sup>.

December 2011 was especially difficult<sup>(14)</sup>. The wave of church attacks was responded to by young, violent Christians, who murdered several Muslims not linked to Boko Haram.

Despite the serious state of insecurity, some analysts consider the operational capacity of fundamentalist Nigerians to be rather limited<sup>(15)</sup>.

In August 2012, the government embarked on a new, more moderate, approach to the problem, aiming to set up a process of dialogue with Boko Haram. While waiting to see how discussions develop, in principle there are too many factors weighed against them. The terrorists' radicalism prevents them from renouncing the objective of their radical ideology. The group's leaders will set, as an initial condition, the release of their imprisoned members.

On the other hand, social tension in the worst hit states has increased. Such a difficult atmosphere, in the context of vulnerable institutions and an uncertain political future, is not the most propitious to develop a process of dialogue which will presumably be long and difficult. President Jonathan will try to make dialogue with the Jihadists a success, based on his political ability and the other party's disposition, and will seek to somewhat improve the probability of his re-election.

Coordinated action with Al-Qaeda and its terrorist structure in Africa is Boko Haram's greatest threat; but not its only one. A chaotic situation, with general violence in the north of the country, would encourage the appearance of new armed groups, simultaneously fighting amongst themselves and against the central government.

### ■ **Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)**

In former times, the Niger Delta was referred to as the rivers of oil, due to significant production of palm oil, its first monoculture. In these marshy lands open to the Atlantic, there is a perception that the area's wealth inevitably ends up in the hands of corrupt politicians and officials, or those of Western oil companies established on the coast, from where sub-Saharan Africa's largest single volume of crude is extracted. There are difficult liv-

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<sup>(13)</sup> See Department of State, Country report on terrorism 2011. A summary of the report is available at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/rm/2012/195898.htm> With access from 31st August.

<sup>(14)</sup> See Stewart, Scott, «Nigeria's Boko Haram remains a regional threat», *Stratford Weekly*, 26th January 2012. Available at <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/nigerias-boko-haram-militants-remain-regional-threat>. With access from 22nd August 2012.

<sup>(15)</sup> Scott Stewart. Op. Cit.

ing conditions, in an unfavourable region, with dense population and a variegated jumble of ethnicities; over 30 million people belonging to 40 distinct groups, speaking about 250 tongues and dialects. It is surrounded by an exuberance of natural resources being degraded by oil refining – a high percentage of it illegal –; hundreds of explosions due to scant safety measures in oil smuggling, and leaks of crude and gas from oil installations<sup>(16)</sup>. With small-scale fishing being one of the Delta's traditional economic activities, fish mortality has brought about a palpable reduction in catches, resulting in loss of employment.

In 2008 there was a very serious development when a ruptured pipeline led to a spillage of the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of barrels<sup>(17)</sup>. Images showing fish and whelks coated in ominous sludge became icons against Shell's activities in the Delta. The company has been accused in Nigerian courts of not repairing the great damage incurred.

On 20th December 2011, an act of sabotage reduced the volume of Nigerian crude sent abroad. It is estimated that MEND's actions against infrastructure have led to a significant reduction in Nigeria's hydrocarbon exports. In little more than a year it is calculated that about a third of the crude extracted has been lost.

In the Delta, the socio-political environment is favourable for rebellious characters, having high levels of criminality.

In 2005, several rebel groups who had already spent a long decade launching attacks, moved definitively in the direction of organised violence. They demand that the majority of the wealth associated with oil production be reinvested in the region, quoting 1.5 billion dollars as the level of compensation deserved by the population due to the damage caused by the transnationals.

MEND's political and social character distinguishes it from Boko Haram, though its origin also has an important ethnic component. The movement is strongly linked to the Ijaw ethnicity which, with about 15 million people, represents the area's majority, while making up about 10 per cent of the national population. The Ijaw feel overlooked in comparison to the Hausa and Yoruba, and demand a greater share of power.

Exploiting the Delta marshland's natural advantages for concealment, with its thousands of streams and tracks, MEND also takes security forces and Western

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<sup>(16)</sup> See Nseabasi S. Akpan, «Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta: an exploratory study», *Journal of Social Sciences* (University of Uyo, Nigeria), vol. 34, no. 1, 2010, pp. 33-42.

<sup>(17)</sup> See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/energy/8486732/Shell-sued-over-oil-spill-in-Niger-Delta.html>.

workers hostage<sup>(18)</sup>. Its bloodiest and most visible action was the detonation of a car bomb in Abuja, causing 16 deaths.

Owing to the permanent terrorist threat, Shell's security costs have multiplied since 2007. According to a recently released report, the company faces an annual expenditure of about 1 billion dollars; an amount which, in terms of national budgets, is only exceeded by two African countries<sup>(19)</sup>. Although the oil company finances the security provided by the Nigerian army, attacks on installations and pipelines raise expenditure for the federal government, which is obliged to employ vital human and material resources in other parts of the country. It is clear that putting an end to these attacks would free up such resources, and that the critics of companies established in the Delta have other means to express their concerns, without damaging the people they claim to be defending.

One of the consequences of the amnesty agreed with MEND's leadership in 2009 is the collaboration of ex-leaders with the government and oil companies, and their employment as private security staff.

Despite everything, the group currently has a considerable number of followers, coming from an area of discontent, which is reflected by the movement's demands<sup>(20)</sup>. At the start of 2012, the group attempted to take advantage of the instability generated in the north by Boko Haram, planning a wave of attacks, which began in February with an attack on one of the main pipelines exiting the Delta<sup>(21)</sup>.

Using this strategy, MEND's most radical faction sought to reawaken what had become, apart from some sporadic attacks, a frozen conflict, since the 2009 signing of a truce with the government.

This reflects the anarchic and wayward character of some of the group's leaders, who follow their own interests and, if necessary, contravene the movement's directives. With just a handful of followers they are able to rekindle violence at any time.

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<sup>(18)</sup> See Hanson, Stephanie. «MEND: the Niger Delta's Umbrella militant group». Council on Foreign Relations, 22nd March 2007. Available at <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/mend-niger-deltas-umbrella-militant-group/p12920>. With access from 31st July 2012.

<sup>(19)</sup> See the piece published by The Guardian, on 19th August 2012. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/aug/19/shell-spending-security-nigeria-leak>. With access from the day of its publication.

<sup>(20)</sup> See «Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)», Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, 10th May 2012. Available at <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Movement-for-the-Emancipation-of-the-Niger-Delta-MEND-Nigeria.html>. With access from 22nd August.

<sup>(21)</sup> See McNamee, Mark. «Have the Niger Delta MEND's militants resumed operations in Southern Nigeria?» Terrorism Monitor, vol. 16, no. 4, February 2012. Available at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39046&cHash=fff50f3e db7344498c9d833bd9f44e21](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39046&cHash=fff50f3e db7344498c9d833bd9f44e21), with access from 21st August.

Alhaji Dokubo-Asari, the group's founder, condemned the attacks carried out by those not accepting the agreement with Abuja.

### ■ Piracy

During the first half of 2012, the number of Somali pirate attacks in the Indian Ocean noticeably reduced. Conversely, the Gulf of Guinea has seen an upturn in boardings of oil tankers and merchant ships<sup>(22)</sup>. The frequency of attacks has increased to the extent of making piracy one of the area's greatest security threats.

It is estimated that, if unreported boardings were added in, the figures would be very similar to those recorded in the Indian Ocean. Most pirates belong to MEND and other armed groups, where they are trained as criminals and fighters. Even while embracing the 2009 amnesty, many have continued outside the law, as pirates, smugglers or again taking up arms.

The pirates of West Africa have some differences when compared to their Indian Ocean counterparts. The Niger Delta can quite easily conceal any illegal activity, becoming a favourite haunt of smugglers and traffickers of all kinds. The easy, quick money made by pirates disposing of booty increases their interest in taking cargo, while discarding the tactic of kidnapping and waiting for ransom. Therefore, their actions are more violent and dangerous. Sometimes they capture an empty oil tanker, from which they board another and steal its fuel, releasing the tanker only when they have traded the oil on the black market.

Regional economic expansion has generated an increased volume of transported merchandise, attracting violent groups who exploit coastal refuges and the military's scarce resources. In 2010 there were 45 known attacks in seven countries whereas 65 were recorded, in 2011, in nine Gulf of Guinea states. The International Maritime Bureau states that, in Nigeria alone, there were more than 30 incidents during the first half of 2012. As a result of reaction by the federal army, the pirates relocated to Togo and Benin. The feared boardings have also moved somewhat further off the coast, trying to elude military intervention.

As well as being a cause of insecurity in the region, piracy incurs increased costs, estimated at about 12 billion dollars.

### ■ Illegal Trafficking

For years there have been significant criminal networks in the Gulf of Guinea. A quarter of the cocaine consumed in Europe comes through the area. The

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<sup>(22)</sup> See the website of the International Maritime Bureau, the body responsible for statistics on piracy. <http://www.icc-ccs.org/icc/imbln> cache.

narco-state of Guinea-Bissau is the paradigmatic case of how Colombian cartels have taken advantage of institutional fragility and the complicity of corrupt politicians, officials and military in order to set up a powerful operating base.

The mafias that traffic immigrants, and women forced into prostitution mainly in Europe, along with the smuggling of precious stones, gold and oil complete a worrying picture.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

In the new geopolitical order, the Gulf of Guinea will occupy a prominent position, as will the rest of the African continent. This has been set out in the documents that outline the security and defence strategy of the principal powers, particularly the United States, and the European Union.

*The zone of influence around the Gulf of Guinea borders the Sahel, where Jihadist terrorism –which is going through a phase of full expansion in Africa– has spread.*

### ■ Spain

At this strategic front line with West Africa, several crucial aspects for Spain's foreign policy converge. To the geographical proximity (more than 3,500 kilometres separate us from their coasts), one can add the possession of large amounts of natural resources, indispensable for the region's economic growth, as well as for Western industry.

The new National Defence directive for the period 2012-2016 was presented to the National Defence Council by the President of the Government last 31st July<sup>(23)</sup>.

The document analyses the principal risks and threats to Spain's security, and proposes the most suitable responses for dealing with such. Those emphasised as most relevant are:

- Terrorism
- Organised crime
- Failed states
- Regional conflicts
- The struggle for basic resources
- Climate change.

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<sup>(23)</sup> The full text can be seen at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/Ficheros/2012/DIEEEA35-2012\\_DDN\\_IEE.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/Ficheros/2012/DIEEEA35-2012_DDN_IEE.pdf)

The previous Directive (2008-2012) already referred to sub-Saharan Africa as one of the regions harbouring most risks and threats to our security.

The current NDD again refers to the Gulf of Guinea as a priority area. There is clearly special concern over the escalation of attacks committed by pirates off Africa's west coast.

In this regard, it complements that set out by the Spanish Security Strategy (EES)<sup>(24)</sup>, where the fundamental principles that govern Spanish defence policy are defined. It emphasises the ability to anticipate any risk or threat of external origin, as well as responsible interdependency with our partners and allies in any action taken to preserve our security in a global and increasingly interdependent environment.

With reference to security in Africa, there is clearly greater concern due to the serious situation across the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel, emphasising the crises originating from the instability of States, exacerbated by the presence of international criminal networks, with the attendant repercussions for maritime security, trade and the supply of energy.

Regarding action to safeguard Spain from the risks most likely to be generated by uncertainties, the 2012 Directive includes the concept of 'responsible defence'. That is, articulating a suitable response to challenges to security, from optimal use of the resources available, which are notably diminished under the current adverse circumstances.

On the other hand, the abovementioned «risk enhancers» are analysed in detail, and different response for neutralising them are proposed.

- Dysfunctions of globalisation
- Demographic imbalances
- Poverty and inequality
- Climate change
- Technological dangers
- Radical and undemocratic ideologies
- Armed conflicts
- Terrorism
- Organised crime
- Economic and financial insecurity
- Energy vulnerability
- Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- Cyber-threats

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<sup>(24)</sup> See <http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/ServiciosdePrensa/Post+it/EstrategiaEspanolaDeSeguridad>. With access from 30th August. Also see the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies; «Comparative analysis of Spain's Security Strategy: everyone's responsibility», Analysis Document 17-2011. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2011/DIEEEA17\\_2011EstrategiaEspanolaSeguridad.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA17_2011EstrategiaEspanolaSeguridad.pdf). With access from 16th August.  
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- Uncontrolled flows of migration
- Emergencies and catastrophes
- Critical infrastructure, supplies and services

There is emphasis on the risk of migratory movements, refugees and internally displaced persons which, along with high population growth, contribute to the formation of megacities and other phenomena alien to African ways of life and difficult for governments to manage. These also facilitate the establishment of violent groups who attract militants from among young people angered at the living conditions they are forced to bear.

Finally, the EES flags up the security problems related to the mafias that traffic people, immigrants and women forced into prostitution.

Aiming at mitigating the harm to our interests caused by the listed risks and threats, the EES proposes a series of strategic responses that combine in the notion of making the most of Spain's comparative advantages on the global stage. Among these advantages, the EES emphasises our geographical position and good relations with the main international actors, particularly with the nations of Africa and the Americas.

There is a proposal for a new approach to the risks and threats that cause most harm. Like our European partners and the Union itself, Spain's intention is to combine its projection in the policies designed in Brussels with a strengthening of external security, above all in the nearest and most disputed regions; and, finally, to defend our external economic interests and access to vital resources.

Likewise, the EES establishes that maximum collaboration will be offered to countries whose security is most endangered. In this regard, priorities are related to situations of extreme poverty, systematic attacks against the civilian population, and the fragility of institutions. This strategy is one of dealing with the social, political or economic causes that erode security in African countries.

To this end, institutional cooperation is an indispensable feature of attempts at mediation, in order to collaborate in security matters or to prevent conflict –particularly in regions where violence can recur due to happenstance incidents–. Although this is a prolonged process, the ultimate objective of missions based on a comprehensive approach to the conflicts described by the EES is to consolidate the institutional mechanisms and routines that encourage the functioning of the rule of law, or that at least produce solid and credible advances in that direction. Simply fostering full development in Africa, according to the Strategy, can increase security in the continent and its surrounding area.

In 2010, General Verástegui was appointed as head of the EU's SSR (Security Sector Reform) mission in Guinea-Bissau, deployed in 2007 by the European Union<sup>(25)</sup>. Worsening of the political situation in that country, after the coup of April 2012, demonstrates the need for even greater efforts with peace and reconstruction missions.

In 2011 and 2012, the patrol vessels *Cazadora*, *Centinela* and *Vencedora* sailed from the Naval Base at Las Palmas, Gran Canary, as part of Plan Africa 2009-2012<sup>(26)</sup>, tasked to carry out surveillance, protecting oil tankers loaded with crude for Europe, as well as for training military in the region<sup>(27)</sup>.

The main objectives of Plan Africa 2009-2012 are protection of human rights, integration of a gender perspective into cooperation policies, environmental sustainability, and adaptation to climate change. Likewise, protection of peace and security is also a fundamental part of its proposals. In this regard, full collaboration with governments has been sought, in order to tackle irregular migration and people trafficking.

The difficulties attributable to the current economic crisis have hindered this programme's full implementation.

## ■ European Union

From 2003, when the first European Security Strategy was drafted, Africa has deserved special attention from Community institutions<sup>(28)</sup>.

The growing involvement of the European Union in the region responds to the need to strengthen its position as one of the most influential global actors, in a very close geopolitical area. The conflicts, political and humanitarian crises and other security-related events have a great effect on the European Union. Al-Qaeda-like fundamentalist organisations have enlarged their sphere of activity into a belt that connects the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, the Horn of

<sup>(25)</sup> See their article «Epilogue to the EU's Security Sector Reform mission in Guinea-Bissau, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Position Paper 12-2010. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/Ficheros/DIEEEO12-2010/Verastegui/Epilogo\\_Mision-Guineabissau.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/Ficheros/DIEEEO12-2010/Verastegui/Epilogo_Mision-Guineabissau.pdf). Also see the report «In the Heart of the Narco-State», *El País*, 28th June 2009. Available at [http://www.elpais.com/diario/2009/06/28/domingo/1246161153\\_850215.html](http://www.elpais.com/diario/2009/06/28/domingo/1246161153_850215.html). With access from 19th August. In cache You have published that you also like this. Undo

<sup>(26)</sup> The full text can be seen at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, <http://www.mae.es/>, or at the following address: [www.casaffrica.es/casaffrica/Inicio/PlanAfrica2009-2012.pdf](http://www.casaffrica.es/casaffrica/Inicio/PlanAfrica2009-2012.pdf) With access from 19th August.

<sup>(27)</sup> See a brief introduction to the mission carried out by the two vessels at [http://www.armada.mde.es/ArmadaPortal/page/Portal/armadaEspannola/conocenos\\_actividades/deLa-Fuerza--0872\\_Africa-Partnership-Cazadora](http://www.armada.mde.es/ArmadaPortal/page/Portal/armadaEspannola/conocenos_actividades/deLa-Fuerza--0872_Africa-Partnership-Cazadora). With access from 20th August.

<sup>(28)</sup> See Solana, Javier. «A secure Europe in a Better World: European security strategy», Brussels, 2003. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>. With access from 21st August.

Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, the Sahel and the Maghreb, and the coasts facing Europe. This area is responsible for part of global energy supply and is the access point to important natural resources<sup>(29)</sup>.

The Joint Africa EU Strategy Action Plan 2011-2013 again refers to peace and security as a priority area in intercontinental dialogue and cooperation<sup>(30)</sup>.

Similarly, the EU reiterates its backing of peace and stability, governability and respect for human rights as necessary conditions for economic and social development.

In the 2011-2013 Plan, Brussels welcomes the advances provided to security by the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Brussels' proposal is to strengthen regional ability to prevent conflicts, integrating these operations with a crisis management work.

Likewise, the EU's intention is to make available all means for protecting the civilian population threatened by conflict and violence, particularly children, and simultaneously involving women in maintaining peace.

Brussels does not want to remain on the fringes of the silent struggle taking place on African soil, which principally involves the United States and China seeking to place their companies first in line for the continent's natural resources; ranging from hydrocarbons and rare minerals to arable land and fishing grounds.

We depend on external sources to meet our high energy consumption, which is approximately half the global total.

In order to provide energy supply guarantees, we propose cooperating with governability and the assurance of legality in producer nations, while trying to neutralise threats in extraction areas and the principal transport routes for hydrocarbons<sup>(31)</sup>.

Despite the good results achieved by European Union missions deployed in Africa, the prolonged process gone through from the emergence of initiatives

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<sup>(29)</sup> See Hornero Gómez, José. «Equatorial Guinea and the Gulf of Guinea»: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2011/DIEEEO46\\_201GuineaEcuatorialxGolfodeGuineaEspana\\_.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2011/DIEEEO46_201GuineaEcuatorialxGolfodeGuineaEspana_.pdf). With access from 3rd August.

<sup>(30)</sup> See Joint Africa EU Strategy Action Plan 2011-2013. Available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/118211.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/118211.pdf). With access from 3rd September 2012.

<sup>(31)</sup> See the ESS monitoring report, drafted at the end of 2008, and available at <http://consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/european-security-strategy.aspx?lang=en>. With access from 7th August.

until their coming into effect hinders them from fulfilling their full potential. This is one of the disadvantages of action backed by Brussels in comparison to other international actors, principally China.

### ■ United States

There are two fundamental reasons why Washington has reformulated its strategy in West Africa, considerably strengthening its presence. The first is the opening up of a new front in the war on international terrorism, in which Al-Qaeda's activity has been moving westwards, via its allies, approaching Nigeria's Atlantic coast.

Secondly, the United States wants to guarantee the highest possible level of security in its extraction, production and transport of hydrocarbons. It is estimated that, in 2020, a quarter of the oil imported by the United States will come from West Africa.

Some analysts suggest other priority North American strategic objectives for the region. They specifically refer to keeping the maritime area between the Gulf of Guinea and North America free from any threat or interference<sup>(32)</sup>. To achieve this it must contribute to African naval forces acquiring an operational capacity that will dissuade pirates from launching attacks, or will be able to counter them when necessary<sup>(33)</sup>.

Washington has also emphasised the need to strengthen the influence of its democratic model in the world, which should serve as a guarantee of leadership aiming to propagate the values sustained by Western representational systems.

- *Obama in Accra*

In an emotional speech given on 11th July 2009 in Accra to the Ghanaian Parliament, President Barack Obama sketched the general policy lines his government intended to drive forward in the African continent<sup>(34)</sup>. The essential objectives are set out in two reference documents: National Security Strategy<sup>(35)</sup>, for 2010 – which updates the document in force from 2006 – and Strategy for *Sub-Saharan Africa*<sup>(36)</sup>, made public a few months after the famous

<sup>(32)</sup> See José Hornero, *op. cit.*

<sup>(33)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>(34)</sup> The full speech can be played at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkNpUEWlhd4>.

<sup>(35)</sup> See the full document at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf). For an analysis of its fundamental aspects, see National Institute of Strategic Studies, «US National Security Strategy: notable aspects of its evolution» Analysis Document, 6/2010. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/2010/DA-IEEE\\_06-2010\\_NSS\\_2010\\_ASPECTOS\\_DESTACADOS\\_DE\\_SU\\_EVOLUCION.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/2010/DA-IEEE_06-2010_NSS_2010_ASPECTOS_DESTACADOS_DE_SU_EVOLUCION.pdf)

<sup>(36)</sup> The document can be viewed at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/af-rica\\_strategy\\_2.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/af-rica_strategy_2.pdf). With access from 14th August.

address. In the Accra address, invoking the blood ties that connect him to the continent, Obama sought to affirm his commitment to Africa.

Democracy, respect for human rights, and stability of institutions are the main principles that form the North American strategy for that region.

The White House acknowledges that West Africa has never had greater strategic importance in the evolution of global security and defence. It proposes a series of objectives, some immediate and some longer term, in order to neutralise the risks and threats present in the Gulf of Guinea.

Generally speaking, the main ones are:

- Dismantle the more active armed groups, in particular those that collaborate with Al-Qaeda in the Jihadist war against the west.
  - Put an end to indiscriminate attacks against the population which, in the conflicts that blight Africa, are accompanied by persecution, destruction of home and land, the penury of forced displacement and the rigours of drought and lack of food.
  - Stem human rights violations. Despite small advances and the insistence of the International Community, these are a great obstacle to stability and the resolution of conflicts in Africa. In this regard, international bodies of justice do important work in prosecuting those responsible for committing crimes against humanity.
  - Solution to the problem of refugees and other humanitarian crises.
  - Stabilisation of borders.
- The establishment of mechanisms that strengthen democratic institutions, giving special attention to strengthening judicial power in Africa's sub-Saharan states.
- With regard to technical assistance and military cooperation, this is carried out via the command of forces deployed in Africa (Africom)<sup>(37)</sup>. Based in Djibouti, its sphere of activity extends across sub-Saharan Africa, training local military to fight international terrorism.

In order to prevent pirate attacks, since last August, they have taken part in Atlantic patrols, along with the Nigerian military, which is the best equipped in the region.

Washington fears a situation in which Nigeria disintegrates or becomes entangled in a civil war that has no medium-term solution, involving the participation of Al-Qaeda along with the northern Islamists<sup>(38)</sup>.

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<sup>(37)</sup> See <http://www.africom.mil>

<sup>(38)</sup> See news article «AFRICOM commander sees Nigeria terror link», published on 17th August 2011 by the Associated Press. It can also be read at <http://www.armytimes.com/>

Washington's relations with the region's governments are generally good, though continuity of strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa is constrained by the result of the presidential elections.

If President Obama is re-elected, significant changes to the White House's African policy are not envisaged.

For Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, what stands out is the continent's great potential and the dynamism of its population, as well as its growth in recent years<sup>(39)</sup>.

Even so, he laments the fact that the United States is losing the initiative to China, which is consolidating its strong position in Africa.

## ■ China

China's presence in Africa is generally associated with buying land for large-scale crop cultivation, intense involvement in the fossil fuel and rare minerals markets, and the expansion of its companies. Since Beijing perceived the enormous possibilities offered by the continent as a source of resources for its booming economic activity, the planet's most populous nation has become almost omnipresent there. With increasingly significant participation in the production and importation of hydrocarbons and minerals, China has sought bilateral relations that do not hinder its need for resources. And, while buying up blocks of shares and oil rigs, it builds roads, railways and other infrastructure which benefit its trade and good relations with the host country.

When it decides to make the most of the economic advantages it has discovered in any place, wherever it may be, China does so with discretion and efficiency; and with speed, which on many occasions is lacking in, for example, the European Union. Though, in some cases, all manner of objections could be raised about its presence in Africa, China does not cause as much opposition as Western countries. It looks at Africa from the East, without paternalism or guilt. It is simply in a business trajectory and has no time to lose.

In order to establish a regulatory framework for economic relations with the Gulf of Guinea, in 2008, China signed the Partnership Agreement with the member countries of ECOWAS. The investments cover very diverse sectors, from hydrocarbons, minerals and construction, to textiles and pharmaceutical industries.

Another characteristic inseparable from Beijing's external activity is avoiding, by all means available, conflicts of any kind. It therefore tries to encourage

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[news/2011/08/ap-africom-commander-sees-nigeria-terror-link-081711/](http://news/2011/08/ap-africom-commander-sees-nigeria-terror-link-081711/)

<sup>(39)</sup> The general lines of his strategy for Africa can be seen at <http://www.mittromney.com/es/issues/africa> – United States. With access from 9th August In cache  
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dialogue and contribute to understanding. This is soft power, the search for maintenance of relative calm, yet without completely fulfilling anyone's expectations. Soft power and negotiations, as a backup and a lesser evil, can be replaced with simultaneous support for all sides. The careful pragmatism that China demonstrates can generate positive dynamics which enable reductions of tension in crisis situations, provided its mediation does not clash with the interests of the United States or the European Union.

## ■ International Organisations

- *African Union*

The continent's principal multilateral organisation is very active in driving forward peace initiatives, reconstruction and stabilisation, and defending Africa's surviving democratic systems.

Along with the regional organisations, African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), is designed to improve the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, and the progressive implementation of the African Security and Defence Policy. The AU Council for Peace and Security is the governing body of this recent security system<sup>(40)</sup>.

The Defence and Security Division deals with all aspects related to the control of armament and disarmament, the fight against terrorism, and security sector reform.

- *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)*

ECOWAS covers 15 countries from West Africa, including the Gulf of Guinea, with the exception of Equatorial Guinea.

Owing to the proliferation of conflicts in its area of direct influence, the organisation has actively involved itself in mediation and dialogue, and the resolution of political crises, coups and ethnic or religious violence. To this end it has developed a range of instruments related to regional security and defence, for improving the stabilisation of member countries and achieving a greater level of security. The framework circumscribing all such initiatives is the Protocol on the Mechanisms of Prevention and Management of Conflicts, Resolution, Maintenance of Peace and Security approved by the member states in 1999<sup>(41)</sup>. The Protocol unifies the content of previous treaties, such as the Non-Aggression treaty, (Lagos, 1978) and the Mutual Assistance treaty (Freetown, 1981). It also fully adapts the regulatory framework to the content of the different UN and AU resolutions.

The document makes a priority of putting an end to the suffering that violence brings to the civilian population.

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<sup>(40)</sup> See [http:// www.au.int/en/dp/ps/psdl cache](http://www.au.int/en/dp/ps/psdl cache).

<sup>(41)</sup> See the full text at <http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/index.php?id=ap101299&lang=>

It also reaffirms the commitment – which in practice the leaders have repeatedly violated – to good governance, the rule of law and sustainable development. There was an intention to give the treaty a more pragmatic character, and make it more effective in application to the numerous conflicts in the region.

In its framework for action, ECOWAS has been present in the civil wars of Sierra Leona (1990-1997 and 2003); Liberia (1993-2000), Guinea-Bissau (1999), and the Ivory Coast (2003)<sup>(42)</sup>. The Protocol warns of the risks posed by organised crime networks and the illegal activity that proliferates in the Gulf of Guinea. It can only be eradicated, adds the text, by means of coordinated and multilateral action by the most affected countries.

*The latest ECOWAS interventions took place after the coups in Guinea-Bissau and Mali. In both cases the course of action chosen was to send a mediation force in order to try to guarantee peace and security until the holding of free elections.*

Good will and the necessary participation of ECOWAS in the resolution of conflicts are beset by various problems. The most difficult to overcome is the lack of means, materials and people to enable the missions to produce the intended results.

The second problem, present in other multilateral bodies, is tardiness in adopting firm resolutions and putting them into practice. Another obstacle is the barely democratic character of some governments present in ECOWAS, and problems of credibility that can arise when strict respect for the rule of law is demanded.

If, in Togo or the Ivory Coast, the political opposition is persecuted, it is difficult for them to appeal for help from the coup regime in Bissau.

In any case, ECOWAS is making significant efforts to make West Africa a more secure region.

In the current circumstances, the fulfilment of this objective can only be envisaged if the deployment of their missions is accompanied by international forces.

- *United Nations*

Committed to seeking substantial improvement in the Gulf of Guinea, the UN has approved the framework for maritime security, focused on tackling piracy and other violent practices in the waters around the continent.

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<sup>(42)</sup> Also see Kwesi, Emmanuel, «Investing in peace and security in Africa: the case of ECOWAS», *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 4, no. 3. pp. 533-542. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1467880042000320050>.



## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

In its future as a geopolitical region, the Gulf of Guinea will continue to be constrained by two forces that act in opposite directions.

Generally, the region's economy will continue to be highly competitive and dynamic, with remarkable levels of growth in a time of global recession. Along with other sectors, those of hydrocarbons, mining and some agricultural products guarantee that the trend of recent years will be consolidated.

The development of the mobile phone market, and the launch of a new satellite produced in Nigeria, show the region's potential for economic development.

At the same time, it is probable that, thanks to international pressure and social evolution itself, the democratic advances and reforms will persist. An improved institutional climate and political openness are vital objectives. Movements through which the people demand more democracy, and the relative normalisation of electoral processes in various countries are positive signs in this regard. In spite of the obstacles, which make this transformation a prolonged and uneven process, it is foreseeable that this trend will also prevail in the immediate future. The evolution of Liberia after the peace accord signed in 2002, or the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone, are hopeful examples, although the risk of a backlash is still high in other countries.

The first constraint for regional security is the prevalence of deep internal divisions, of ethnic, religious, political or economic character. The outbreaks of violence that periodically rock the region can result in civil conflicts. One example is the worsening of the situation in the Ivory Coast, where escalated tension endangers pacification of the country.

On the other hand, political corruption, coercion and other administrative malpractice have very negative consequences for regional development. Firstly, they result in juridical insecurity, harming one of the greatest factors in helping a nation achieve stability and progress. In booming economies like those of West Africa, it weakens growth and hinders the normal development of productive activity and the arrival of greater investment. Such problems encourage the pillaging of natural resources, the formation of clans and power groups, fraud, and irregularities of all kinds in contractual relations. For the same reason, they put a brake on job creation, and the access of large sections of the population to the benefits of the economic boom. As a result they become destabilising factors and sources of conflict.

At the same time, corruption and juridical insecurity denote an indifferent attitude to citizens' political freedoms and the rights of the individual, and towards

the functioning of democratic institutions. With foundations like these, any misunderstanding or difference can become the source of a new conflict, while a sense of belonging feeds social tension.

Ultimately, the institutional factor and the transmission of correct incentives by administrations are essential to a nation's progress.

Institutional cooperation is therefore one of the areas where the International Community can offer more to the region's development, by means of mediation in political conflicts, and by strengthening judicial power and national security systems.

### ■ **Nigeria**

In the immediate future, Nigeria must continue to deal with a complex socio-political arrangement, which contains threats to the nation's security and stability.

Attacks by Boko Haram, instability in the Niger Delta and piracy will continue to cause security problems for Nigeria.

### ■ **Boko Haram**

From the perspective of international Jihadism, establishing itself in such an important country is an opportunity the armed group will try to make the most of. In that regard, Boko Haram's decentralised and anarchic structure will facilitate its infiltration and subsequent control, which would be incorporated into the framework of Al-Qaeda in West Africa. In the current circumstances, it is quite probable that this will occur in the short term. The abandonment of the more vulnerable states to Boko Haram action, by the civil population, is indicative of the worrying situation for the federal government.

Independent of its origin, the conflict has acquired a clearly religious aspect, linked to Al-Qaeda's expansion towards West Africa.

### ■ **Piracy**

It is foreseeable that, after having reached the maximum alert level due to the frequency of attacks in recent months, a new trend towards gradual control of this phenomenon in the Gulf of Guinea may begin. A better equipped Nigerian military, and international collaboration, will be the key factors to neutralising the pirates operating in the area. Despite the advantages offered by the Delta's terrain, and the opportunities offered by political corruption, neither the Gulf governments nor the International Community can allow the proliferation of

pirates, exacerbating insecurity in such an important area for world energy supply.

Taking into account the successes achieved in the Indian Ocean, it is quite probable that similar measures to those applied off the Somali coast will be used.

### ■ Niger Delta

This marshy, overpopulated, oil-producing region will, for another year, be a focus of instability and concern. Despite the strengthening of security and the amnesty for MEND militants, the Delta continues to be a centre of smuggling of all kinds.

The activity of the oil companies will continue to be targeted.

At the same time, the tension associated with the area's geographical and socioeconomic characteristics will not significantly reduce.

High unemployment and the lack of resources for the local population will continue to cause a feeling of rejection towards the presence of multinational oil consortia.

## CHAPTER X

# THE GREAT LAKES REGION. THE GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGE OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*Ignacio J. García Sánchez*

*«I'm speaking to you at the end of a long trip. I began in Russia for a summit between two great powers. I travelled to Italy for a meeting of the world's leading economies. And I've come here to Ghana for a simple reason: The 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens in Accra, as well. This is the simple truth of a time when the boundaries between people are overwhelmed by our connections. Your prosperity can expand America's prosperity. Your health and security can contribute to the world's health and security. And the strength of your democracy can help advance human rights for people everywhere. So I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world as partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect. And that is what I want to speak with you about today.»*

*Barack Obama.*

Speech to the Ghanaian Parliament.

11th July 2009

**ABSTRACT:**

The Great Lakes Region embodies the essence of the African continent and its struggle to emerge from a vicious cycle of poverty and externally driven conflict. The current geopolitical environment – dominated by a global crisis of financial capitalism that affects all regions but is particularly severe in the developed world – coupled to a huge wealth of natural resources put the region in a favourable position to build a new, unique, individual scenario up from its own roots, providing the basis for on-going, sustainable development and hope.

The formidable threats and challenges the region faces are rooted in inhuman slavery, acquisitive colonialism and the trauma of independence revolutions encumbered by Marxist ideology. A region where ethnic, racial and tribal resentment live on to this day, driven by charismatic leaders who hold sway over a very young population using poverty and exclusion to their advantage. The strength of its natural resources, however, and the huge human potential of youth in today's multilateral, plural framework offer this region a unique opportunity in its relatively short history to play its own distinctive role in the international scene.

**Keywords:**

Conflict, Africa, Great Lakes, Security, Development, Colonialism, Independence.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

*«On the basis of its geopolitical features and patterns, sub-Saharan Africa is the least mature region in the global geopolitical system, and it is highly unlikely to evolve rapidly towards a coherent geopolitical structure that may help it to overcome the current regional atomization.»*

*Saul Bernard Cohen*<sup>(1)</sup>

The increasing pace of transformation in the global strategic framework – which will accelerate even further in this constantly changing environment – is a hallmark of our age. Speed has become crucial for any decision-making process in geopolitics today. This is one of the key distinctive elements of modern geostrategic thought across the globe. While the West, mired by its own supremacy, seems poorly adapted to and even uncomfortable in the new strategic scenario, other geopolitical regions are engaged in expansion and creation, building relationships at a rate that is sometimes faster than the current circumstances would appear to require. This situation calls for some reflection on the near future.

Yet the challenges of political decision-making are different in each individual human and social environment. In the region covered by this article – which will focus strictly on security matters and specifically the most critical aspect of this subject, i.e. conflict – uncertainty and complexity are manifest: *«The conflicts seen in the first decade of the 21st century are seeming to give way to a hybrid scenario, combining conventional conflict and asymmetrical confrontation, with the latter threat becoming increasingly prevalent and availing itself at any opportunity of areas that lie beyond the control of territorially sovereign states.»*<sup>(2)</sup>

In this context, Africa represents one of the many faces – possibly the most tragic – of conflict in today’s kaleidoscopic scenario: *«Globalisation and the new emerging powers are creating a multipolar world in a process which, expedited by the financial and economic crisis since 2007, is set to gain further momentum in coming years. This new world order involves security and stability risks unless it is coupled with multilateral governance, at the regional and global levels, based on promoting democracy and human rights. Multipolarity without efficient multilateralism can lead to grave conflict.»*<sup>(3)</sup> The

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<sup>(1)</sup> Cohen, Samuel Bernard. *Geopolitics: The geography of international relations*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Second edition.2009, p. 403.

<sup>(2)</sup> National Defence Directive 2012: *Working for a responsible, necessary defence*. July 2012. Spanish Government. The NDD is available for download at <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/Varios/DDN-2012.pdf>.

<sup>(3)</sup> Spanish Security Strategy: *A responsibility shared by all*. 2011. Spanish Government. The SSS 2011 is available for download at <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicacio>

2012 National Defence Directive highlights the «*endemic ills*» of sub-Saharan Africa, while the Spanish Security Strategy refers to the continent as «*culturally diverse, demographically dynamic, with the lowest human development indicators in the world; the region where highly disturbing phenomena such as climate change and uncontrolled migration are felt the strongest.*» Africa is also associated in this document with «*serious problems including illegal trafficking, ethnic conflict, failed states, underdevelopment (...) [It is also] fertile ground for criminal networks and terrorist groups*».

This view of Africa as geopolitically immature, as Saul Bernard Cohen puts it<sup>(4)</sup>, finds its roots, perhaps more deeply than in any other of the world's regions, in the continent's geographical and climatic traits. Added to this, its late entry into the international scene is associated with a deeply harrowing episode that has left a profound mark on the present: slave trading, which forced more than 15 million Africans away from their places of origin to be sold as slaves between 1500 and 1800, mostly in the Americas but also in the Near East and Asia.

The industrial revolution has imposed the role of raw material supplier on sub-Saharan Africa. In the scramble for a land potentially rich in natural resources, the European powers and the first white settlers set out to pursue their own large-scale relations and interests, which were patently quite removed from the real interests of the native populations. The real reason behind this economic exploitation was Europe's rapid industrialisation of the 1870–1890 period. Rapidly growing surplus capital called for new markets, particularly in Europe and North America, and for the minerals and agricultural products found in tropical regions. An organic notion of geopolitics thus became increasingly dominant, with «*living space*» as a central idea. While the dominant states were destined to grow, smaller countries were destined to disappear or submit to absorption. This conception culminated after the First World War with the Munich school of geopolitics, particularly the views of Karl Haushofer, who envisaged a world divided into global regions, one of which would comprise Europe and Africa. The industrial, financial North, led by Germany, would rule the South, whose economy would be centred on the primary sector, i.e. agriculture and cattle rearing, and the supply of raw materials<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Second World War and the collapse of colonial Europe did not alter the course of political and socioeconomic trends. During the Cold War, sub-Saharan Africa was crippled by internal fragmentation resulting firstly from the struggle between the two ideologically-driven blocs and secondly from decolonisation. The poorest region in the world is geopolitically atomised

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[nes/Nacional/EstrategiaEspanolaSeguridad\\_junio2011.pdf](#).

<sup>(4)</sup> Op. cit. Note 1, p. 405.

<sup>(5)</sup> Delgado Moreno, Alfonso. *La evolución del pensamiento geopolítico*. CESEDEN. Monografías. Fundamentos de la Estrategia para el siglo XXI. («The Evolution of geopolitical thought. CESEDEN. Monographics. Fundamentals of the 21st century strategy.») December 2003. Spain. Ministry of Defence.

and recurrently torn by conflict. Most African countries were fashioned on the territorial boundaries passed down from the colonial period. This design is flawed in countless ways, as in many cases boundaries were drawn without any political sensitivity to the ethnic, tribal and religious sovereignty of the individual groups brought together. The post-colonial experience has thus been laid to waste by bitter disputes for separation or union, leading to dramatic loss of human life, devastation of entire regions and massive refugee movements.

In this immature, fragile geopolitical environment, Africa is waking up to a new age of international transformation, born of the collapse of Marxist ideology and prevailed by globalisation and power dissemination. Its guiding reference, Europe, is a consolidated geopolitical area that in turn feels responsible for the socioeconomic failings of its former African colonies. The region is dominated by four major foci of instability: the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. All these areas are trapped in the vicious circle created by Africa's «*endemic ills*», notably:

A population of more than 800 million people (see Table 1) scattered across a territory of more than 20 million square kilometres. The long distances between the fertile agricultural lands in the tropical and subtropical areas exacerbate dispersion. Moreover, none of its coastlines, which have a limited extension, have the necessary economic and demographic weight to play a dominant role as a regional power. A further factor that favours dispersion is the large number of far-between river systems, each attracting major concentrations of population.

- Although the region is predominantly black, there are more than one thousand ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive language and religious characteristics.
- Transport axes are insufficient and merely serve as routes for the transport of crops and minerals – they do not favour population concentration and economic development. Instead of helping to strengthen and cement national and regional systems, these corridors have become centrifugal forces that foster discord and strife.

**Table 10.1**

<b>SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA</b>	<b>Years 2010/11</b>
Total population (millions)	874,8
Population growth rate (annual %)	2.5
Urban population (%)	37
GDP (US\$) (thousands of millions)	1.254



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	Years 2010/11
Income per capita (US\$)	1.293
GDP growth rate (annual %)	5.0
Life expectancy, total (years)	54.2
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	76.9
Literacy rate among young women (% aged between 15-24)	68.7
Prevalence of the HIV virus (% of population aged between 15-49)	5.5
Source: World Development indicators*	

\* More recent data can be found at: <http://data.worldbank.org/region/SSA>

However, this scenario may be changing despite the challenge posed by the global crisis and the rise in food prices caused by the devastating drought that is currently affecting the whole world. According to the World Bank's economic forecasts, the region will enjoy growth rates of 5.3% in 2012 and 5.6% in 2013. The 18 largest African countries will reach a combined annual purchasing power of 1.3 billion US dollars by 2030. Moreover, this growth, which has brought an aggregate increase in the region's GDP over the last 10 years of 167%<sup>(6)</sup>, has been general. More than one third of the countries in the region have seen growth rates of 6% or greater, with some 20 countries already growing faster than in 2007 and 2008. This economic growth is helped by high prices in commodities and other exports, oil-producing countries benefiting most in this respect. Improved trade terms also contributed to a growth equivalent to 8.5% of GDP.

Added to this, direct incoming foreign investment increased by 25% to an estimated 35.6 billion US dollars, despite drastic fall-backs in 2009 and 2010. «*The business climate is improving, attracting investment in telecommunications, real estate, and retail.*» Remittances from Africans residing abroad have also recovered, rising to a maximum of 23 billion US dollars.

The World Bank report for the region states that «*Africa's long-term growth will increasingly reflect interrelated social and demographic changes creating new domestic engines of growth.*» The report focuses on key points including urbanisation, an expanding workforce and the emergence of middle-class African consumers. While in 1980 only 28% of Africans lived in cities, today almost 40% of the continent's more than 800 million people are urban dwellers, «*roughly the same proportion as China's and greater than India's*». According to the World Bank's estimates, this percentage will have risen to 50% by 2030.

Despite these accomplishments, major challenges still lie ahead in terms of socioeconomic development, not least because governance and trans-

<sup>(6)</sup> The region's GDP in 2002 was 470 billion US dollars. Over the ten previous years (1992–2002) the region's GDP fell marginally from 558 billion US dollars in 1992.

parency remain weak in many countries. Poverty constitutes one of the endemic ills mentioned by the NDD 2012. According to the latest update published by the World Bank in 2008, for the first time since 1981 (51%) less than half of the African population (47%)<sup>(7)</sup> have lived on less than 1.25 US dollars a day. The poverty rate has fallen by ten percentage points since 1999<sup>(8)</sup>.

Maternal mortality fell 26% between 1990 and 2009, although 645 women still die during pregnancy or childbirth for every 100,000 live births. Significant progress has also been achieved in the area of healthcare<sup>(9)</sup>, where child mortality rates are also decreasing<sup>(10)</sup>, while HIV infections are stabilising. Primary school completion rates are rising faster than anywhere else in the world<sup>(11)</sup>. Primary school enrolments have increased significantly, bringing millions of children into education for the first time.

The region is also highly vulnerable to adverse climatic events, which are becoming more variable and extreme. Their effects, including high temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and increasingly frequent extreme natural disasters, compound the challenges faced by agriculture, water sourcing and the food industry in general<sup>(12)</sup>. These circumstances could jeopardise progress in the fight against poverty, hunger and disease, threatening the lives of many millions. The World Bank's estimates reveal that Africa faces an annual loss of between 1% and 2% of its GDP due to climate instability. Deforestation, especially in the tropics, contributes about 20 per cent of man-made global carbon emissions<sup>(13)</sup>.

<sup>(7)</sup> The World Bank gave the following figures in 2008: sub-Saharan Africa, 47.5%; South Asia, 36%; East Asia and Pacific, 14.3%; Latin America and Caribbean, 6.5%; North Africa and Near East, 2.7%; and Europe and Central Asia, 0.5%.

The figures for a daily income of 2 US dollars are radically different. Here, South Asia has the highest rate at 70.9%, with sub-Saharan Africa in second place at 69.2%. This exposes the real extent of poverty in the African continent. In East Asia and the Pacific the figure doubles, reaching 33.2%. The same is the case in Latin America and Caribbean at 12.4%, while North Africa and Near East exceeds this figure at 13.9%. Europe and Central Asia stand at 2.2%.

<sup>(8)</sup> In the Great Lakes region, poverty is distributed as follows: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 87.72% (2006); Burundi, 81.32% (2006); Zambia, 68.51% (2006); Tanzania, 67.9% (2007); Rwanda, 63.2% (2011); Central African Republic, 62.8% (2008); Angola, 54.31% (2000); Republic of the Congo, 54.10% (2005); Kenya, 43.37% (2005); Uganda, 38% (2009); and Republic of Sudan, 19.8% (2009). No data are available for the Republic of South Sudan.

<sup>(9)</sup> Life expectancy has risen in the last 10 years from 50 in 2002 to 54 at the present time.

<sup>(10)</sup> In Rwanda, the child mortality rate fell by 47%. In many African countries, maternal mortality has fallen between 20% and 50%.

<sup>(11)</sup> The primary school completion rate has risen in the last 10 years from 56% in 2002 to the current 70%.

<sup>(12)</sup> Access to drinking water in the region stands at 61% (2010), where the current world average is 88%.

<sup>(13)</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are below 0.8 metric tonnes per capita, where the world average is 4.8 metric tonnes and the average for OECD countries reaches 10.5 metric tonnes.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

*«In today's post-colonial world, the newly politically awakened partake of a common historical narrative that interprets their relative deprivation, prolonged external domination, denial of self-dignity, and continued personal disadvantage as the collective legacy of Western domination.»*

*Zbigniew Brzezinski*<sup>(14)</sup>

Before describing the historical background to conflict in the Great Lakes Region, we will first delineate the area subject to analysis. For this purpose, we will have recourse to a regional initiative which, as an effort of local, regional, international and global cooperation, may be considered the best suited instrument to resolve crisis situations that may arrest development and stability in the member countries.

The International Conference on the Great Lakes *«is composed of eleven member states: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia, with the youngest nation in the world, South Sudan, envisaged to become the next member. The Conference emerged out of one of the worst atrocities in modern history, the Rwandan genocide of 1994, where more than 800,000 people were killed, most of them women and children. The Rwandan Hutu government's attempted extermination of the Tutsi population, which brought death to 11% of the total population and approximately 80% of Tutsis, was largely funded with money from international aid – used to purchase materials including machetes and automatic light weapons – and was perpetrated while the leading international security organisations watched passively.»*<sup>(15)</sup>

The exploitative ordeal of European colonisation, with the scars of racism and ethnic violence it left behind, continued to be felt as newly formed countries endeavoured to build national identities, however fragile, in the absence of historical boundaries or any sense of culture and tradition they could call their own. Territorial demarcations that have no regard for religious, ethnic or linguistic differences, added to a colonial legacy that replaced subsistence farming with an export-oriented use of the land, had a lethal effect on vast swathes of population living below the poverty line. Utterly porous boundaries allow

<sup>(14)</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *«STRATEGIC VISION. America and the Crisis of Global Power»*. Basic books. 2012 New York p. 32.

<sup>(15)</sup> García Sánchez, Ignacio José. *«La Región de los Grandes Lagos. El Corazon de Africa en la encrucijada»* (The Great Lakes Region. The heart of Africa at a crossroads.) Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Available for download at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analysis/2012/DIESEL\\_37-2012.La\\_region\\_de\\_los\\_ganders\\_Lagos\\_JIGS.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analysis/2012/DIESEL_37-2012.La_region_de_los_ganders_Lagos_JIGS.pdf).

rebel groups and masses of refugees to move freely through them and serve as communication channels for organised crime. Moreover, they stoke disputes for rich deposits of valuable minerals and other natural wealth sources, which are strewn across the African continent heedless of sovereignty or territorial demarcation.

Since the 1980s, all the countries in the region have suffered anti-colonial wars, civil conflicts, coups and severe famines.

**Angola**, which gained independence from Portugal in 1975 after a 14-year war, was embroiled in a civil struggle that went on for 27 years until 2002 between the country's two main rebel groups: the socialist People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, led by the current president, José Eduardo Do Santos, and the northern nationalist, conservative National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Samba. Samba's death in 2002 opened the way for a peace agreement, and today UNITA, currently led by Henrique Noyal Samakuva. The civil war left almost one and a half million dead and more than four million displaced persons.

**Burundi**, which gained independence from Belgium on 1st July 1965, suffered several coups and the assassination of its first democratically elected president in 1993. This sparked a violent civil conflict between the Hutu majority (85%) and the Tutsi minority (14%). The conflict, which the constitution enacted in 2005 and subsequent elections (in 2005 and 2010) are striving to provide a peaceful settlement for, left more than 200,000 people dead in a country with a population of 10.5 million (2% of the population perished). The country's Hutu president, Pierre Nkurunziza, was re-elected in 2010 and is assisted by two vice-presidents, one of them Tutsi and the other Hutu.

**Kenya**, which attained independence from the British Empire in 1960 after eight years of civil insurgency under the charismatic leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, is currently undergoing a disputed internal process to build a national identity in a state that has been multi-ethnic since its inception. With a surface area of 580,367 square kilometres (the 49th largest country in the world, between France and Spain), the country is divided into 47 districts, which enjoy substantial autonomy from the central government. The state's difficulties in ensuring security and stability were laid bare after the 2007 election, when more than 1,500 people were killed. The new constitution enacted in August 2010 should provide a legal framework enabling this culturally diverse society to develop in harmonious coexistence.

**The Central African Republic (CAR)**, which achieved independence from France in 1960, was ruled by a string of military and civil governments that failed to control a country almost the size of its former colonial metropolis but

with a population scarcely above five million and useful farming land amounting to 3.1% of its territory. March 2003 saw the latest coup, headed by General François Bozizé, who called an election in 2005, which he won. His re-election in 2011 did not gain international support due to countless irregularities in the process. The Bangui government does not control the country's entire vast territory, and the armed groups of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operate in some areas. This Ugandan-born terrorist movement, one of the most active in the region, which combines Christian fundamentalism and northern Ugandan ethnic groups, is led by Joseph Kony, a man sought by international justice who is widely known for recruiting approximately 100,000 child soldiers<sup>(16)</sup>. Its activities have caused the internal displacement of almost 2 million people in the regions adjoining South Sudan and the DRC, as well as northern Angola<sup>(17)</sup>.

**The Republic of Congo**, which gained independence from France in 1960, had Marxist governments until the end of the Cold War, when a number of coups took place. It was at that time that north-south ethnic rivalries brought the bloodiest conflicts and the gravest refugee and displacement crises. The peace agreement of 2003, though successfully breaking the spiral of violence, was followed by an unstable scenario where the country's – albeit declining – wealth in natural resources including oil and diamonds<sup>(18)</sup> only exacerbates the situation, fuelling corruption and the activities of warlord-protected criminal organisations.

**The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, which gained independence from Belgium in 1960, suffered from significant social and political instability during its first years of existence<sup>(19)</sup>, which paved the way for the 1965 coup by colonel Joseph Mobutu, later known as Mobutu Sese Seko<sup>(20)</sup>. Mobutu ruled the country for 32 years until internal instability, compounded by a massive influx of refugees from the conflict between Rwanda and Burundi, led to a rebellion headed by Laurent Kabila<sup>(21)</sup> in 1997, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, which ultimately succeeded in ousting the president. Yet this did not mark the

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<sup>(16)</sup> <http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/the-lords-resistance-army>.

<sup>(17)</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41980&Cr=LRA&Cr1=> .

<sup>(18)</sup> The Republic of Congo was expelled from the Kimberley Process in 2004 for lack of transparency as to the origin of large quantities of diamonds being exported through official channels. Readmission is apparently being considered as the country meets the required standards.

<http://www.diamondempowerment.org/education-initiatives/diamond-producing-countries/republic-of-congo/>.

<sup>(19)</sup> It is the largest and most highly populated country in the Great Lakes region. It is the 11th largest country in the world, after Algeria, with a population of more than 73.5 million – double the number of people living in both Sudanese republics put together. Its huge wealth of natural resources have been and continue to be at the source of the country's enduring instability, particularly in the eastern areas.

<sup>(20)</sup> Mobutu changed the country's and the river Congo's name to Zaire in 1975

<sup>(21)</sup> Laurent Kabila, originally a Marxist, led the Tutsis of the Kivu region in the south, against the dominant Hutu group. However, his inability to suppress Hutu extremists in the east of

end of external intervention. One of the most devastating conflicts in the region ensued, engulfing virtually every surrounding country<sup>(22)</sup>, and even involving the occupation of the eastern part of the DRC by Rwandan forces. The conflict finally came to its termination with the signing of the Pretoria Agreement between both presidents, Joseph Kabila<sup>(23)</sup> and Kagame on 30th July 2002<sup>(24)</sup>. National and international reconciliation has progressed and president Joseph Kabila was re-elected in November 2011 in a disputed election<sup>(25)</sup>.

**The Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan** were discussed in the Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts 2011<sup>(26)</sup> and in document published by the Institute on the first anniversary of the separation between the two countries on 9th July of this year<sup>(27)</sup>. The subject is also addressed in Chapter VIII of this edition on the Darfur conflict.

**Rwanda**, which achieved independence from Belgium in 1962 with a Hutu majority government<sup>(28)</sup> that had succeeded in ousting a Tutsi monarch with the aid of colonial power, was embroiled in a fratricidal civil war that came to a bloody head in April 1994 with the genocide of the Tutsi population by the Hutu political regime, which killed more than 75% of the group. The genocide ended when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched an offensive from the north of the country and the Ugandan border which defeated the largely Hutu governmental troops and established a government of national unity. The war left more than one million dead and two million refugees, who fled to the bordering countries and have since progressively been returning to their places of origin. Even so there are still some rebel groups, most notably the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (DFLR), which was formed around the civil and military perpetrators of the genocide but currently aims to bring together all the movements that oppose the Kigali regime, including both Hutus and Tutsis.

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the country led to a renewed offensive by Rwanda, this time directed against him, seeking to occupy the region.

<sup>(22)</sup> The clash involved on one side Rwanda, supported by Uganda, and on the other side Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, all of which supported Kabila's regime.

<sup>(23)</sup> Joseph Kabila succeeded his father Laurent in power when the latter was assassinated in January 2001.

<sup>(24)</sup> The peace agreement brought the «Great African War» to an end, although instability lives on in the east of the country. The war is estimated to have caused more than 3 million casualties, through direct fighting, disease and malnutrition.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sc7479.doc.htm>.

<sup>(25)</sup> Joseph Kabila: 49%, Etienne Tshisekedi: 32.3%. Source:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html>

<sup>(26)</sup> Baños Bajo, Pedro. «*Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts 2011.*» Chapter V. South Sudan: The Uncertainties of a New State. Available for download at

[http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama\\_geopolitico\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2011.pdf).

<sup>(27)</sup> García Sánchez, Ignacio José. «*South Sudan Year 1.*» Available for download at

[http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analysis/2012/DIEEEA31-2012\\_Sudan\\_del\\_Sur\\_Ano\\_I\\_JIGS.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analysis/2012/DIEEEA31-2012_Sudan_del_Sur_Ano_I_JIGS.pdf).

<sup>(28)</sup> Ethnic groups: Hutu (Bantu), 84%; Tutsi (Hamitic), 15%; Twa (Pygmy), 1%.

**Tanzania**, which came into being as a nation state in 1964 following the union of Tanganyika, which achieved independence from the British Empire in 1961, and Zanzibar<sup>(29)</sup> (1963), has been spared from any significant internal conflicts and clashes with rebel groups. Thus, it has enjoyed political stability, possibly because it lacks the rich natural resources of its neighbours. Its economy, one of the poorest in the world<sup>(30)</sup> which nonetheless grows at an average annual rate of 6.7%, is essentially based on tourism<sup>(31)</sup> and, gold and coffee exports. The stability and security that are needed to exploit tourism are threatened by the large numbers of refugees entering the country – more than half a million, chiefly from Burundi and the DRC.

**Uganda**, which gained independence from the United Kingdom, in 1962, suffered a major internal crisis stemming from the colonial boundaries, which bring together a multiplicity of ethnic groups, political systems and cultures<sup>(32)</sup>. The governments of Idi Amin and Milton Obote plunged the country into a severe crisis in which more than half a million people were killed by the government apparatus. Recovery is slowly being achieved under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni (1986), who authorised the introduction of a multi-party system in 2005. Economic development, which until now had been based principally on coffee exports, has been boosted by the discovery of oil fields, which the country intends to begin exploiting in the near future, and other natural resources yet to be discovered. However, development is threatened in the north of the country by the LRA, which has recently deployed in neighbouring countries. The group has allegedly kidnapped and murdered tens of thousands of people, and caused more than one and a half million more to become refugees. The wealthy oil-producing area bordering the DRC is home to the supporters of the rebel Allied Democratic Forces and the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU), which aim to establish an Islamic state in Uganda. The groups, which were formed in 1995 by the former followers of the dictators Idi Amin and Milton Obote, have been inactive for some time.

<sup>(29)</sup> Zanzibar has autonomous status and its own parliament. Disputes between the two main parties, which were frequent in the past, have subsided since a national unity government was formed in 2010.

<sup>(30)</sup> With an average per capita income of 1,500 US dollars, Tanzania occupies position 201 in the world of a total of 226, ahead of Rwanda (202), Uganda (203), Central African Republic (219), Burundi (223) and DRC (226); and behind Zambia (198), Kenya (195), Sudan (173), Republic of Congo (158), and Angola (141).

<sup>(31)</sup> Its territory is home to natural sites such as mount Kilimanjaro (the tallest peak in Africa and one of only two mountains in Africa, along with mount Kenya, to have permanent glaciers) and numerous natural parks (the Serengeti, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, being the best known among them). It also borders three of the African Great Lakes: lake Victoria, the second largest drinking water lake in the world; lake Tanganyika, the second deepest lake in the world; and lake Nyassa.

<sup>(32)</sup> The country is politically structured into 112 districts, where a multiplicity of ethnic groups like (Baganda 16.9%, Banyakole 9.5%, Basoga 8.4%, Bakiga 6.9%, Iteso 6.4%, Langi 6.1%, Acholi 4.7%, Bagisu 4.6%, Lugbara 4.2%, Bunyoro 2.7% and other 29.6%).

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html>.

**Zambia**, formerly known as North Rhodesia, peacefully achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1964 and adopted a Communist regime under the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda. The government's massive reduction in copper production – Zambia is the largest copper exporter in Africa – and a fall in prices brought the country to economic disaster. The fall of the Soviet empire, with the political democratisation and economic liberalisation that followed, added to the relative stability and security currently enjoyed in the country, have attracted tourists who are willing to visit its countless national parks and sites of natural beauty<sup>(33)</sup>. Victory in the last election, held in September 2011, went to Michael Sata (43%). In his fourth attempt to secure the presidency, he defeated the former president, Rupiah Bwezani Banda (36%) of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy, who had been in power for 20 years.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

*«A more efficient aid programme means focusing equally on the three pillars of development: human capital, economic infrastructures and political capabilities.»*

*Charles A. Kupchan*<sup>(34)</sup>

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More than half a century after the traumas caused by decolonisation, and more than thirty years after the end of the ideological war that split the world into two great blocs, the region's current potential to shape its own destiny does not allow for excuses. It is virtually unscathed by the financial crisis that began already five years ago in the heart of the developed world<sup>(35)</sup> and set in an extremely favourable economic, political and social environment. The ability to create a hopeful future in the region will depend on the political skill its governments demonstrate in building solid local and regional institutions capable of seizing the opportunities opened up by technological innovation and the new Internet– and clean-energy-based economic infrastructure.

Some considerable challenges remain, however, which require great political and social courage to resolve.

**The «Great War of Africa»**, which centred on the Democratic Republic of Congo, produced complex alliances and involved the use of terrible cruelty and violence. Despite the efforts being made at every level to implement peace

<sup>(33)</sup> The most renowned of the countless natural sites in the country is the Victoria Falls, a World Heritage Site in the Zambezi river basin, near lake Kariba, which contains the largest reserve of fresh water in the world by volume.

<sup>(34)</sup> Kupchan, Charles A. «*The end of the American Era. U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century*». New York 2002. Random House, Inc.

<sup>(35)</sup> What the former Brazilian president has called the crisis «of white, blue-eyed people».



agreements through effective control of the territory, political tension and sporadic upsurges of rebel violence are still found today. Particularly following the contested results of the 2011<sup>(36)</sup> election, where after considerable delays the victory of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) was finally announced<sup>(37)</sup>. On 15th June 2011 three opposition groups<sup>(38)</sup> joined forces to challenge the results once again and call attention to the instability in the east of the country.

Fighting has flared up again in the last few months between the Congolese Armed Forces<sup>(39)</sup> and the March 23 Movement (M23), which is suspected to have Rwanda's support. Despite repeated denials by the Kigali government, Kabila publicly accused Rwanda on 29th July<sup>(40)</sup>. Following the publication of a report on the matter by a UN group of experts, a number of donor countries including the US<sup>(41)</sup> and several European states suspended the provision of aid to the country.

The escalating violence led the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 2053 (2012) on 27th June<sup>(42)</sup>, which extends until 30th June 2013 the mandate of MONUSCO<sup>(43)</sup>, supports the efforts of the Armed Forces of the DRC, calls for regional cooperation and reaffirms the UN mission's priority of protecting the

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<sup>(36)</sup> <http://es.euronews.com/2011/12/14/los-observadores-de-la-ue-critican-el-proceso-electoral-en-r-d-del-congo/>.

<sup>(37)</sup> The PPRD won 63 seats in a National Assembly of 500, losing 111 from the 2006 election, and was therefore compelled to enter into agreements with other forces of a similar political affiliation. The party is currently governing with a majority of 260 seats, fewer than the 332 it had in the previous parliamentary term.

<sup>(38)</sup> The Union for Democracy and Social Progress (the opposition party led by Étienne Tshisekedi that won 32.33% of the vote, compared with 48.95% won by Kabila), the Alliance of Patriots for the Re-foundation of the Congo, and the People's Resistance Army.

<sup>(39)</sup> «Fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (AFDRC) and the rebels of the March 23 Movement (M23) intensified in June and July. Between 6th and 8th July, M23 rebels seized some towns in the northern Kivu province, including Bunagana, Rubare, Rutshuru, Kalengera and Kako. This offensive has strengthened the rebel group and brought the capability of government troops into question.» IISS Armed Conflict Data Base.

<sup>(40)</sup> On 15th July, during the 19th Summit of the African Union being held in Addis Ababa, presidents Kabila and Kagame endorsed an International Conference on the Great Lakes agreement for the establishment of an international neutral force «to eradicate M23, FDLR and all other rebel forces in eastern DRC and patrol and secure the border zones». [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analysis/2012/DIESEL\\_37-2012.La\\_region\\_de\\_los\\_ganders\\_Lagos\\_JIGS.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analysis/2012/DIESEL_37-2012.La_region_de_los_ganders_Lagos_JIGS.pdf).

<sup>(41)</sup> The US government has warned the Rwandan authorities that they could be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court for supporting M23. <http://congoplanet.com/news/1988/paul-kagame-may-face-war-crimes-charges-at-the-icc-says-us-official-stephen-rapp.jsp>.

<sup>(42)</sup> <http://monusco.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vQd5ofyaOVA%3d&tabid=10662&language=en-US>.

<sup>(43)</sup> <http://monusco.unmissions.org/>.

civilian population, while unequivocally condemning all rebel groups operating in the area<sup>(44)</sup>.

**The LRA** seems to have withdrawn to the vast areas in the DRC and the CAR where government control is difficult. Violent attacks continue in those areas despite the military offensive launched by the African Union in March with more than 5,000 troops. This effort resulted in the capture of a guerrilla leader, Caesar Achellam, on 13th May on the Mbou river in the CAR. His commander, Joseph Kony, is believed to be constantly on the move to evade capture.

While the Ugandan amnesty law expired having benefited more than 13,000 ex-combatants, and the UN Secretary-General called in June for more efficient international support for regional efforts to eradicate the LRA, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported<sup>(45)</sup> 128 attacks (95 in the DRC and 33 in the CAR), resulting in 24 people dead (12/12) and 117 kidnapped (83/44). The number of refugees and persons displaced as a result of the violence is estimated at more than 450,000.

The situation between the two **Sudanese republics**<sup>(46)</sup> is also on an uncertain course. Intense international pressure is being exerted, particularly by the two powers that most overtly supported Khartoum, i.e. China, and Juba, i.e. the US. Both of them have clearly stated that the two countries must engage in active cooperation and that they will not be tolerated to turn their back on each other. Following the agreement on the price to pay to transport crude oil through North Sudan, current tension centres on the states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where the refugee situation is causing concern. On 6th September the UN Security Council received the report from the special envoy Haile Menkerios on the implementation of Resolution 2046<sup>(47)</sup>, which voiced concern over lack of progress on the contentious issues between the two communities, including the recently signed oil agreement. As a result, the re-entry into the market of South Sudanese oil may be delayed.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

*«Europe in the Great Lakes crisis (...) A troubled beginning (...) Like the wider International Community, European governments were slow to respond to the initial signals of accelerating crisis in the early 1990s and were caught off-*

<sup>(44)</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/countries>

<sup>(45)</sup> Report on the first half of the year. <http://www.unocha.org/>.

<sup>(46)</sup> García Sánchez, Ignacio José. «South Sudan Year 1». 18th July 2012. [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analysis/2012/DIEEEA31-2012\\_Sudan\\_del\\_Sur\\_Ano\\_1\\_JIGS.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analysis/2012/DIEEEA31-2012_Sudan_del_Sur_Ano_1_JIGS.pdf).

<sup>(47)</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/327/77/PDF/N1232777.pdf?OpenElement>.

*guard by the launch of the campaign of systematic genocide in Rwanda.»*

***The European Parliament*<sup>(48)</sup>**

The Great Lakes Region has for too long been at the mercy of foreign parties that have used its resources for their own benefit or used the area as a battlefield to assert their supremacy and decide ideological conflicts. Probably due to the heavy weight of history, Western powers feel strongly committed to the future of the region. They have left behind a vast area of states that are still weak<sup>(49)</sup>, where rebel groups and criminal organisations engaging primarily in the illegal trafficking of arms, drugs and persons, strive to fill the void left by civil institutions.

The UN has played a decisive role in this region by exerting crucial political pressure during decolonisation after the end of the Second World War and maintaining an invaluable commitment to development and security. Indeed, it was an initiative of the UN to establish the International Conference on the Great Lakes<sup>(50)</sup>, which has recently called for an international neutral force under the mandate of the UN and the AU<sup>(51)</sup>. A further key aspect of the UN's commitment to the region is the notion of «responsibility to protect»<sup>(52)</sup>, which has been assumed by the Spanish Security Strategy<sup>(53)</sup>, and the numerous Security Council resolutions and Secretary-General calls for clear, quantifiable support from the International Community for the efforts being made by the countries involved to achieve security, stability and development.

Its sustained economic development associated with political stability and stronger institutions is encouraging the leading economic powers to become politically committed to the countries in the region. China is stepping up its presence in the region with large-scale infrastructure pro-

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<sup>(48)</sup> European Parliament. Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union. Directorate B. Policy Department. Ad hoc study. «implementing the EU concept on mediation: learning from the cases of Sudan and the Great Lakes». June 2011. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=4285>.

<sup>(49)</sup> See DIEEEA37-2012 (Note 38) pp. 10–12.

<sup>(50)</sup> <https://icglr.org/>.

DIEEEA37-2012 (Note 45): «*The Conference (...) emerged out of one of the worst atrocities in modern history, the Rwandan genocide of 1994... did not officially come into being, however, until the year 2000, when the UN Security Council called the International Conference for Peace, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, which led to the establishment of the ICGLR's Permanent Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya, with the support of the UN and the African Union.*»

<sup>(51)</sup> <https://icglr.org/spip.php?article239>.

<sup>(52)</sup> <http://www.unorg/en/preventgenocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml>.

<sup>(53)</sup> Note 3, p. 22.

jects<sup>(54)</sup>, together with India and Brazil<sup>(55)</sup> – the country with the second largest black population in the world after Nigeria – which are expanding their trade agreements in the area. This presence, less formally demanding in terms of sustainable development and the establishment of strong institutions that adhere to the rule of law and human rights, can have negative effects in the long term.

Investment in large-scale farming by major multinational corporations and, more recently, the purchase and lease of land by foreign countries including the Gulf States, China, Libya, India and South Korea, also pose a serious risk to food security in the region in so far as their environmentally harmful practices are detrimental to the principal means of subsistence of a large part of the population<sup>(56)</sup>.

Spain's interest, as mentioned in the introduction, is focused on three specific areas of sub-Saharan Africa: the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa. This does not mean, however, that Spain has abandoned the Great Lakes. In line with EU policy on the region, the Spanish Plan Africa 2009–2012 centres on supporting development and strengthening institutions, with the «reform of security sector» as one of its chief objectives. The Plan also stresses the role of mediation and respect for human rights. This effort is primarily channelled through Spain's support to the initiatives undertaken by the UN and the AU – which aims to build a structure and capabilities similar to the EU's<sup>(57)</sup> and already has increasingly strong political will and capacity for action<sup>(58)</sup> – and other regional organisations. The Spanish support for the African Standby Force (AFS) within project «Anami II»<sup>(59)</sup> is part of this approach.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

*«As the world gets more complicated, multilateral solutions get weaker and weaker we need more home-grown*

<sup>(54)</sup> Moyo, Dambisa. «Beijing, a Boon for Africa». *The New York Times*. 27.06.2012. «In 2009, China became Africa's single largest trading partner, surpassing the United States. And China's foreign direct investment in Africa has skyrocketed from under \$100 million in 2003 to more than \$12 billion in 2011.»

<sup>(55)</sup> Kerneliotis, Teo. «Brazil competes with China, India to invest in Africa». CNN. 7.06.2012. «... «(...) trade between Brazil and Africa jumped from around \$4 billion in 2000 to about \$20 billion in 2010 (...) During his eight-year tenure, Lula made 12 trips to Africa, visiting 21 countries, more than any of his predecessors. At the same time, Brazil increased the number of its embassies in Africa from 17 in 2002 to 37, boasting today more embassies in the continent than the United Kingdom.»

<sup>(56)</sup> [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/hlpe/hlpe\\_documents/HLPE-Land-tenure-and-international-investments-in-agriculture-2011.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE-Land-tenure-and-international-investments-in-agriculture-2011.pdf) . More than 60 million hectares in 27 African countries to April 2010.

<sup>(57)</sup> <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/peace-and-security>.

<sup>(58)</sup> <http://au.int/en/dp/ps/psd>.

<sup>(59)</sup> *Anami* means «peace in Africa» in Kiswahili.

*domestic solutions. But Africa, united is on the brink of a breakthrough. That is the task awaiting.»*

*Donald Kaberuka*<sup>(60)</sup>

The conditions are right in the heart of Africa, given the current international situation and geopolitical framework, for the Great Lakes Region to break away once and for all from its externally-imposed fate. Culture and history, natural resources and leaders' personalities must all be overcome by the increasingly powerful energy of a youthful society that has women and education as its most valuable assets for the future. Speaking before the Ghanaian Parliament on 9th July 2009, US president Barak Obama was adamant: «*We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans.*» He then went on to say: «*Africa doesn't need strong men, it needs strong institutions.*<sup>(61)</sup>»

Tribal, racial, cultural and religious notions need to be overcome so that organised communities will emerge and contribute to the common good, upholding the values laid down in the US Declaration of Independence: «*(...) unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed (...)*» These values are also clearly stated in the Spanish Constitution: «*The Spanish Nation, desiring to establish justice, liberty, and security, and to promote the wellbeing of all its members (...) proclaims its will to (...)*» The emerging communities, structured on the basis of the existing states – which face all manner of challenges as been described above – could transcend those limitations by creating regional, continental and universal organisations. In the words of the ICGLR, «*Reaffirming our individual and collective determination (...) to transform the Great Lakes Region, in the framework of our common destiny, into a space of durable peace and security, of political and social stability, and of economic growth and shared development by multi-sector cooperation and integration for the sole benefit of our peoples.*<sup>(62)</sup>»

<sup>(60)</sup> Kaberuka, Donald. President, African Development Bank Group. «*The Global Economy: Rebuilding Resilience in SADC and Africa*». Speech at the 32nd SADC Heads of State and Government Summit. Maputo, Mozambique. 17th August 2012.

<sup>(61)</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-ghanaian-parliament>.

<sup>(62)</sup> ICGLR. «*Pact on security, stability and development in the Great Lakes Region*». Nairobi, Kenya. 15.12.2006.

**■ CHRONOLOGY**

<b>TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>
1956	Sudan. Independence from the United Kingdom and Egypt
1960	Kenya. Independence from the United Kingdom
	Central African Republic. Independence from France
	Republic of Congo. Independence from France
	Democratic Republic of Congo. Independence from Belgium
1961	Tanganyika. Independence from the United Kingdom
1962	Rwanda. Independence from Belgium
	Uganda. Independence from the United Kingdom
1963	Zanzibar. Independence from the United Kingdom
1964	Tanzania. A new nation born of the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar
	Zambia, Independence from the United Kingdom
1965	Burundi. Independence from Belgium
	Democratic Republic of Congo. Coup d'état by Mobutu
1971	Uganda. Idi Amin dictatorship until 1975
1975	Angola. Independence from Portugal
1984	Tanzania. Revised constitution
1994	Genocide in Rwanda
1995	The rebel group, Allied Democratic Forces and the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) are established
1996	Zambia. Revised constitution
1997	Democratic Republic of Congo. Kabila exiles Mobutu
2002	Angola. End of the civil war. Peace agreement between the MPLA and UNITA
	Republic of Congo. Constitution
	Democratic Republic of Congo. Great war of Africa -1998-2002 Peace agreement. Kabila and Kagame

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
2003	Central African Republic. Last coup d'état. General Bozizé
	Republic of Congo. Peace Agreement
	Rwanda. Constitution
2004	Central African Republic. Constitution
	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, declaration on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region
2005	Burundi. Constitution
	Sudan. Interim constitution. Under review
	Uganda. Yoweri Museveni authorises a multi-party system
2006	Democratic Republic of Congo. Constitution
2007	Kenya. 27 December. Mwai Kibaki has been re-elected since 2002, with 46% of the votes
	The executive secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region inaugurates its general headquarters in Bujumbura, Burundi
2009	Republic of Congo. 12 July. Following the civil war, Denis Sassoy-Nguesso has been re-elected since 1997, with 78.6% of the votes
2010	Burundi. 28 June. Pierre Nkuruziza has been re-elected since 2005, with 91.6% of the votes.
	Angola. New Constitution
	Kenya. New Constitution
	Republic of Sudan. 11-15 April. Last elections. Ahmad Al-Bashir has been re-elected since 1993, with 68.2% of the votes
	Democratic Republic of Congo. UN stability operation, MONUSCO. Extended to 30 June 2013. Resolution 2053, of 2012-
	Rwanda. 9 August. Paul Kagame has been re-elected since 2000, with 93.1% of the votes
	Tanzania. 31 October. Jakaya Kikwete has been re-elected since 2005, with 61.2% of the votes

<b>TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>
2011	Central African Republic. 23 January. François Bozize has been re-elected since the 2003 coup d'état, with 64.4% of the votes
	Democratic Republic of Congo. 28 November. Joseph Kabila has been re-elected since 2001, with 49% of the votes
	Republic of South Sudan 9 July. Independence from Sudan
	Uganda. Lieutenant General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has been re-elected since the 1986 coup d'état, with 68.4% of the votes
	Zambia. 20 September. Michael Sata elected, with 43.3% of the votes
2012	Angola. 31 August. Jose Eduardo Dos Santos has been re-elected since 1979, with 71.8% of the votes



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## CHAPTER XI

# YEMEN

*Ignacio Matalobos González de la Vega*

### **ABSTRACT**

The state of Yemen is threatened by a huge economic crisis, the depletion of its energy and water resources, a civil war in the north of the country and secessionist subversion in the South, together with corruption and rising unemployment. The agreed surrender of power by former President Saleh in 2012 has not solved its problems. The establishment of the AQAP base in its territory has brought its misfortune to a head and put it in the firing line of the fight against international terrorism.

### **Key words:**

Conflict, Geopolitics, Yemen, Terrorism

## ■ INTRODUCTION

### ■ The Arabian Peninsula. The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Yemen

The Arabian Peninsula is home to the six authoritarian monarchies that constitute the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Qatar) and the Republic of Yemen. The region has immense energy resources and its political stability is based on the support provided to its leaders by Western powers, basically in exchange for oil and gas.

The stability of the GCC states was affected in 2011. The appearance in the Muslim world of the Al-Qaeda Ideology followed by the outbreak of Arab revolutions in 2011 and 2012, which have brought down governments that were considered stable and of long-standing tradition, have broken the peace and caused growing instability and chaos. The consequences are not easy to predict and will quite possibly be far removed from the idyllic reality that is being analysed by Western journalists and pseudo-analysts who carry out their work from a distance. Instability and insecurity will undoubtedly help the expansion and implantation of radical religious and extremist ideologies and forces in the Middle East, which already threaten the historically stable monarchies.

The impossible coexistence between local religious traditions and laws and the modern world can be seen in this land. The presence of military bases in sacred Muslim territory and the intervention of the infidels' Armed Forces («God's enemies») in support of the Gulf monarchies has led to confrontation between governments and the radical members of the population, who are so diverse and abundant in the region. The protection of the leading classes' interests and economic development in the region have produced aberrations in political, economic and military relations; the ultraconservative religious Wahhabis, in the case of Saudi Arabia, have had to put up with the presence of infidel troops on their soil and see how, to help their government against the invading but Muslim brother from Iraq, foreign soldiers came from the West, who belong to other beliefs and religions and, for even greater dishonour, women soldiers who, with great indignation on their part, bore arms and drove vehicles to defend what Arab armies, which had been spending much of their multimillionaire budgets on military purchases and products, were unable to defend.

Relations between countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), most of which are Sunnite, and the government of Iran, which has a Shi'ite majority, include regular threats and political and territorial claims and the closure of the Ormuz Straits; confrontations are increasingly visible and violent between Shi'ites and Sunnites in Bahrain and in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. AQ's consolidation in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its direct threat to

the Saud family, the high and growing level of unemployment affecting national native Arab citizens and, in particular, young people, together with the corruption of those in government and the modern slave-labour conditions of foreign workers, in addition to the new phenomenon of satellite TV and communications over social networks, which have already brought about a change in how revolts are announced and managed, stand as elements of concern due to the way they threaten the interests of the Western world and other main players, especially Asian players on the international market.

In strange contrast in the immensely wealthy and apparently modern Arabian Peninsula, as a result of its instability, poverty, government system and growing threat to international security, we find the state of Yemen. Perhaps Yemen is the most beautiful country in the world, in which farmland, town and city landscapes from more than 2000 years ago remain almost unchanged, tribal and peasant customs that date from before Islam are upheld and concepts assumed as untouchable in the modern Western world are actually non-existent there or not part of reality.

Figura 11.1. Political map of Yemen. Source: Ezilón.com



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## ■ Yemen

The political situation in Yemen must be analysed in the context of recent events on the Arabian Peninsula and of the fight against international

terrorism and the importance of its geographical location in relation to the shipping of energy resources that originate from or travel through the region.

At the present time, Yemen is about to lose its capacity for carrying out or maintaining any form of economic reform at a time when unemployment, poverty and the young population are rising.

Yemen is to double its current population of 24 million by 2035; three quarters of its population are under the age of 30 years today, 45% are under the age of 15 and it is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. Unemployment affects 35% of the population, 45% of the population live under the poverty line, 50% of the population are illiterate, 73% live in rural tribal areas and the country has a GDP per capita of only \$2500. Standards of living are closer to those of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and endemic poverty is exacerbated by the high birth rate.

Roughly 70% of government revenue comes from the energy sector, which is on the decline owing to the depletion of reserves.

Yemen is an arid, mountainous land and only 2.9% of the soil can be used for farming. In cities, the lack of water is very common and the production of «Qat», the local drug, requires a large amount of water for growth. It is part of every sector and characterises the population's social life. Apparently, crops require almost 40% of the water that is available, which, for some, is confirmation of the fact that the Yemeni population prefers to isolate itself from reality rather than deal with its everyday and future problems.

Yemen is under the threat of a huge economic crisis, a rising crisis of state resources, on the road to the depletion of its energy resources and aquifers, incapable of continuing to subsidise its population's basic needs; a republic surrounded by the mistrust of traditional monarchies in the GCC, with a large financial capacity and accustomed to their military and foreign security problems being solved by the West, who have not wished to get involved in the problems of their poor, conflicted neighbour and who are concerned about the presence of Yemeni workers in their countries ever since they were expelled during the occupation of Kuwait.

The Republic of Yemen is a Muslim Arab state in which only someone like former President Saleh, with his network of alliances and control of key positions in military, political and economic structures, has been able to survive, keeping the state together and retaining power for more than 30 years.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ The Birth of the Modern State of Yemen

The creation of the modern state of Yemen after the union in 1990 between the Republic of Yemen and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was basically an amicable process, but it went against reality; the economic systems were incompatible, the armies remained separate, oil disputes led to a confrontation between President Saleh's party, the Arab Nationalist General People's Congress Party (GPC) and the South Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Four years after the unification, the South broke away from President Saleh's regime and looked to proclaim its independence.

During the Civil War of 1994, a number of strange political alignments appeared; as payment for President Saleh's support of Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, the ultraconservative Saudi Arabia, which had just expelled 700,000 Yemeni workers from its territory, changed its traditional behaviour of support for the North and joined the secular, socialist South. President Saleh's regime responded by declaring war as a confrontation between Islam and atheist socialism, a measure aimed at encouraging Yemeni Islamists to recruit the recently returned veterans from the War against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

The rapid and decisive victory of the North did not help consolidate the situation. Ideological tension with the South reached a standstill. The YSP and other small left-wing parties formed a permanent minority with no power in the Yemeni Parliament. Saleh's efforts to create a centralised nationalist Arab state simply led to a confrontation with the Islamists and tribal leaders who joined together to create the Congregation for the Reform of Yemen (al-Islah). In 2005, the factions of the YPS and al-Islah in the Parliament joined under the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in an effort to stop the control of the GPC.

The ideological diversity, the lack of definition of a leader among young people, the complex participation of women and support for certain rebel units of the Army explains the complications involved in the Yemeni rising of 2011, which drew inspiration from the protests in the Arab world that were supported by thousands of students, calling for and, finally, after the endless bloody confrontations and deaths, succeeding in bringing down President Saleh.

### ■ Security Problems: Secessionism, Internal Rebellions and AQAP

Besides the permanent lack of central government control in tribal areas, Yemen faces four serious problems that affect its internal security and stability and, to a large extent, its neighbours and the International Community.

The year 2004 saw the *Houthi Rebellion* or *Sa'dah War* in the northern governorates on the border with Saudi Arabia; this rebellion, which comes as a Civil War, has a religious side, which is the confrontation between the two main streams of Islam: the Shi'ites, known locally as *Zaidita*, and the Sunnites, who hold the majority in the Arabian Peninsula, worsened by the presence of radical Wahhabi elements in the region. However, the *Houthi Rebellion* is fundamentally a political claim in which the followers of Sheikh al-Houthi call for respect towards their traditions and equality with the other citizens of Yemen. They also consider that the government of Sana'a maintains harmful relations with the USA and Israel. Throughout «*the six Houthi wars*», the rebels have destabilised the border with Saudi Arabia and the northern governorates to the point where they have caused bloody armed conflict with the Saudi Arabian Army and the evacuation of towns and villages. They have also sped up the conflictive closing of the border that was a gateway to Saudi Arabia for smugglers, arms dealers, illegal immigrants, drug dealers and terrorists.

The «South Yemen Movement» appeared in 2007, mainly in the Aden area and bringing together different groups. Officially, it makes peaceful protests to claim the secession of the South. The protests have also included violence, attributed to Islamist groups, tribes from the South or even elements that belong to the government. In the port city of Aden, which was under British rule until 1990 and then run by the Marxist Soviets, protests and violence have increased. The population of the South considers itself to be different and historically and culturally more progressive than that of the North.

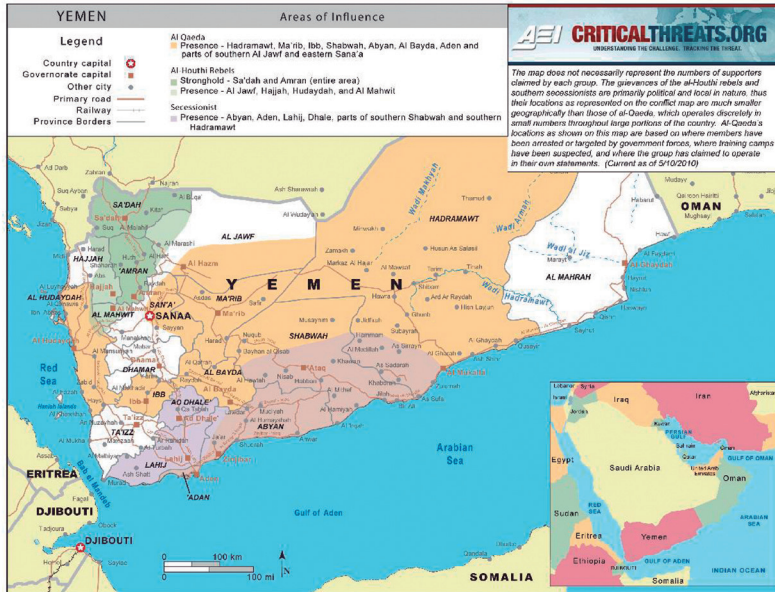
Finally, in 2009, taking advantage of this situation of chaos and internal instability, the traditional Yemeni and Saudi groups that followed the Al-Qaeda ideology joined together as the so-called Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, in order to stay in the territory and export their ideology, they have made subtle changes and adaptations to their tactics with regard to their previous actions in Saudi Arabia, the Caucasus, Iraq and Afghanistan, in an attempt to win over the minds and hearts of the population.

In 2011, the «Revolution Movement» or «Young People's Revolution» began and, in keeping with the dictates of the revolt in Tunisia in 2011, it has pushed President Saleh out of Yemen and is calling for reforms and the end of corruption.

On this stage of insecurity and instability, on which the Yemeni government has to act, the AQAP organisation is considered as one of the clearest threats to the International Community at the present time.



## 11.2. Threats in Yemen. Source: critical Threats.org



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### ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

#### ■ The environment, the neighbouring states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), protest movements and relations with Yemen

In summer 2011, «the Arab Spring» had infected the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time as the protests in the South Mediterranean, the first social revolts were recorded in the GCC and, to a greater or lesser extent and internal or international visibility, they have taken chaos to the impenetrable world of the fabulously wealthy and, until only yesterday, stable monarchies of the Peninsula.

The situation has meant that the «Peninsula Shield Force», a military body of the GCC, and the police forces of the UAE have intervened in Bahrain to strengthen the security forces and help the Bahrainis focus on controlling the revolts. At least 1000 soldiers from Saudi Arabia and several hundred police officers from the United Arab Emirates entered the country, together with other smaller forces from the other states of the GCC, in response to an urgent request from the monarchy. This led to protests from the Shi'ite population and from Iran.

The situation is such that part of international public opinion sees another example of double-edged politics: the military intervention and condemnation of the dictator in Libya and the lack of concern and looking-the-other-way with regard to the bloody events in Bahrain.

- *Bahrain*

This tiny island-state, in which the Shi'ite majority is the object of discrimination, is where the most amount of street violence has occurred, inspired by the wave of revolutionary change that began in North Africa and characterised by confrontations between the two majority Muslim groups: Shi'ites and Sunnites. The governing monarchy is Sunnite and requested military and/or police support from the other monarchies of the GCC.

The presence of a large number of US forces from the Fifth Fleet, based in Manama, the proximity of Saudi populations on the border, mostly Shi'ite, the accusation against the government of having awarded nationality to foreign Arab Sunnites and the proximity and permanent conflict with the interests and claims made by the neighbouring state of Iran form part of the origin and development of these protests.

- *Oman*

This state has also suffered revolts, albeit to a lesser extent than Bahrain; however, people have been killed. The situation has led the popular and beloved Sultan Qabus to make various political and economic concessions. The Sultan's authority appears to be safe.

- *Kuwait*

The memory and streets of Kuwait still show signs of the destruction caused years ago by the invading Iraqi forces of Saddam Hussein, who claimed, not without reason, that this territory historically belonged to Iraq. In July, there have been no demonstrations, at least none of importance.

- *Qatar*

In proportion, Qatar is the second wealthiest state in the world and has almost no native population; some years ago, it began its amicable approach to the USA, providing it with the largest military base in the region. It also approached all kinds of states and movements, including the nearby and somewhat threatening state of Iran. It also sponsored the Al Jazeera satellite TV station, which is very influential in the Muslim and Western world.

- *Saudi Arabia*

The self-called «The Kingdom», the Wahhabi paradise, understood that something was rotting in its interior on 9-11, when it was notified of the nationality of most of the terrorists.

Saudi Arabia stands out from the other members of the GCC thanks to its size, population and resources; it is the great power of the region, but it also stands out for the leadership it inspires owing to the fact that the two holy places of the origin of Islam are located in the country: Mecca and Medina. The King of Saudi Arabia carries first and foremost, above any other title, that of Protector of the Holy Places, which guarantees him the most important position in the Muslim world.

The state maintains a feudal structure, based on the privileges of the large and growing Saud family, which is based on the radical puritan religious branch of the Wahhabi Sunnites and is part of all public and private activity. Despite its exacerbated radicalism, Saudi Arabia has won the support of Western powers thanks to its stability and the predictability of its international policies, as well as its capacity for guaranteeing the supply of energy resources to the West. However, Saudi Arabian financial support for extremist religious centres and Muslim groups has stained its image abroad, presenting it as perhaps the main propagator of violent religious radicalism, an image it is today trying to clean up.

According to the recent census, the population of Saudi Arabia totals 28 million, around 8 million of which are foreign workers: Asians, Africans, Europeans and Muslims from a variety of places, in comparison with the 20 million Saudi Arabians, 10 million of which are women, whose rights are limited and who are not part of the labour force; the other 10 million are men, fewer than 5 million of which are of working age, and their technical training is terrible, despite the great efforts and investments made in education by the government.

The instability brought about by the Arab revolts of 2011 in The Kingdom took the form of calls via text messages and on social networks for demonstrations in Riyadh, Jeddah and the Eastern Province. The claims were mixed with the traditional claim for women's right to drive vehicles and protests from the population and Shi'ite groups, considered heretics by the radical Wahhabi Sunnites.

The street demonstrations failed, but the dissidents' capacity for organisation was made evident. The preliminary response from the government and religious leaders was to declare the right to demonstrate as sinful and anti-Islamic, threats whose importance is not readily understood in the West, but which were key factors at the time. Control of the mosques and Friday

prayers were again decisive. The presence of thousands of security vehicles and police officers in the street on the «Day of Rage» (no fewer than 900 police vehicles on the main avenue of Riyadh!) discouraged dissidents and the potentially dangerous and permanently idle young Saudis, who saw the protests as a way of breaking away from their routine and the great boredom caused by the iron-rod authority of their families and religion. Furthermore, the signing of various royal decrees bought subjects' loyalty by increasing the salaries of Saudi civil officers in one fell swoop, together with the number and benefits of the police forces and the «Mutaween», the ever-present religious police officers who are responsible for maintaining the population's morality and decency.

The 8 or 10 million foreign workers, with their low or zero qualifications (Filipinos, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians, Egyptians, etc.) resident in The Kingdom, who were fearful of the calls to protest, disorganised and always kept on a short lead by their bosses, did not cause any incident either.

The expatriate population of Western workers, which make up the technical management labour force, joked with each other in 2012 about the contradiction of imagining a demonstration of Saudis in Arabia asking for work or the end of corruption, aware of what they are like and how lax they are when it comes to work, together with the unavoidable obligation of observing the five long breaks for daily prayers, which mostly take place in one of the endless number of mosques.

The so-called «saudisation» process or state programmes for ensuring that, by law, part of the jobs are filled, by Saudis, is a complete failure owing to their incompetence and irresponsibility.

Saudi Arabia's relations with Yemen are considered by the Saud family as a matter of national politics, not merely one of international relations. The expulsion of more than 700,000 Yemeni people during the invasion of Iraq, the closing of the border between the two countries, the Saudi army's military operations in 2009 during the last Houthi conflict, the unification of the two branches of AQ to form AQAP and the support and confrontations with President Saleh are the most significant aspects of these relations.

#### ■ **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**

The struggle of AQ in the Arabian Peninsula is not one of Muslim radicals against the West; it is primarily a battle for its own survival between the members of the Saud family and the followers of the ideology upheld by Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden, of Yemeni origin and with family ties with an important family of traders and builders in Saudi Arabia, always had loyal followers of Yemeni and Saudi origin in his closest circle. During the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the number of Yemeni fighters against the Soviet troops was very high. Furthermore, the number of Yemeni nationals who have passed through Guantánamo is also very significant. In the 1980s, on their return to Yemen after the Soviet withdrawal, the Yemeni veterans of Afghanistan played an important role in mounting the Al-Qaeda ideology and in Yemeni politics. In 1994, some of the veterans helped President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the Civil War against the separatists from the South.

AQ's recent activity in Yemen comprises several actions of particular importance for the media: on 12 October 2000, a spectacular suicide attack took place against the *USS Cole* in the port of Aden, killing 12 North American sailors. On 11 September 2001, the Yemeni government clearly showed its support for the USA in its «War on Terror». In 2002, the leader of AQ in Yemen was killed during a missile attack and the Yemeni security services arrested or liquidated the organisation's most important figures. In 2006, two dozen inmates accused of terrorism escaped from a prison and started to reform AQ in Yemen. As from 2006, the Jihad networks were strengthened by those who had escaped from Saudi Arabia. In 2009, in Jeddah, a supposedly reformed terrorist, who, as reconciliation, was allowed to jump over the security fences, tried to sacrifice himself and assassinate Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Saudi Arabia's Anti-terrorist Chief and member of the Saudi Arabian royal family. AQAP ordered the kidnapping of members of the Saudi royal family and Christian residents in the Kingdom.

AQAP is a transnational franchise of the Al-Qaeda (AQ) ideology. Formed in 2009 and based on groups in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Its leader Nasser al-Wuhaysi, who fought with Bin Laden in Afghanistan, is of Yemeni origin; and his second-in-command is the Saudi Arabian Said al-Shihri, who was captured on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2001 and has been detained in Guantánamo, and also part of the rehabilitation programme implemented in Saudi Arabia to recover former Jihadists for the Saudi cause.

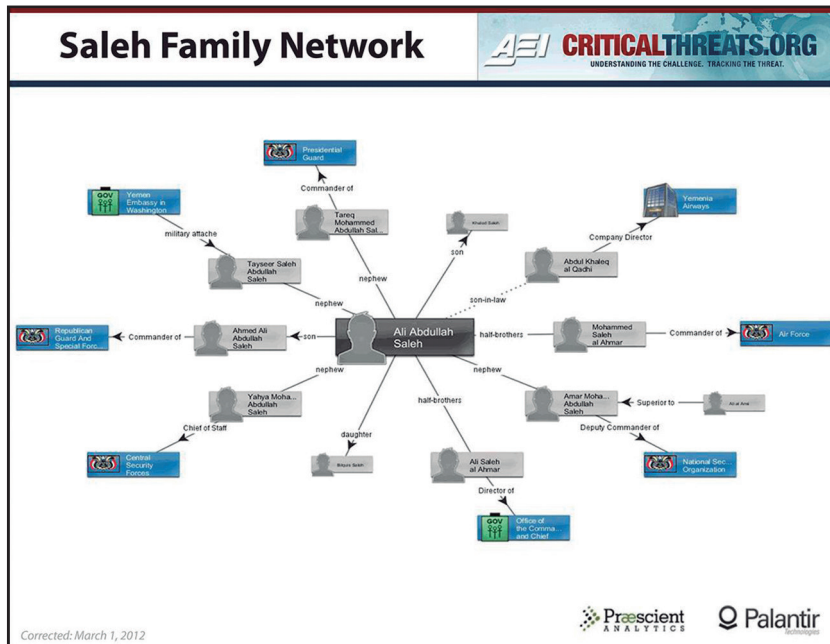
President Saleh accused AQAP, tendentiously and without reason, of being behind the Houthi Movement, whose insurgents belong to the local Shi'ite branch of Islam, and the separatists of the South. However, both the AQAP and Houthi Movement and secessionists from the south have different routes and very different interests. Furthermore, they all have social movements based on justice that accuse President Saleh of receiving support from Washington and Riyadh. For President Saleh and his successors, the existence of a known scapegoat opposed to the International Community is, to a certain extent, convenient since they can blame it for all their problems. The support given to

Yemen for its fight against insurgents and terrorism would be lower profile if the enemy were not AQAP.

To date, AQAP has declared at least three Islamic emirates as areas temporarily or intermittently occupied by its militants (al-Jaar, Azzan in Shabwa, Zinjibar near Aden). Unlike the tactics used in Afghanistan, Somalia or Iraq, in Yemen, AQAP uses other procedures and tries to win over the «hearts and minds» of the Yemeni people, improving their infrastructures with fast-impact actions and projects, setting up tribunals and dealing out justice in fast-track proceedings. Indeed, they continue to allow the Yemeni people to chew on Qat, the narcotic substance that contains a stimulant that produces euphoria and a lack of appetite and consumed in Yemen by most of the population.

AQAP’s surprising capacity for standing up to Yemen’s Armed Forces and keeping hold of cities and territories, albeit temporarily, is the result of the chaos that has affected the military structure; the military units across the country had a wealth of experience after fighting for many years against the rebel groups and tribes. The breakup of the chain of command, corruption and lack of leadership, together with struggle for power in Sana’a, position the generals against each other. As in Roman times, the result is that the troops that are far away from and abandoned by central government forget their obligations and the borders and provinces (governorates) are left without government.

Figura 11.3. Saleh family network. Source: criticalthreats.org



### ■ Saleh, is the cure better than the disease?

For 33 years, President Saleh, thanks to the position of his large family and his alliances with tribal chiefs, maintained extensive control over most of the state territory; as he pointed out himself, with all his limitations and possible criticism, he was against the totalitarian monarchies of the GCC as the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, he managed to achieve a low level of violence in the country in which all the ills a government could have to face remained active: from the most dangerous terrorist group, which is also deeply rooted in the population, to secessions, i.e. one in the North and one in the South, a stifling economic situation, joined by a fall in state revenue caused by the lack of oil, an environmental crisis caused by a lack of water, a population steeped in absolute poverty in one of the wealthiest areas of the planet, which also spends much of its day under the influence of Qat, the omnipresent drug, and a powerful neighbour in the North, i.e. Saudi Arabia.

As has recently occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt and Syria (?) after the fall of their systems or leaders, uncertainty favours chaos. AQ and the religious extremists that can be found all over the Muslim world take benefit from the situation. All of them are intolerant and unyielding with the principles of human rights preached by the naive International Community, whose members seem to insist on wanting to impose the most westernised leaders and institutionalise the principles and traditions of the Western world, with its Christian Greco-Roman base, on peoples of very different cultures and religions.

### ■ Wahhabism and AQ

For a Western observer who is not familiar with the region, it is not easy to make a clear distinction between the objectives and ideology of AQAP and the traditional religious interpretation or doctrine that is most common across the region: Wahhabism. This movement has been exported for years to the Muslim communities all over the world through the schools and prayer and culture centres financed directly or indirectly by the Saudi state.

By way of a practical summary, the Wahhabis and the AQ ideology coincide insofar as they are radical regarding the literal acceptance of the Koran, which includes all aspects of public and private life and social relations; however, they do not relinquish the conveniences of modern life and it is also surprising that they deny the right to carry out activities and exercise freedoms that are universally accepted. Furthermore, they are both characterised by the way in which they degrade infidels and women.

Unlike AQ, the Wahhabis, whose many public activities outside Saudi Arabia have ultimately reduced the expression of their intolerance against the infidel

(who is, after all, living in their house), have supported and based their power on the relationship of absolute support for the Saudi monarchy, the House of Saud, in their mutual interest.

They seek to offer an official front that is refined, more amiable, modern and moderate, with a radically non-violent manner, as long as we can exclude from the concept of 'non-violence' the fact that the Mutaween, or religious police, which is responsible for maintaining moral and decency, prevents girls from escaping from a fire, causing them to be burnt to death at school simply because their male relatives were not at the gate to pick them up and girls are not allowed to go out on their own; or the consent with which the death penalty is systematically applied in its most primitive and public form, such as beheading, or forced marriages between young girls and polygamist old men, the court of members, the application of their private laws on non-nationals; the maximum punishment for homosexuality, a practice that is very common among a population in which the most minimal of relationships between the sexes is impossible; the prohibition of any social or private contact between man and woman, the official inferiority of women, the prohibition and intolerance of other religions in its territory, including Christianity and Judaism, both of which are also monotheist and share many elements of history, holy places and tradition.

AQAP is radically similar to Wahhabism in terms of religious intolerance, but it is also violent, supporting the forced imposition of the Islamic state and the laws provided in the Holy Koran; it also establishes the Islamic emirate wherever it goes, even though it is only temporarily. AQAP declares that its priority targets in its fight on the Arabian Peninsula are the members of the governing Saud family, the energy facilities and Western citizens and interests. Its violent actions in Saudi territory against energy facilities, estates on which Western workers and families live and the outlandish failed attack against Prince Nayef in Jeddah years ago revealed the organisation's capacity for violence. It is combated from Saudi Arabia with special rehabilitation centres in which discussions are held on the interpretation of the Holy Koran and there are constant religious activities, the provision of financial subsidies, the promotion of marriages to stabilise the inmate's private life and the intervention of the militant's family to help with the 'decontamination' process. The level of failure of this centre is high, but it does obtain results.

## ■ Yemen

In January 2011, protests began in Yemen against the corruption of the governing elite. Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in the capital, Sana'a, and the provinces in the following months. The demonstrators called for the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power for



three decades, and they rejected any transition plan that might delay his departure. In March, General Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar, chief of the 1st Armoured Division and Commander of the Northwest Military Region, abandoned the President and declared his support for the opposition. His desertion was followed by other high-level desertions, but the President still refused to abandon his post. In April 2011, the GCC proposed a number of initiatives so that the President could accept a negotiated departure to enable the established elite to maintain government and prevent the demonstrators from reaching power. The situation in the streets in a country in which weapons are part of tradition and everyday life is marked by violence and a high number of victims.

In February 2012 Vice-President al-Hadi became President after elections in which he was the only candidate. With the GPC holding on to the majority in the Yemeni Parliament and the members of the large Saleh family still in key ministerial positions and the national security system, signs of structural change are few and far between.

It is not clear whether or not Saleh's departure and the GCC's plan will create more chaos or a stable balance. Despite recognising the transition process, the YSP and other opposition groups have made little progress with this status quo. The same can be said of tribal leaders, who remain expectant in view of the possibility of power being centralised and their traditional authority being reduced. Obtaining support from these groups is vital for the success of President Hadi and Yemeni security.

With the coming elections in two years' time, any failure to reach a consensus may create expectations for militants who hope to benefit from a state that is chronically instable and immersed in complete chaos.

#### ■ The «National Dialogue»

By way of summary, the process for renovating the state of Yemen can be broken down into three phases: The first begins with the signing of the GCC Countries' Initiative in November 2011 and the transfer of power in an attempt to reduce tension between the various factions of the conflict and bring the 'election' of Hadi on 21 February 2012 to an end.

The second phase, which will take around two years, covers the establishment of the National Dialogue, which has already begun, the setting-up of a Committee to draft the text of a new Constitution followed by a referendum and general elections. These processes must achieve a minimum level of security by consolidating the state and expanding the government's control to the entire territory.

The third is the stabilisation of the economy and the creation of employment.

Unfortunately, the huge expectations the population have from this Revolution will not be satisfied immediately and this situation will diminish support for and the strength of new players. The lack of education, the spreading of rumours, the acceptance of events and conversations under the effects of Qat will worsen this foreseeable climate of disappointment and complicate the scenario awaiting the transition government, which is perfectly aware that things will not change immediately. Saleh's regime has lasted 33 years and its roots spread to every institution and aspect of social life, and that cannot be changed in 2 years.

From the Western point of view, a simple analysis is possible and reveals two factors or players: the Joint Meeting Party (political opposition) and the popular civil protest movement (people in the streets – the independent revolution). Both need to ensure that those who are responsible for the transition do not abuse their power and that the process is transparent, with a large amount of open information about the progress that is being made and the participation of young people and women, which would bring in new ideas and reduce the power of the current elite.

The basic economy, everyday needs, which affect everyone, the cost of electricity, roads, hospitals and services pose the most difficult and urgent problems for the current government, whose members are divided between the former regime and traditional opposition and which needs to take difficult decisions that are possibly unviable owing to the lack of budget and the uncertain result of political decisions.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

The International Community and neighbouring states, basically Saudi Arabia and the other Muslim monarchies with their high financial capacity and where the lack of civil rights for citizens and foreigners is absolute, see how Yemen is facing a situation of instability that will unavoidably affect them and may have a domino effect and bring down their governments in the coming years.

### ■ The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Its members have interests in common and also share feelings of insecurity. They also received specific threats both inside and outside their borders in relation to economic integration and security.

The creation of this organisation was a response to the Iran-Iraq War, the Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The rapid economic development of its members and the lack of skilled national workers has led to the mass arrival of immigrants from different origins, which has multiplied the local population in several states. The total population of the GCC members has risen from 28 million in 1998 to more than 43.5 million in 2010. Around 12 million expatriates are residents in the GCC. Most of them come from Southeast Asia and there is no doubt that these countries depend on foreign labour for their future.

Yemen has been trying to join the organisation for a long time, but its possibilities of success would appear to be very remote. The reason why the six states created the GCC came from their shared feeling of threat and their similar political and economic structures and the design of their foreign policies. However, Yemen is a state with a decentralised structure and a population that is poor and heavily armed, where many institutions act independently and often contrary to central government.

#### ■ Youth unemployment and Yemeni workers in the states of the GCC

The states of the GCC are facing the need to create employment for their exponentially increasing, poorly trained and numerous young population, where their governments' priority aim focuses on programmes for nationalising employment. Unskilled labour employment is currently taken up by a population that is mainly Filipino, Indian, Pakistani or African, working under slave labour and paid salaries that would never be accepted by the countries' unskilled nationals.

Public education in the states on the Arabian Peninsula is based largely on teaching that includes memorising the sacred text of the Koran, religious concepts that cover issues ranging from hygiene and law to family relations. The scientific education, if any, is very basic and conditioned by the untouchable 'religious truths'.

In the 1980s, there were more than 1.3 million Yemenis working in the GCC and between 1958 and the end of the 1980s, the Yemenis could travel to their neighbour Saudi Arabia without a visa. This situation changed radically in 1990 when President Saleh made the mistake of not condemning the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq, a situation that led the West and its Arab neighbours to consider that it supported the situation created by Iraq. At the time, the requirement of a visa was reinstated for Yemenis wishing to enter Saudi Arabia. One million Yemenis had to leave the states of the GCC, a situation that coincided with the unification between the North and South. The same happened to Palestinian workers in Kuwait owing to a similar stance assumed by Yasser Arafat.

At the present time, according to various unofficial sources, the number of Yemeni workers in the GCC, including illegal workers, varies between 300,000 and 1,000,000. Illegal people-trafficking, not only Yemenis, across the border

between Saudi Arabia and Yemen has been an issue in recent years and it has recently been affected by the Houthi revolt in the region.

The presence of Yemeni workers in the states of the GCC is characterised by the initial acceptance of belonging to the same religious group and Arab race, the growing sensation that Yemeni people are a possible source of instability and insecurity linked with terrorism and the lack of professional training or qualification. The presence of Yemeni workers in the GCC favours their training and the sending of important remittances to their country.

### ■ The Soviet Union and the Russian Federation

The Soviet Union and, later, the Russian Federation and other states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have maintained special relations with Yemen. Thousands of Yemeni people have received an education and training at Soviet universities and military centres and they have established family ties with citizens from the former Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the wars of the Caucasus involved Yemeni Jihadists who fought against the Soviet troops. On their return, some of the Jihadists joined Saleh in his fight against the insurrection in the South. It is important to highlight the fact that much of the Yemeni army's material is of Soviet or Russian origin.

### ■ USA

For the USA, which has been threatened and suffered several attacks in Yemen, the basic problem is not the change of regime, but rather the possible destabilising of the country in favour of AQAP's activities and the establishment of a new sanctuary for AQ's militants. After Saleh's departure, the USA's main concern is AQ's presence in the country, which seems to have grown after its interventions there. The USA wants a future state that is heavily centralised so that it can extend its control across the territory and deal with AQ, tribal authorities and the secessionist movements that are located in the North and South. And, finally, provide security for the shipping routes through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This is the view of the USA's interests, not the interests of the Yemeni people.

The so-called 'secret war' fought by the USA with Yemen's authorisation and/or support against AQAP terrorists has led to a number of attacks with drones operated by the CIA or the US Armed Forces against targets in Yemen. The use of these modern platforms allows the USA to act by surprise in extremely dangerous areas without exposing their conventional units to any risks. The aggressive use of these platforms and its lethal missiles is subject to legal controversy.

In recent years, the USA has sent significant amounts of money and military instructors who specialise in anti-terrorist tactics to support the government of Sana'a.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

### ■ The future of the protest movements in the GCC

Contrary to the majority's opinion, which seeks to believe in the unchangeable stability of the GCC states, there is indeed a possibility of local protest movements initially causing the violent fall of a GCC monarchy. This would lead to an uncontrolled chain reaction that would affect, at least temporarily, the extraction of gas and oil, the presence of Western military bases in the region and a wave of xenophobia against the millions of Asian and European workers...

The main dissatisfied groups in the region are:

- The non-national Arab population (Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians and Egyptians, etc.), who, after decades in the region, want to have a passport and receive the benefits given to Arab nationals. They have taken part in the revolts in Bahrain.
- The religious groups that consider they are oppressed or that receive support from Iran and maintain a confrontation based on religion between Shi'ites and Sunnites.
- Young nationals with no professional qualification, unemployed, who see how the jobs in their own countries are given to foreigners.
- Progressive young nationals and women 'contaminated' by Western influence, opposed to the system and the traditions upheld by the many religious extremists.

However, the main element of destabilisation in this region currently comes from the millions of Asian, Filipino, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Indian and African workers who live in the different states of the Gulf and who are subjected to living conditions that can be defined as modern slavery. They represent the majority of the male adult population in the states of the GCC and, to date, they have not been involved in any particular protests; however, as part of a spontaneous or organised chain reaction, they could bring the life and economy of the region to a standstill, together with the extraction of its resources and the sudden fall or taking of power.

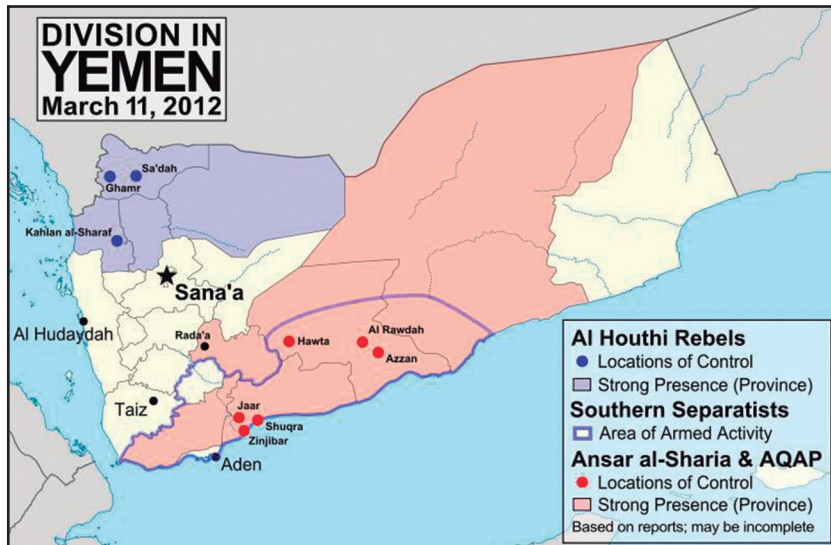
### ■ Yemen: Saleh's possible return

The probability of the failure of the huge expectations placed in the revolution, especially by young people and women, is very high. Corruption and poverty

cannot be eliminated in one fell swoop. The Houthi problem in the North and the secessionist problem in Aden will continue. The coming-to-power and the entry in institutions of new, inexperienced politicians whose pockets are still empty is a new threat.

Saleh's circle, which has been in power for 33 years and which is deep-rooted in all the institutions and aspects of social life, can easily become an important minority in Parliament. If his health allows, Saleh can return to power in person or through one of his middlemen. This recurring scenario depends only on the decision of the sovereign people of Yemen. That would undoubtedly be a better option for Yemenis and for the International Community than the also possible option of the state disintegrating into three weak nations. The situation is very similar to that which has occurred in neighbouring Somalia.

Figure 11.4. Division in Yemen



#### ■ The future state

While the internal political situation of Yemen limits violence to internal borders and neutralises the exportation of terrorist activities, the International Community will remain vigilant and provide limited support to anyone occupying the Presidency or power in Yemen. However, a situation of chaos that leads to an uncontrolled situation or an increase in AQAP's activities or those of similar organisations will lead to a new intervention by one of the powers or an international coalition, which would most probably receive support from the countries of the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia.

As with other post-revolution scenarios, the structure of the new state must come from a process of consultation that involves the highest possible number of players, followed by the drafting of a new constitution that needs to be endorsed by the population and, finally, elections. The theory of the procedure is well known, as is the difficulty of reality.

The differences between North and South mean that a consensus must be found for the future structure of the state. Excessive decentralisation may worsen problems, such as the distribution of resources, corruption or excessive tribal power.

■ **Yemen, sanctuary for terrorists. Where and how to fight AQ after its withdrawal from Afghanistan?**

The withdrawal or return of the international coalition forces operating in Afghanistan will mean that at least part of the forces used on said mission can be assigned to new locations, which will undoubtedly include Yemen. A new scenario with the same enemies.

The territory of Yemen is almost as hostile as Afghanistan, but it can be accessed easily by sea and by air. Furthermore, unlike the states that border with Afghanistan, its Arab neighbours have modern infrastructures and share economic interests and suffer from the threat of AQAP as much as or more than the West.

The attitude of two states on the border with Yemen, which would condition logistics support, intelligence work and operational support, will be determined in the case of Saudi Arabia by the level of the threat and activities carried out by AQAP, also owing to the current internal political scenario, which is never easy in this country, and the permanent excuse of the ever-pending succession to the throne.

In the case of Oman, the most probable scenario is the refusal to authorise operations from its territory. The respected and independent Sultan Qabus has always tried to maintain neutrality and protect his people from violent conflicts that can lead to their separation, especially at a time when there is no clear successor and his strength is weakened by his age.

Both players, Saudi Arabia and Oman, have taken a very limited part in the two operations of the region owing to the reasons that have been given: the fight against piracy in the Indian Ocean and the war in Afghanistan. Their actions, partially conditioned by the operative incapacity of their armed forces and partially by the fear of a violent anti-Western reaction from their subjects or the extremists in their own territory, have been basically limited to enabling the transit of the forces of the powers in the fight.

In a hypothetical confrontation with AQ in Yemen, it would appear to be logical to define it as a conflict limited to direct and radical confrontation with AQAP, avoiding the provocation of or confrontation with groups of insurgents or secessionists, which represent an internal affair in Yemen. Operations must be based on forces from naval units or, where applicable, air bases located in Saudi territory or the nearby African coast.

Conditioning factors for the operation would be: minimum exposure of own forces to enemy fire and IEDs, development and strengthening of intelligence and knowledge of the enemy through new coordination models between civil and military intelligence services, extensive HUMINT and propaganda operations, control of the electromagnetic spectrum and area, use of precision weapons and technical resources directed and controlled from outside the borders and the taking of decisions with regard to targets in real-time through precision actions. Furthermore, in this case, it would seem that the elected government of Yemen may make a request for said international support.



**Tabla 11.1.**

<b>TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>
1838	UK takes control of Aden
1918	The Turks retire from North Yemen
1967	The British occupation in the South ends
1979	Ali Abdulla Saleh elected President of the North
1990	Formal unification of the Yemeni Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). Tension between Yemen and Saudi Arabia over the Yemen's support for Baghdad in the UNSC during the latter's invasion of Kuwait.
1994	Civil war between the North and South.
2000	Acts of banditry and kidnaping of foreigners Attack on the USS Cole in Aden Yemen and Saudi Arabia agree on final delimitation of their borders.
2002	At least five AQ suspects detained March. US vice-president, Dick Cheney, visits Yemen. October. Attack on the French ship Limburg. October. Yemen receives a loan of USD 2.3 billion from the world Bank and other donors to combat the causes of terrorism and lack of security. November. Six al-Qaeda suspects die in an attack by a US Predator. The UK embassy strengthens security and warns its citizens to leave Yemen December. The Spanish army intercepts a shipment of Scud missiles fro North Korea to Yemen. The ship continues its voyage after it is confirmed that they were destined for the Sana'a armed forces.
2003	Yemen frees 92 repentant members of AQ.
2004	Confrontations between government forces and Houthi rebels, between 80 and 600 die February. Yemen protests to Saudi Arabia over the construction of a border fence.
2005	Confrontations between government forces and Houthi rebels, approximately 280 die. 39 dead in protests over removal of fuel subsidies. November. Saleh visits President Bush in the White House.

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
2006	<p>January. President Saleh visits Kuwait to attend the Emir's funeral.</p> <p>February. 23 al-Qaeda prisoners escape from prison in Sana'a.</p> <p>March. Yemen maintains contact with Somaliland over fishing agreements.</p> <p>April. Saleh visits China.</p> <p>April. The General Secretary of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Abdul-Rahman al-Atiyah, visits Yemen.</p> <p>April. The Spanish Embassy is inaugurated in the Yemen.</p> <p>April. Saudi Arabia and Yemen agree to an exchange of prisoners. Yemen sends 16 Saudis accused of terrorism and receives 11 Yemenis.</p> <p>July. Yemen requests the Arab League mutual defence treaty to be activated against Israel, in response to actions in Lebanon.</p> <p>November. Donor conference in London.</p>
2007	<p>February. Yemen accuses Iran and Libya of supporting Yemeni rebels.</p> <p>May. President Saleh visits the USA and holds meetings with President Bush and the Intelligence Agencies.</p> <p>July. Terrorist attack in Marib, 8 Spanish tourists and their Yemeni driver die.</p> <p>August. President Saleh offers to mediate between the Palestinian groups, Fatah and Hamas.</p> <p>August. The US embassy warns of an increase in terrorist activity.</p>
2008	<p>January. 2 Belgian tourists and their Yemeni driver die in a terrorist attack in Hadramawt.</p> <p>March. A mortar attack on the US embassy damages a school.</p> <p>April. The Director of the FBI visits Yemen.</p> <p>April. Mortar attacks on a settlement of westerners and the Italian embassy.</p> <p>August. The Saudi Minister of Interior Affairs visits Yemen.</p> <p>September. Six terrorists launch a suicide attack on the US embassy. 11 dead.</p> <p>September. President Saleh visits Saudi Arabia.</p>
2009	<p>March. Four South Korean tourists killed in a suicide attack en Shibam.</p> <p>August. The army launches a new offensive against Houthi rebels.</p> <p>September. Assassination attempt in Jeddah on the Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayef.</p> <p>October. Confrontations between Houthi rebels and Saudi military forces. The Houthis take several Saudi soldiers prisoner.</p> <p>December. The USA launches a cruise missile strike on two AQAP installations in Yemen.</p> <p>December. The Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, attempts to explode a bomb on a Northwest Airlines flight to Detroit.</p>

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
2010	<p>February. The Yemen government and Houthi rebels sign a truce and cease hostilities</p> <p>March. Yemen launches air strikes against AQAP in the governorate of Abyan. This is followed by land deployment in Abyan and Shabwa.</p> <p>April. AQAP attack on the British ambassador in Sana'a.</p> <p>July. An air-strike kills AQAP member, Sheikh Jabir Ali al-Shabwani, sparking a small tribal war in Marib</p> <p>Explosives are discovered on planes in London and Dubai. AQAP claims responsibility.</p>
2011	<p>Protests against the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime, in the context of the Arab Spring. Political crisis. Transition agreement (November 2011) allowing transfer of power from the president to the vice-president, the formation of a National Reconciliation Government among the main parliamentary parties, holding presidential elections and calling for national dialogue. The horizon for these reforms is 2014.</p> <p>Following an attack on the president's palace, President Saleh goes to Saud Arabia for medical treatment.</p>
2012	<p>Presidential elections on 21 February. Only the Vicepresident, Abdel Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, stood as agreed.</p> <p>September. The number two in the al-Qaeda terrorist network in the Arabian Peninsula, Said el Shahri, is killed in an army attack in the province of Hadramut, according to Ministry of Defence reports. Al Shahri had been held in the US Guantanamo prison, in Cuba, according to reports from the Dpa press agency. On his return to Saudi Arabia, he underwent a rehabilitation programme for ex-terrorists.</p> <p>At least five dead in a car bomb explosion near the Yemeni government headquarters in Sana'a. It was targeted at the Yemeni Defence Minister, the Brigade General Muhammad Nasir Ahmad..</p> <p>September. According to travel recommendations from the Spanish MAEC website: "Sa'ada, Amran, Abyan, Hadramaut, Lahj, Marib, Shabwa, Al-Dala'e and al-Jawf provinces should be avoided at all cost, as they are zones of armed conflict".</p>

Source: Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments y MAEC

#### ■ SOURCES:

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments

[http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Paises/ArbolPaises/Yemen/fichapais/Documents/YEMEN\\_FICHA%20PAIS\\_2012.pdf](http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Paises/ArbolPaises/Yemen/fichapais/Documents/YEMEN_FICHA%20PAIS_2012.pdf)

Tabla 11.2.

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		YEMEN
Area		527,970 km <sup>2</sup>
GDP		Nominal GDP (in millions of USD) 39.2
Structure.	Agriculture	8,3 %
GDP/Active population (2011)	Industry	38,8 %
	Services	52,9 %
GNI per capita		US\$ 950
Literacy rate		50%
% Unemployment		Official figures are not reliable. Estimated to be between 35% and 55% of the population.
Executive Power		Head of State: Presidente Abd Rabuh Mansur HADI, since 25 Feb. 2012  Elections: On 21 February 2012, in accordance with terms of the GCC agreement. The next elections will be held in 2014.
Legislative Power		Two chambers  House of Representatives: GPC 238, Islah 47, YSP 6, Nasserite Unionist Party 3, National Arab Socialist Ba'th Party 2, independents 5
Political Parties and Leaders		General People's Congress or GPC [Abdul-Kader BAJAMMAL]; Islamic Reform Grouping or Islah [Muhammed Abdallah AL-YADUMI]; Nasserite Unionist Party [Abd al-Malik al-MAKHLAFI]; National Arab Socialist Ba'th Party [Dr. Qasim SALAM]; Yemeni Socialist Party or YSP [Yasin Said NU'MAN].
Foreign Trade		The main imports into Yemen consist of machinery and vehicles, mineral fuels, manufactured goods, food and livestock, and chemical products. These imports come from the United Arab Emirates (15.8%), China (12.3%), Saudi Arabia (7.5%), Switzerland (6.4%) and Kuwait (5.6%).  Yemen's main exports are crude oil, coffee and fresh and salted fish. Yemeni exports in 2006 were mainly destined for China (29.9%), India (16.6%), Thailand (15.9%), South Korea (6.4%) and the United States (6.4%).
Crude oil and LNG production		Oil reserves in the country are falling, the useful life will end in 2017.  Lack of alternative sources of public revenues will give rise to a fall in growth for the country.

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		YEMEN
Crude oil and LNG production		<p>Gradual removal of fuel subsidies from 2009, also political instability caused by the revolts in 2011, have put inflation at 20% over the last year, rising to 400% at certain times in the year for goods such as diesel, cooking gas or water.</p> <p>2009. An LNG extraction plant is started up in Bahaf.</p> <p>Oil no longer flows through the Mareb pipeline (75% of the total), due to constant terrorist attacks against it. The security situation makes it impossible to drill for new sites.</p>
		<p>The lack of infrastructure, both for tourism and fisheries, means that there is significant waste of potential sources of revenue apart from hydrocarbons.</p> <p>In 2011, the Yemeni public finances have survived mostly due to direct external aid, especially from Saudi Arabia</p>
Population		24.800.000 (2011)
Age structure	0-14	43%
	15-64	54,4%
	Over 65	2,6%
Population growth rate		32.57 births/1,000 population (2012 est.)
Ethnic groups		Predominantly Arab, but also Afro-Arab, South Asian and European.
Religions		Muslim Shaf'i (Sunni) and Zaydi (Shia).
Population below the poverty line		40%
Government		<p>Prime Minister: Mohammed Salem Ba Sundwa (Independent)</p> <p>Agriculture and Irrigation: Farid Ahmed Mujawar (CGP)</p> <p>Defence Mohammed Nasser Ahmed Ali (CGP)</p> <p>Education: Abdulrazzaq Yahya Al-Ashwal (JMP)</p> <p>Electricity: Saleh Hassan Sumai (JMP)</p> <p>Religious and Islamic Affairs: Hamud Ubad (CGP)</p> <p>Finance: Sakhr Ahmed Al-Walij (JMP)</p> <p>Foreign Affairs and Immigration: Abubakr Abdulá Al-Qirbi (CGP)</p> <p>Human Rights: Houriah Ahmed Mashhour (JMP)</p> <p>Information: Ahmed Ali Al-Amrani (JMP)</p> <p>Interior Affairs: Abdulqader Qahtan (JMP)</p>

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS	YEMEN
Government	Justice: Murshed Ali Al-Arashani (JMP) Work and Social Affairs: Armat Al-Razzaq Hummad (CGP) Local Administration: Ali Mohamed Al-Yazidi (JMP) Oil and Minerals: Hisham Sharaf (CGP) Planning and International Cooperation: Mohamed Al-Sadi (JMP) Public Health and Population: Ahmed Qassim Al-Ansi (CGP) Public Works and Roads: Omar Abdulá Al-Qurshumi (CGP) Trade and Industry: Saada Al-Din Ali bin Talib (JMP) Transport: Waeed Abdulá Bathib (JMP) Water and the Environment: Abdurazzaz Saleh Khaled (JMP)
Refugees	179,845 (Somalia)
Displaced persons	Over 550,000 (Sa'ada conflict (2012))
Military spending. % GDP.	6.6% of GDP (2006)

Source: Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments and The CIA World Factbook

#### ■ SOURCES:

Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments

<http://maps.worldbank.org/mena/yemen-republic>

The CIA World Factbook. Consulted at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

The CIA World Factbook. Consulted at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

## CHAPTER XII

# AFGHANISTAN: PROGRESS ON TRANSITION

*Francisco José Berenguer Hernández*

### **ABSTRACT**

The last stage of the war in Afghanistan is nearing its end. There is no going back on the transfer of full power to the Afghan government as national reconciliation negotiations are making steady progress. A lot has been done to help the Afghan government in the building of a viable state that ensures a certain stability and security. It is time for the international troops to come home and for all Afghans, not only the government, to take on with hope responsibility for the future of their country.

### **Keywords:**

Central Asia, Afghanistan, Taliban, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has been a region far removed from history's political and cultural currents; however the level of integration of Central Asian republics into the International Community is increasing. The five ex-Soviet nations, plus Afghanistan, as an unquestionable influence in the former, have all experienced positive evolution in recent years with the energy market acting as the driving force of their economies. Kazakhstan represents an economic success story since its independence, achieving a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 50% per capita<sup>(1)</sup>, whereas Tajikistan, the least successful has registered a drop of 45% in its GDP since 1990<sup>(2)</sup>.

The long period of peace experienced by these countries represents an opportunity for development that is reasonably being made the most of, though there is still a degree of tension to be found among the republics. Their natural resources are not evenly distributed: the abundance of hydrocarbons in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan starkly contrasts with the absence of same in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, the control by the latter of the sources of water that supply their neighbours places them in an advantageous position as regards the management of this natural resource which, while one of their main political weapons, is at the same one of the causes for tension in the region.

Afghanistan's peculiarity makes it the only country that has failed to secure a climate of peace and prosperity, immersed as it is in a conflict that has been going on for decades. It has become a source of concern for its northern neighbours, fearing its possible spreading. Consequently, in addition to the ethnic and inequality factors that prevail in the region, there are also other ones causing instability, such as, for the most part, the presence of Islamic fundamentalist and Jihad groups, not to mention gun running and drug trafficking-related organised crime.

The rise in defence spending from 2006 to 2015 testifies<sup>(3)</sup> to the aforementioned tensions and threats to peace in the region, as shown in the graph<sup>(4)</sup>.

The United Nations is certainly not unaware of this situation, as shown by the setting up of the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) to promote dialogue and confidence building measures. In terms of the presence of security organisations in the region,

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<sup>(1)</sup> World Bank. <http://www.worldbank.org/kz/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/KAZAKHSTANEXTN>.

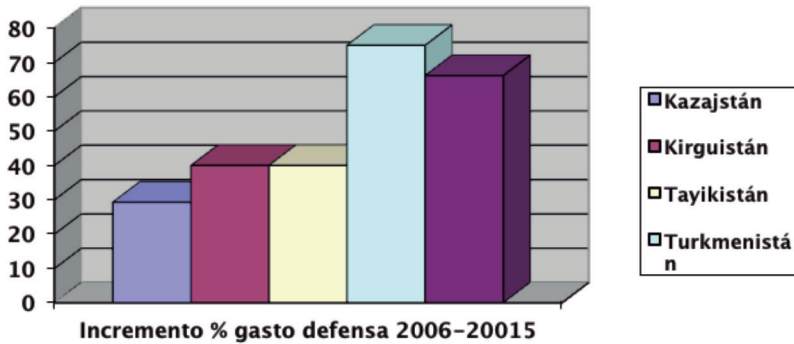
<sup>(2)</sup> World Bank. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TAJIKISTANEXTN>.

<sup>(3)</sup> Jane's Defence Budgets.

<sup>(4)</sup> Internally prepared chart.



Figure 12.1



along with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), we must also add the Community of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which is predominantly military in nature, and perhaps the most relevant long-term one, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Afghanistan is absent from these, immersed as it still is in its own dynamic. After the end of the war, one of the questions to be tackled will be the willingness of the Afghan government to take part in these organisations.

Afghan influence in a predominantly Islamic region is a potentially determinant factor. The triumph of the most extremist Islamic tendencies in Afghanistan would see the spreading of instability to the ex-Soviet republics, Russia and China. Consequently, the final outcome of the conflict is, to a great extent, going to determine the future of the region.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ Historical

Afghanistan has traditionally been an area of conflict. The military campaigns carried out there have been characterised by their fierceness and duration in time, more proper to irregular warfare than decisive field battles. Alliances with native inhabitants has been the only way in which to exercise any domain over the territory, which has always proven to be superficial<sup>(5)</sup>, incomplete and restricted to the towns and cities. This was the case for the Persians, Greeks, Arabs, English<sup>(6)</sup>, Soviets and remains so for NATO.

War in Afghanistan, given the severe environmental conditions, has historically proved to be an equation that armies<sup>(7)</sup> have found impossible to solve.

<sup>(5)</sup> Sekunda, N., Warry, J. (1998). *Alexander the Great, his armies and campaigns*. London: Osprey Publishing.

<sup>(6)</sup> Hambly, G. (1985). *Asia Central*. Madrid: Siglo XXI published by España Editores.

<sup>(7)</sup> Fremont-Barnes, G. (2009). *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919*. London: Osprey Publishing.

Today, the international forces, by using new technologies and a different approach to past wars, have managed to achieve reasonably better results, though the final outcome of the conflict remains uncertain.

### ■ Recent

The fall from power of King Zahir Shah in 1973, caused by Daoud Khan and the Babrak Karmal pro-Communists, led to the umpteenth war in Afghanistan, and one that has come down to us today. Finally, the coup d'état in 1978 established the pro-Soviet regime, which under the direction of Taraki, took measures with respect to the redistribution of land and as regards more sensitive social aspects. These measures were deemed to be anti-Islamic and rejected by large sectors of the population.

The bombing of towns where the resistance was strongest, purges of intellectuals and professionals and the violent repression of the people caused over 50,000<sup>(8)</sup> victims. The assassination of Taraki and war between pro and anti-Communist factions led to Soviet intervention.

### ■ Soviets, Mujahedeen and Taliban

The Soviet invasion saw the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Afghans. Many of them sought refuge in Pakistan and joined the resistance that had been organised there by Pakistan and the United States. They were Mujahedeen<sup>(9)</sup> who had led the holy war against the invader.

Convinced of the impossibility of victory, the Soviets withdrew, leaving behind one million dead, the destruction of infrastructures and farming, the laying of mines, 4 million refugees in neighbouring countries and the destruction of thousands of homes. Nevertheless, national reconciliation proved impossible, giving rise to a period in which the Mujahedeen became involved in a multi-sided civil war, the objective of which was Kabul. This stage ended upon Islamabad supporting the Islamic students at the Western Pakistani madrassas, the Taliban.

Extremely strict in their application of the *sharia*, but at no great remove from the mentality of a lot of Afghans, they received support from part of the population on having brought an end to the chaos that reigned. Nevertheless, Mujahedeen commanders, mainly Tajiks and Uzbeks, coming together in the Northern Alliance, managed to withstand the Taliban thrust and get support from the Russians and the Central Asian republics alarmed by the Afghan regime, which had also become a hideout for the al-Qaeda leadership. By means of its alliance with the latter, the Taliban, who were not recognised by the International Community, received technical and economic aid.

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<sup>(8)</sup> Ewans, M. Marsden, P. *Afghanistan: History*. London: Europa World online.

<sup>(9)</sup> Etymologically, «warriors for Islam».

## ■ Enduring Freedom and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

The 11-S attacks and the refusal of the Taliban to hand over the al-Qaeda leadership led the United States of America to declare the war on terrorism and on the Taliban, by way of launching «Operation Enduring Freedom». The Northern Alliance and the foreign troops quickly defeated the Taliban. Many of them sought refuge once again in Pakistani tribal areas. From that sanctuary, the insurgents have infiltrated into Afghanistan, challenging the government of the country and the international forces that support it, namely, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

In spite of the forming of a legitimate government, the power that local warlords have, drug trafficking, banditry, corruption and the recovery of the Taliban, have prevented the pacification of the country. As a result, the strategies adopted have had to be adapted both to events as they unfold, as well as to not meeting all of the goals set.

## ■ Strategies Employed

- *Conventional Warfare*

The conventional strategy managed to defeat the Taliban–al-Qaeda pairing militarily by means of aerial and Northern Alliance support, led by special operations teams embedded in the Alliance. After destroying the Taliban regime, international aid focused on helping President Karzai to rebuild the country, with priority being given to the army (ANA) and the police (ANP).

- *Anti-terrorist and Counter-insurgency*

The American government assumed that the defeat of the Taliban was irreversible, focusing its efforts on eliminating the surviving members of al-Qaeda and instructing and equipping Afghan National Army (ANA) units. However, the deployment of the ISAF and Afghan troops in Kabul left the rest of the country in the hands of the local warlords. It became necessary to continue operations to do away with the remains of the Taliban, but also to control activities related to organised crime and drug trafficking, thus proving that a predominantly anti-terrorist strategy had been a mistake.

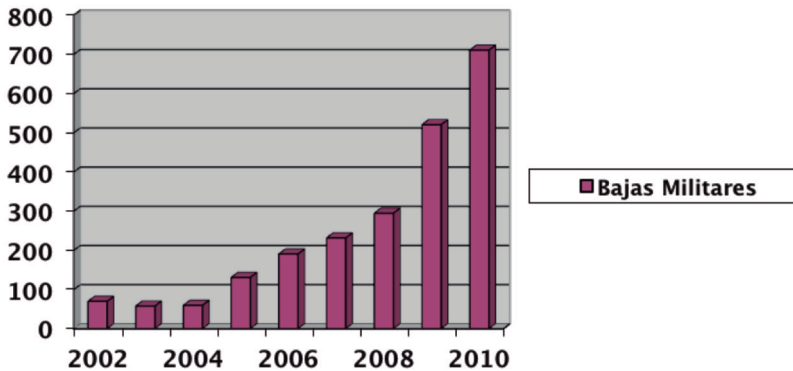
As a result, in 2004 campaign strategy was redirected, shifting for the most part to counter-insurgency. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme managed to recover a great number of weapons, to achieve the abandoning of the struggle by thousands of insurgents and support for the government by many of the warlords. Nevertheless, this counter-insurgency strategy demanded more troops to enable their presence throughout the coun-

try and to make it possible to hold the first presidential elections at the end of 2004.

It soon became clear that the counter-insurgency strategy, albeit conceptually the right one, was weakened in its performance by insufficient troop numbers when it came to controlling the extensive and complex territory that is Afghanistan. Paradoxically, the efforts of many of the contributing nations proved excessive, giving rise to national public opinion becoming weary and running out of steam. Moreover, the numerous and at the same time scarce presence of troops in rural areas enabled the insurgents to use massive Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and to lay ambushes for patrols. Allied casualties grew increasingly as of 2005<sup>(10)</sup>.

Nonetheless, these casualties were not only to be found among the ranks of the combatants, but as the following graph<sup>(11)</sup>, shows, violence had extended throughout the entire country.

Figure 12.2



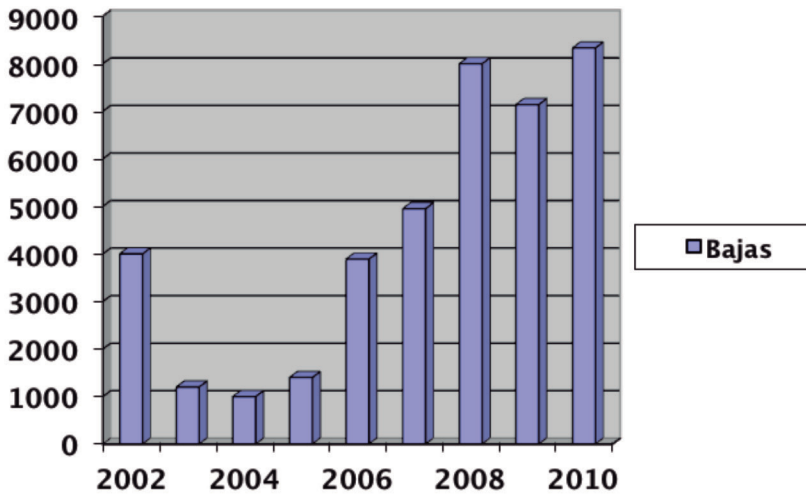
- «Surge», *Transition and Reduction*

Public opinion weariness, the high costs and the feeling that the campaign had become deadlocked that resulted from the process described above demanded that a new strategy be adopted. In spite of the unquestionable achievements, such as the building of production and communications infrastructures, the greater degree of female schooling and the drop in illiteracy, and above all, the increasing of the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), endowing the government with governance tools that it had never had before, the feeling of stagnation and pessimism took root in the administrations of the participating countries.

<sup>(10)</sup> Internally prepared chart.

<sup>(11)</sup> Internally prepared chart.

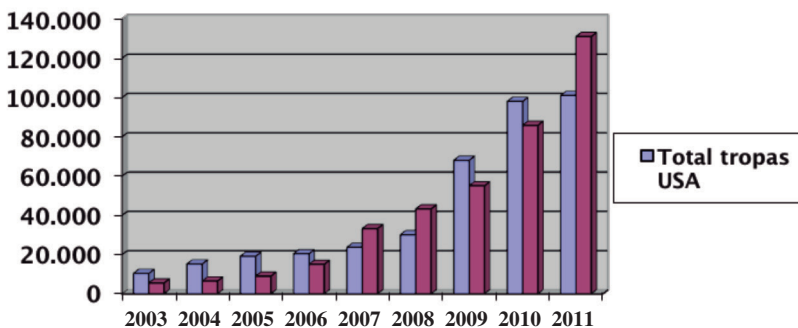
Figure 12.3



After the relative failure experienced, caused by such things as the lack of unified criteria among the participating countries, the inadequate way of tackling drug production or the lack of confidence that the Afghan government inspired due to numerous accusations of corruption, its alleged collusion with drug trafficking and the inability to make the public a party to the benefits of the economic aid, it became necessary to look for an option other than the permanent military presence in Afghanistan. In the end, President Obama set out the lines of a new strategy in December 2009:

- Initial increase of troops –30,000 North American and 10,000 allied ones– with the aim in mind of defeating the Taliban in the areas where they exert most influence, namely, the south and west of the country.

Figure 12.4



- *Evolution of the Number of Foreign Troops in Afghanistan*<sup>(12)</sup>
  - A big increase in the effort to train and equip the ANSF to enable them to assume responsibility for the country's security. The *Afghanisation* of the conflict.
  - Strengthening cooperation with Pakistan against the Taliban havens along the border, increasing financial and military aid.

Owing to the positive results these initiatives were to have, the President announced that American troops would start leaving Afghanistan as of 2011, with the last troops being scheduled to leave at the end of 2014.

The increase of troops in 2010 and 2011 was used to undertake large-scale operations in the eastern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, traditionally insurgent and poppy-producing areas. The severely punished Taliban forces in these operations lost their initiative.

Notwithstanding, it can also be said that, in spite of the successes, there would be no decisive military victory. Given the stalemate situation, the Afghan government, Taliban and the international forces became convinced of the need for a negotiated solution. Since 2010 this avenue has been explored.

The look of the final outcome in Afghanistan, if not the desired one, but at least a possible one, has led to a change of strategy, which has once again focused on counter-terrorist actions, trying to put a stop to or neutralise the remaining – albeit few – al-Qaeda elements and the more extremist Taliban ones – greater in number – who are against going down the political road and giving up the armed struggle.

At the same time, the great efforts made in training and strengthening the ANSF made it possible to put the *Inteqal* – transition – into operation, which consists of the gradual transfer of authority to the ANSF, with the aim in mind of taking on complete responsibility for the entire country at the end of 2014, a date on which the foreign military presence would then be extremely small, by means of a formula yet to be decided on.

Below we give a brief summary of the main events in the conflict.

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<sup>(12)</sup> Internally produced graph based on data provided by the United States Department of Defence.

**Table 12.1**

<b>TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENTS</b>
14.01.1761	Battle of Panipat. Consolidation of the Durrani dynasty by Ahmed Shah Durrani, father of the Afghan Nation
1775	Taimur Shah Durrani establishes his capital in Kabul
1833-1842	First Anglo-Afghan War
1878-1881	Second Anglo-Afghan War
1919-1921	Third Anglo-Afghan War
1973	Mohammed Zahir Shah, the last king, leaves Afghanistan
1979	Beginning of the Soviet invasion
	Assassination of Hafizullah Amin
1989	Soviet withdrawal and start of the civil war
1996	The Taliban capture Kabul
2001	The United States begins air strikes on Taliban and al-Qaeda positions. Start of Enduring Freedom
	The Northern Alliance captures Kabul
	The United Nations Security Council establishes ISAF through Resolution 1386
	An Interim Authority is created under the presidency of Hamid Karzai
2004	Elections are held, in which Karzai is chosen as President
2009	President Karzai is re-elected
	President Obama gives a speech at West Point. Beginning of the exit strategy from Afghanistan
2005-2010	Constant escalation of violence. Sustained increase in civil and military victims
2011-2014	Transition process (Inteqal). Political negotiation. Increasing Afghanisation of the conflict. Foreseeable reduction in insurgent attacks and casualties caused by these.
2014	End of reduction of western forces in Afghanistan

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ Transition and Reduction of Troops

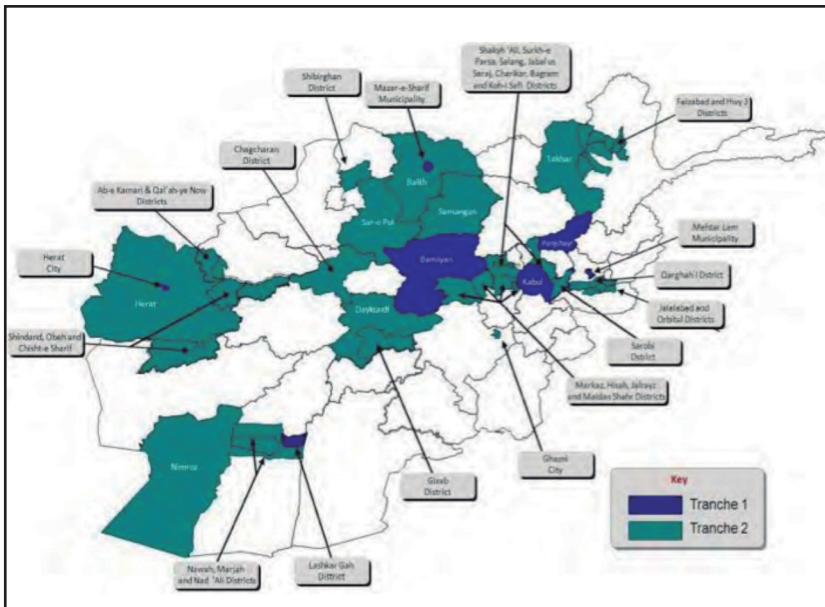
The transition process is clearly irreversible. It is fully up and running as the main tool to reduce the presence of foreign troops in the country and for the Afghan government to take on its security responsibilities. By mid-August 2012, during the time of the year most prone to insurgent activity, the security of half of the Afghan population was under ANSF responsibility.

The process, controlled by the Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board (JANIB) has recently undergone an important change. The pace and irreversibility of the process was designed as being tied to the availability of sufficiently prepared Afghan forces, which meant that initially – during what was called *Tranche One* – those areas that were subject to less insurgent activity were handed over. The aim behind this method was to increase their experience and self-confidence, while at the same time enabling assessment of the progress made by the JANIB.

*Tranche Two* later announced by President Karzai at the end of a 2011, involved a further 13 provinces, thus giving rise at present to the state of affairs that can be seen in the following figure<sup>(13)</sup>

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Figure 12.5



<sup>(13)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

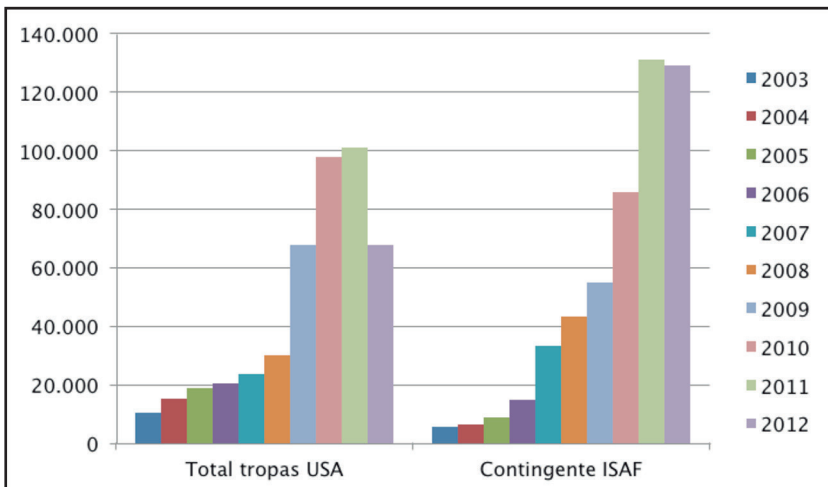


The third phase or *Tranche Three* is currently under study, but will include aforementioned change. This consists of the conviction of the inadvisability of leaving the most conflictive areas, with the greatest insurgent presence, until the end of the process. The reason behind this change is obvious, given that the Afghan forces would evidently have to take over full responsibility for the most dangerous areas with an already reduced foreign troop presence. Such a risk has been considered too big to be taken, as it would put the small numbers of remaining foreign troops, as well as their Afghan colleagues, at greater risk. Consequently, the traditional Taliban spheres of influence in the south and east of the country will be included in the third phase. That is to say, greater risks are going to be taken on as of the end of 2012 with a view to ensuring the end of the transition, without a doubt destined to be a very delicate moment at the end of 2014.

As far as the reduction of American troops is concerned, the process continues. The reduction of 11,000 troops since the beginning of 2012 will continue along with the withdrawal of the additional forces sent for the big military operations carried out in 2010 and 2011. After the withdrawal of these troops in the last quarter of 2012, it is estimated that there will still be some 68,000 troops there at the end of the year<sup>(14)</sup>. ISAF have also begun their withdrawal, albeit more slowly. Even though this withdrawal is linked to the different responsibilities of each country, there is little doubt that the reduction of troops is going to speed up over the next few months, with numerous nations having already announced this earlier and larger withdrawal than was planned for originally.

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Figure 12.6



Evolution of the Number of Foreign Troops in Afghanistan<sup>(15)</sup>

<sup>(14)</sup> United States Department of Defense.

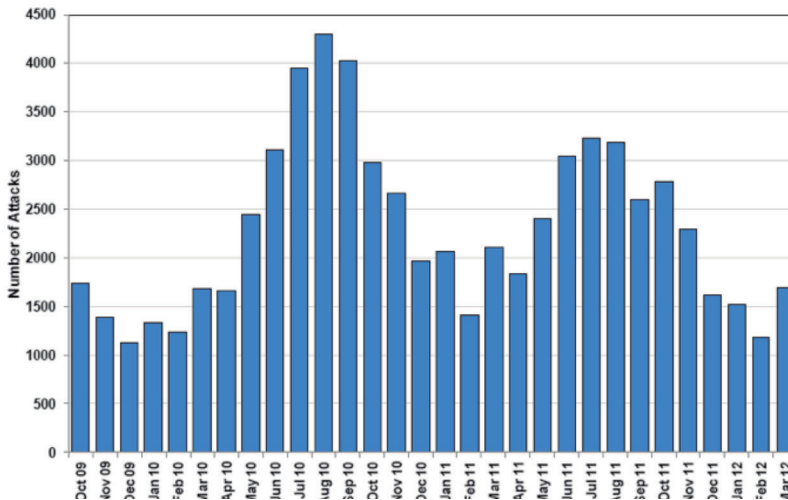
<sup>(15)</sup> Internally produced graph based on data provided by the United States Department of Defence.

■ **Levels of Violence and Casualties**

A considerable improvement can be seen in this respect in comparison to previous years. Indeed, one might even speak of a reverse trend, though with the requisite caution, because as shown in the graph<sup>(16)</sup> there has only been a modest fall-off in the number of attacks in 2012 with respect to the two previous years, registering an average of 21%. However, it is also true that since 2005 the trend had reflected an invariable annual increase. Therefore, it is a positive sign, though we need to wait and see how it evolves.

A good indication of the fragility of this progress is the fact that in the months that have elapsed since April to the time of writing – the end of August 2012 – the number of attacks launched by the insurgents has risen again – by 11% to be exact, which can be viewed as an extremely negative fact if it is interpreted as a recovery of the insurgency initiative coinciding with the withdrawal of mainly American troops. Indeed June, which averaged some 110 attacks a day<sup>(17)</sup>, broke the record held since 2002. However, it is also true that ambitious operations are being carried out in areas of great importance to the Taliban, so the numbers of attacks suffered should come as no surprise. The fight has been brought to the very heart of Taliban power, which they are naturally trying to defend with all the means at their disposal. After these operations have been completed and the troops that came as a result of the so-called «wave» have left, it will be possible to see just exactly where the figures for violence in the southern and eastern provinces under dispute stand.

**Figure 12.7**



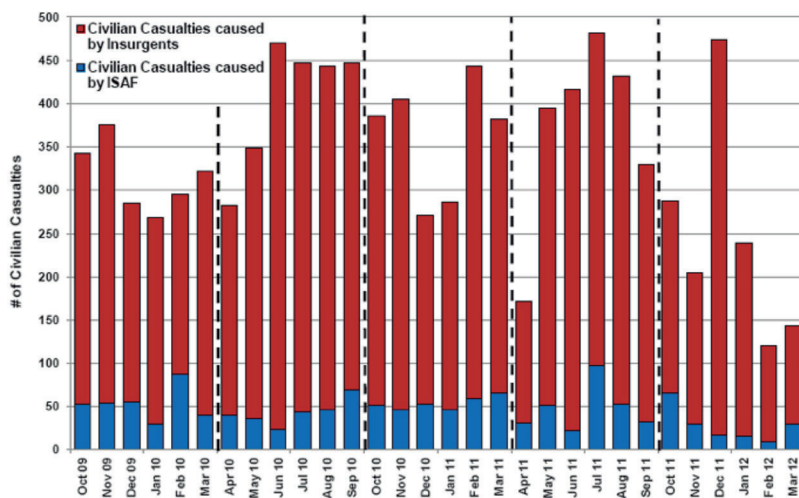
<sup>(16)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

<sup>(17)</sup> Data provided by ISAF HQ.

As far as the evolution of casualties is concerned, one can speak of obvious improvement. In spite of the aforementioned increase in attacks over the last few months, casualty figures have fallen considerably. All one has to do is to compare the 103 international troop casualties in June 2010 with the 39 suffered in the same month in 2012.

Civilian casualties have also fallen by 32%; both with respect to those caused by the insurgents, as well as regard those arising from international forces' operations<sup>(18)</sup>, after the changes made to the tactics pursued, particularly in the always controversial aspect of the air attacks.

**Figure 12.8**



Therefore, it seems that one can deduce from this that the insurgent attacks have become less effective. According to statements made by American troops<sup>(19)</sup> improvements to equipment and intelligence are making it possible to better counteract the IED threat. For this reason, the attack launched in July in the Wardak province against an American vehicle resulting in the death of six soldiers is reason for concern, given that it could be a new type of more powerful and efficient device designed by the insurgents to attempt to counteract the improvements made to protection.

On the other hand, in spite of being unable to carry out spectacular attacks like those launched in Kabul in 2011 by Haqqani militia, the summer months are being characterised by aforementioned increase in attacks, which without a

<sup>(18)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

<sup>(19)</sup> AFP, 10th July 2012.

shadow of a doubt seek to hold onto a more powerful position at the negotiating table. That is most likely the reason behind the indiscriminate attacks and weaker targets picked last August, which in a few days managed to cause the deaths of tens of people in Kabul and Kandahar, the majority of whom were civilians, though foreign and Afghan troops were also among the casualties.

The mode of attack used, bombs and even suicide bombers wearing explosive belts, show a qualitative weakening in comparison to the attacks of the summer of 2011 against some of the heaviest protected buildings and organisations in Kabul, carried out by strongly armed militia squads capable of engaging in combat for several hours. Faced with this lack of capacity, the insurgents have sought to endow their actions with importance by way of the significance of the dates on which these are carried out, making them coincide with *Eid al-Fitr*, marking the end of Ramadan.

However, if there is one side to the violence that particularly concerns the coalition at present, this is the disproportionate increase in the attacks being suffered by foreign troops carried out by members of the ANSF. Those involved in these attacks have been low ranked soldiers and police officers of some of the most prestigious units, as is the case with the assassination of three British soldiers by an ANP officer on 2nd July 2012<sup>(20)</sup> in the Nahr-e Saraj district in Helmand.

Up to 50 coalition soldiers have been killed in this way over the first seven months of 2012, with an alarming escalation over the summer, whereas the total amount of casualties caused in a similar manner in 2011 was 35. Even though the arguments of ISAF officials talk of particular feuds and not of the infiltration of insurgents into the ANSF, the fact is that these types of attacks have become much more frequent over the last two years, to the point of becoming worthy of its very own categorisation – «green-on-blue» – and the visit to the country of General Dempsey, Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff to specifically tackle the matter. A plan has been put forward to intensify surveillance and internal investigation into the ANSF with a view to reducing this circumstance, which is undermining the confidence between instructors and their students at a critical juncture. And it has indeed done so, to the point that the United States has decided to temporarily suspend the instruction of new recruits to the Afghan local police, which is especially open to insurgent infiltration.

### ■ The Coalition

In addition to what has already been said, the most important events involving international troops present in the theatre of operations have not been particularly positive.

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<sup>(20)</sup> Matthew Rosenberg, *The New York Times*, 2nd July 2012.

On 20th February several copies of the Koran were burnt in Bagram by American soldiers in a thoughtless act and one perhaps provoked by an excess of zeal concerning security. The reaction by the civilian population led to serious disturbances and even suicide attacks resulting in the death of 40 Afghan civilians and six Americans. This unfortunate incident left Afghan-American relations at its lowest point at a time when the post-2014 strategic agreement was being negotiated.

Several incidents of a similar vein occurred in the first six months of 2012, in a world where a gibe, a slight or mindlessness, which in the Western world would not be afforded any great importance, can be taken as an insult that demands violent redress. This is what lies behind several of the attacks made on their instructors by Afghan police or military personnel. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the event which greatly marked Afghan-American relations was the assassination of 16 civilians, some of whom were children, by an American non-commissioned officer in the village of Belandi. An inexplicable, individual action that provoked the consternation of the US government and which was very close to having grave strategic consequences.

Nevertheless, in spite of these upsets, and a host of other ones of a cultural nature, on 23rd April 2012 Leon Panetta, American Secretary of Defence, finally announced that both countries had reached the hoped for strategic agreement that sets out the Afghan scene after 2014. Long and complex negotiations were required, made that much more difficult by the events described above and ones that were always sensitive to the collateral victim issue. Nonetheless, the agreement is must for both countries in order to ensure a certain stability, and perhaps, even to the survival of the Kabul government and of all that will have been achieved by 2014 and thereafter.

The fact is that there is simply no alternative. The full withdrawal of the American troops on 31st December 2013 would most likely bring with it a swift deterioration in security, a setback to the progress made and a new civil war. The putting into operation of the agreement is vital for at least the initially agreed ten-year term, not only in the security field, but also with respect to the worrying economic aspect and the viability of the State that has been created.

The strategic agreement, even though its fine details have still be worked out and have to be adaptable to the different situations that arise, makes it possible to affirm that the transition process, the transfer of responsibilities to the ANSF and the scaled withdrawal of international troops is going satisfactorily<sup>(21)</sup>. Though it is still much too early to be able to affirm a successful process outcome.

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<sup>(21)</sup> Brigadier General Richard Cripwell, (UK), ISAF Strategic Transition Group Director, report to the Pentagon of 21st June 2012

## ■ The ANFS

The ANFS are still fully immersed in the recruitment and instruction process, while at the same time taking over a bigger number of districts and provinces. They have undergone little change in the last year and continue to have the same problems with respect to the training or qualifications of their leaders, the high desertion rate, maintenance task incompetence, corruption, etc.

Some recent incidents further strengthen this feeling of weakness. Events such as the desertion of eleven ANP officers who, with abundant equipment, left their ranks to join up with the Taliban in Helmand<sup>(22)</sup>, or such as the lack of safeguarding the night-vision goggles purchased by the ANFS<sup>(23)</sup> which has enabled a sizeable amount of these, perhaps even hundreds, to fall into the hands of the insurgents, thus making night-time operations that much more dangerous.

Neither do the infrastructures transferred to the ANSF seem to be properly maintained. Indeed, there is evidence of the abandoning of posts built along the border with Pakistan, which are deemed to be critical for the security of the country as a whole. According to inspectors who have pointed out this deficiency, the lack of maintenance has made the installation uninhabitable, often due to the lack of water, thus leading to its abandonment. Several of the installations that were visited were found to be in this situation and were even being used by local inhabitants for other purposes. At present, over 200 bases have been closed and around 300 have been transferred to local forces<sup>(24)</sup>. This situation starkly contrasts with the stance adopted by President Karzai who has asked that the Western military bases not be pulled down in order to transform them into schools, hospitals or government offices.

However, perhaps the biggest security challenge facing the ANSF is the fight against the main and most lethal offensive resource employed by the insurgency. IEDs cause a very high percentage of casualties and require the maximum efforts of coalition forces to combat their effectiveness. This requires the work of extremely specialised teams whose numbers do not suffice to protect the troops and at the same time properly instruct the ANFS in this area, which is one of the biggest challenges facing the forces in charge of security. This is one of the main causes for concern according to General Ferron, Deputy Commander of the NATO Training Mission programme – Afghanistan (NTM-A) in the up-and-running process of transferring responsibility<sup>(25)</sup>.

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<sup>(22)</sup> Daud Ahmadi, Helmand provincial governor's spokesman, 6th August 2012.

<sup>(23)</sup> 7,157 night-vision goggles. David Lerman, Bloomberg, 20th June 2012.

<sup>(24)</sup> Deb Riechmann, Associated Press, 27th August 2012.

<sup>(25)</sup> Kristina Wong, The Washington Times, 9th August 2012.

In spite of everything, with the expected figure of 352,000 men constituting the Afghan forces in October 2012<sup>(26)</sup>, there is an increasing number of units capable of operating independently. This is the result of a change in direction by the NTM-A which, instead of focusing on the growth of the ANFS, has centred its efforts over the last few months on instruction and training.

Notwithstanding this progress, they still continue to be the weak link in Afghanistan's security architecture, registering five losses for every one suffered by the international troops<sup>(27)</sup>. It is to be expected that this number increase as the transition process advances throughout the entire country, particularly in the highest risk areas. This highly disproportionate rate can also be put down to the fact of the Taliban identifying the Afghan forces as the main opposition, given their conviction that the withdrawal of foreign troops is irreversible.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that some 14,000 members go to make up the rural self-defence groups. This local police body is remarkably effective in its immediate surroundings; however, even though it is subject to government authority, there are a lot of doubts as to what its attitude will be in the post-2014 scene.

### ■ The Insurgent Forces

In spite of the serious setbacks suffered by the insurgents in 2010 and 2011, they have proven themselves to be extremely resilient. They have continued to produce combatants from their Pakistani havens who, in spite of the drop in quality and in training with respect to previous years, are proving capable of recovering momentum over the summer months. As has become custom, one of the most outstanding characteristics of the Afghan insurgents, regardless of whom they are facing, is their determination, or as classic terminology would have it, their will to win.

Nonetheless, the damage and deterioration suffered by the insurgents is obvious. One of the most powerful instruments of punishment to which they have been subject over the last year are the drone attacks. A notable success must be added to the numerous insurgents who have fallen in this way, mainly during their crossing from one side to the other of the Pakistani border. We refer to the death of Sher Mohammad Hakimi during a meeting with other Haqqani members<sup>(28)</sup>. One of the leader, Muhammad Agha's main collaborators, he played an important roles as an instructor of new militia in what is possibly the most active and dangerous organisation during the latest stage of the conflict. This

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<sup>(26)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

<sup>(27)</sup> Official Afghan government data.

<sup>(28)</sup> Associated Press, 6th August 2012.

is an extremely sensitive loss which, along with several others caused by the drones, has greatly contributed to the qualitative weakening of the insurgent forces.

One of the consequences of this weakening is the change in the *modus operandi*, which seems to respond not only to the need to adapt to the evolution of the operations, but mainly to head in the direction of establishing a situation that can be sustained as an element of power after 2014. In this sense, above all the Haqqani network, albeit not the only one, has begun to operate in a particularly mafia-like fashion<sup>(29)</sup>.

Indeed, extortion, kidnapping, threats to and the assassination of citizens who oppose or make difficult the setting up of this network of interests that looks beyond 2014 can all be added to the actions against the ANSF and international troops aimed at destroying the progress made in education and with respect to the condition of women, a permanent focus of Taliban attention.

Along the same line of trying to ensure a favourable environment after the withdrawal of the foreign troops, the insurgents have embarked in 2012 on an assassination campaign of local and government civil servants. In this way they are both trying to obstruct the taking control of the area by the State during the transition period, as well as attempting to create conditions of chaos and lack of governance that will benefit their future actions.

These crimes are being strongly responded to by armed tribal groups, which are increasingly opposing these mafia-like practices that are undermining the authority of the tribal chiefs. An example of this resistance took place in the bazaar in Alishing where armed men prevented a Taliban group continuing on with its extortion practices there<sup>(30)</sup>. It is highly significant that one of the most frequent actions taken by these local revolts against the Taliban power is the re-opening of the schools that have been closed by the latter.

The fact is that, in addition to the local struggle for power, the people are fed up with the impositions put on them by the Taliban, who allege religious reasons for preventing them from accessing basic services. Although in Pakistan, a revealing example of this attitude is the prohibition by Pakistani Taliban in Northern Waziristan of the child vaccination campaign against polio. By alleging that there were CIA agents infiltrated among the doctors, it was not possible to vaccinate some 160,000 children<sup>(31)</sup>. Such attitudes are leading a lot of people to showing their resolute opposition against their outrages. Indeed, in recent months this opposition has given rise to armed confrontations.

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<sup>(29)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

<sup>(30)</sup> Waseem Nikzad for AFP, 20th July 2012.

<sup>(31)</sup> Declan Walsh, *The New York Times*, 18th June 2012.



As a result, tribal groups are becoming circumstantial allies of the government, though this is a risky option, because erstwhile Mujahedeen, who were ousted from power by the Taliban, have been detected as leading these groups, which may quite likely be an attempt by them to use the situation with a view to returning to the situation as it stood before the Taliban came, which in turn would undermine the capacity of the government to exercise effective control over the country as a whole. Therefore, it may just be an interim alliance over the next few years, and one that is not wholly free of risks.

However the most significant event over the last year is the express recognition by the Taliban leadership of the impossibility of winning the war and of the need to enter into the political arena<sup>(32)</sup>, as well as their distancing from al-Qaeda – which they classify as a «plague» – and the memory of Bin Laden. Even though this is not the official stance of the Taliban leadership, the fact is that there is only a token presence of al-Qaeda Jihadist groups in Afghanistan and they exercise little influence in the unfolding of events there. Whatever the case, these words must be taken within the framework of the negotiation scene that is currently going on.

### ■ Negotiation

In addition to the strategic agreements mentioned above with the United States, the only hope for real, lasting peace is the conclusion, by means of a solid agreement among the parties involved, of the negotiations that have been going on for some time now.

After the intervention of numerous intermediaries – Saudi Arabia, Turkey – the step forward taken in Kyoto seems to set the guidelines for the next negotiation phases. Qari Din Mohammad Hanafi, the erstwhile Taliban minister and one of its most influential leaders, and Mohammed Masoom Stanekzai, President's Karzai's main adviser, met there on 27th June, in what the American ambassador in Kabul described as an amazing turn of events in the negotiations<sup>(33)</sup>. Firstly, because the Taliban leadership is dealing directly with the government, and secondly, because the presence of Hanafi in Japan implies Pakistan's tacit consent by allowing the trip and, therefore, its approval of the negotiating process.

A start has, therefore, been made on the national reconciliation process, and the resulting sharing of power among the different stakeholders. The military stalemate seems to have convinced all of those involved of the only viable option. In fact, in a symbolic gesture, President Karzai has invited the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, to lay down his arms, to open a political office in Kabul and to present himself as a candidate in the presidential elections to be held in

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<sup>(32)</sup> Julian Borger, *The Guardian*, 11th July 2012.

<sup>(33)</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*, 12th July 2012.

2014, which will be decisive for the future of the country. This would indeed be good news, but the situation does not yet seem ripe enough for such an invitation to be accepted, even though the only way for peace and stability to be secured necessarily involves the Taliban accepting to play the political game.

Details about a possible exchange of prisoners or the freeing of Mullah Baradar, being held in Pakistan, will afford us an insight into the state of an issue that is becoming increasingly more pressing for all given the inexorable passing of time and fast approaching critical deadline of 2014.

### ■ Afghanistan's future

Even though the tone of this analysis may be more positive than that of last year's one, given the numerous signs and indicators that enable such a view, there is still no room for a decidedly optimistic vision, in the light of the fact that a lot of the doubts concerning the country's future remain unresolved.

The most worrying of these is the possibility of a new civil war. Were this to happen, Afghanistan would leave off having any future, given that a reactivation of international presence and aid seems unfeasible in the light of the current world economic scenario and the new American strategic directives set forth at the beginning of 2012. In fact it does not seem even to be an option for the hypothetical winners of the war, who would inherit an isolated country in ruins, and one most likely given up on by a large section of the International Community.

Nevertheless, the Afghans are the ones who seem most given to considering this possibility. Declarations such as those made in July 2012 on a visit of Afghan members of Parliament to California<sup>(34)</sup> in which they claimed that Afghanistan was not yet ready for self-government, or the brain drain being suffered by the country, seem to suggest very little confidence in a peaceful and prosperous future. In addition to the imminent loss of income that the total withdrawal of the troops will bring with it, there will also be further growth in the scarcity of acceptably paid jobs.

Widespread corruption in the administration represents a further curb on development. One of the key bodies to combat corruption, the Ministry of Finance, has recently been involved in a capital flight scandal to Canada. The Minister for Finance, Omar Zakhilwal, has even had problems in explaining the origin of this money, a fact which only serves to increase the public's lack of trust in their leaders, given that this time around the case was widely spread by the main Afghan channel, Tolo Television. Bearing in mind the big responsibilities that are lying on Minister Zakhilwal's shoulders as regards financial and tax matters, it is not hard to imagine the public's disenchantment.

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<sup>(34)</sup> Stephen Magagnini, *The Sacramento Bee*, 3rd July 2012.

Disagreements between the Parliament and ministers give rise to episodes like the sudden dismissal of the Minister for Defence Abdul Rahim Wardak and the Minister of Justice Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, both of whom were well considered by International Community representatives, thus leading to a complex replacement process.

Equally worrying are the accusations that have been made by UN representatives about the torture practices used by the ANSF to get information from prisoners<sup>(35)</sup>, or the suspicion of the granting of operating licences to the country's mineral resources by high-level civil servants in exchange for substantial commissions<sup>(36)</sup>. Moreover, the latter case affects the biggest source of potential income for the country, namely its mining wealth, which has yet to be exploited in a situation in which economic feasibility is being put in question after the withdrawal of the troops and the aid and reconstruction programmes in 2014.

As a result of all of these issues, the donor conference held in Tokyo in July has imposed conditions on the \$16,000 million package to be used to develop the economy over the next four years. In order to receive this aid, the government must reduce corruption, which reflects the depth of the concern that exists as regards the feasibility of the State in this aspect.

Another touchstone concerning the irreversibility of the most important progress made is the condition of women. Abuses, domestic violence, forced marriages, etc., are daily occurrences and relief solutions such as the shelter for mistreated women are not well looked upon, even by the most conservative elements of the government. Consequently, one cannot discard that there will be setbacks to these advances. On the other hand, attacks on, and group poisonings at, girls' schools are taking place, which is perhaps the saddest side to a country where there are hundreds of women in prison for moral offences, many of which consist of them escaping homes where in addition to being enslaved they were abused on a daily basis.

To complete this rather disheartening picture, reference must also be made to the ethnic tensions that are gradually beginning to surface once again. Of course that is not to say that these had ever disappeared, but rather that the military campaign absorbed the majority of the efforts and attention. Now that the reconciliation process for 2014 seems to be taking over centre stage from the war, which must not be overlooked, these tensions are resurfacing. Even state bodies have entered into conversations with the leaders of the different ethnic groups as to the percentage of the population they represent. This is in no way a gratuitous item of information, given that it may become a determining factor when it comes to awarding power, economic and territorial shares. Once again the Hazaras, whom it would seem there is an attempt to minimise – the figures

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<sup>(35)</sup> Nathan Hodge and Habib Khan Totakhil, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12th July 2012.

<sup>(36)</sup> Graham Bowley, *The New York Times*, 24th June 2012.

vary incredibly from 9 to 20%<sup>(37)</sup> – and even to disparage, may turn out to be the biggest losers, as was the case under the Taliban. The reality is that some old customs are being revived such as the annual raid of the Kuchis, Pashtun nomads who in the summer secularly dispute with its Hazara inhabitants the Kajab valley to the west of Kabul.

Lastly, a reference to the growing of poppies and drug trafficking. There has been a notable increase in the anti-drug strategy effort over the last year. The aim is to continue weakening the relationship that holds between drugs and the insurgents and, above all, to advise, train and support the ANSF to take over this responsibility with assurance. Production has continued to fall, registering a drop of up to 50% in comparison to the best years, as is reflected in the reduction in the seizure of heroin and precursor chemicals, not to mention a drop in arrests. Nevertheless, a 70% increase in the growing of marihuana and hashish<sup>(38)</sup> has been detected in what appears to be an attempt at business diversification. Notwithstanding the foregoing, we are still not at a stage where we can consider the battle against drugs to have been won, given that the drop in production also coincides with two years in a row of bad weather. Consequently, we will have to wait and see the figures for the next few years that will see little or no participation of the international troops in the fight against drugs.

In fine, despite the persistent declarations of coalition members, pessimism is rife at least among the more educated Afghans who, in a lot of cases, are planning to leave the country. Nevertheless, this vision seems to overlook a lot of the progress that has been made in many spheres of public life, and indeed even in private life, and the big improvements that have taken place in the ANFS and the political class. It remains to be seen if this lack of confidence of the Afghans in their own people has any basis or, on the contrary, is grounded on models that have now been overcome. Normally, the truth lies somewhere between the extremes, thus the country can still expect some hard times after 2014.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

### ■ Iran

Given its well-known influence with the Tajiks, in addition to its closeness to the Hazara, it would not remain impassive in the face of a resurgence of an extremist regime, particularly if any such regime were to persecute the Hazara again. Therefore, a stable and moderate Afghanistan is positive for Iran which, moreover, would then be able to intervene more actively in the economy.

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<sup>(37)</sup> Graham Bowley, *The New York Times*, 19th June 2012.

<sup>(38)</sup> Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan April 2012, United States Department of Defense.

The economic sanctions to which it is subject as a result of its nuclear programme are not only having a detrimental effect on the Iranian economy, but also on the money being sent by the numerous Afghan emigrants to their families, which is also affecting the Afghan economy. Furthermore, the Iranian authorities are expelling a growing number of Afghan workers.

### ■ **The Ex-Soviet Republics**

These are obviously interested in having a peaceful, stable and moderate Afghanistan, which in turn would enhance their own stability, while the possibility of access to the Indian Ocean for their hydrocarbons through Afghan territory would be a valuable asset for these republics.

They will, therefore, try to exert influence on the Afghan ethnic groups with which they have ties – above all the Tajiks and Uzbeks – to contribute to the stability of the country, given that these have an important part to play in controlling their borders with respect to arms and drug trafficking.

At the same time, collaboration with NATO is proving crucial in the months that the supply routes from Pakistan have remained closed. Likewise, and despite the re-opening of aforementioned routes, the «northern route» is going to be very important in the withdrawal of troops and the material that has accumulated over ten years of war, particularly for the American forces. It is estimated that up to one third of the material and military personnel will leave the country through the Central Asian republics<sup>(39)</sup>.

### ■ **The Russian Federation**

The possible spreading of Islamic extremism and the high level of Afghan heroine consumption among its people means that Russia is also interested in a stable Afghanistan. The words of President Putin on 1st August 2012<sup>(40)</sup> are highly significant given his criticism of the withdrawal of the majority of combat troops from Afghanistan without having completed their task of stabilising the country, thus leaving Central Asia in a position of great vulnerability as regards extremism and organised crime.

Indeed, the railway hub of Ulyanovsk, where Putin made this speech, is to be used as of August by the troops and material leaving Afghanistan, given that Russia continues to support the operation by enabling this transit through their territory, in spite of the heavy internal criticism received as a result of this policy.

### ■ **China**

China shares Russia's concern about the possible radicalising of its Muslim minorities, while at the same time it has great interest in Afghanistan's natural

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<sup>(39)</sup> Craig Whitlock y Karen DeYoung, *The Washington Post*, 4th July 2012.

<sup>(40)</sup> Reuters from Ulyanovsk.

resources as part of its policy of collecting resources on a global scale. Having been awarded some of the most important contracts recently granted by the Afghan government, its economic involvement in Afghanistan is growing daily, where it will probably become the main investor and long-term economic support.

A further pointer to his likelihood is China's known ability for its extremely pragmatic approach, thus there is little doubt that it will be capable of defending its commercial interests after 2014, regardless of the internal situation in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, a certain minimum stability and security will be welcomed by the Chinese government.

### ■ **India**

An ally of Afghanistan against its rival Pakistan, India may prove to be one of the main external supports in impeding the return of a Taliban government. Moreover, it is destined to become a basic mainstay of the Afghan economy, possibly competing with China to rank as the country's primary economic partner. It will be able to count on the support of the United States in this contest, thus the fact that American advisers will remain on the ground for at least ten years will most likely favour Indian interests.

### ■ **The Western bloc**

The presence of Western civilian and military advisers and the continuance of economic aid will serve to prolong the Western world's influence in Afghanistan, though there is great weariness as regards the Afghan issue. Everything points to the fact that there is going to be an increasing and marked tendency towards disinterest after 2014, particularly if the economic crisis is going to draw out, which indeed seems to be the case. The goal may easily be reduced to ensuring over the next few years that no direct and lethal threat is contrived again in Afghanistan to Western countries and interests. This void will most likely be swiftly filled by the powers in the region.

### ■ **Pakistan**

A constant factor in the Afghan conflict, it will continue to play a key role. However, it must also be said that it is in an extremely complicated position. After 2014 a moderate Afghan government would favour China and India as its main partners, in opposition to Pakistani interests, as shown by the continued failure to see eye to eye between the governments of both countries. However, the temptation to promote a new Taliban government, given the Islamic extremist situation that its own country is currently going through, would seem to be a short-term foreign policy that could easily have a boomerang effect.

At present, after months of extremely difficult relations with the United States on account of the raid that did away with Bin Laden and the air strike that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011, the situation has notably improved between both countries. Not for nothing does Pakistan depend on American military and economic aid, as well as America's influence with the Indian government, which enables Pakistan to focus its military efforts against Islamic tribal militia and the Taliban.

As a result, there has been an intense round of negotiations between Americans and Pakistanis, such as those held directly between the American head of armed forces in Afghanistan, General John Allen, and General Ashraf Kayani, commander-in-chief of the Pakistani army, which have led to more intense border control collaboration. This is a shared interest, given that there are increasingly more incursions into Pakistan from Afghan territory, mainly by the followers of Maulana Fazlullah, who is hiding out in eastern Afghanistan after escaping from the big Pakistani army operations carried out in the Swat valley in 2009.

However, the main novelty has been the re-opening of NATO supply routes through Pakistan in June after a seven-month close owing to the apologies offered by Secretary of State Clinton for the death of aforementioned 24 soldiers. The problems concerning the incursions of drones into Pakistani air space or the support of state elements to Islamic extremist groups operating in Afghanistan have of course not gone away, they are still on the table, but there is little doubt that this re-opening of routes, as well as the consent for the movements of Taliban leaders involved in the negotiating process, reflect a much more positive collaboration with Pakistan than was the case a few months ago.

These important signs of reconciliation are increasing, in spite of the protests of thousands of citizens against the re-opening of the routes. Indeed, these citizens even went on a protest march from Lahore to Islamabad, which was organised by a coalition of Islamic parties led by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed<sup>(41)</sup>, who is wanted by India as one of those responsible for the terrorist attacks in Bombay in 2008. Meetings with top intelligence personnel from both countries and the announcing of Pakistani operations against the Haqqani network in the west of the country further confirm this new stage in bilateral relations that are decisive for the evolution of the war in Afghanistan and for the country's future, but also for the future of Pakistan.

A rise in the danger of the activities being carried out by these militia groups must be added to known Islamic fundamentalist activities in the west. Most likely as a response and warning to the Pakistani government with respect to its intention to carry out punitive actions in tribal areas, Islamic fundamentalist militia attacked the Minhas Air Base on 9th August, where it is believed up to

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<sup>(41)</sup> Alex Rodríguez, *Los Angeles Times*, 8th July 2012.

100 nuclear warheads<sup>(42)</sup>, are stored, keeping the attack up for several hours. This direct threat to the Pakistani nuclear arsenal affords a clear warning of just how unstable the internal situation of the country is and, of course, has triggered off international alarm as to the possibility of Islamic militias being able to gain access to nuclear warheads.

A change to the situation of the approximately three million Afghan refugees that are living in Pakistan is something that could potentially have a major impact on the situation in Afghanistan. The Pakistani government has announced its intention to revoke their recognition as refugees<sup>(43)</sup>, which would oblige them return to Afghanistan, thus causing an economic, not to mention, a humanitarian crisis. It is expected that diplomatic efforts will avoid such an event, or at least enable the programming of a staggered return, in such a way as to make it easier for the scarce Afghan resources to assimilate their arrival. Whatever the case, we are dealing with a powerful pressure tool in Pakistani hands.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Military operations have taken the background, given that the movements aimed at establishing post-2014 conditions are the current priorities in Afghanistan. These can be summed up as follows:

- The remains of al-Qaeda and the irreconcilable Taliban are the enemy to be beaten.
- The end of the war is an Afghan question, even though the strategic agreement with the United States and the continuing of the economic contributions will aid in achieving this aim.
- The training of civilian and military Afghan personnel is greatly advanced, though there are still doubts as to their ability to act on their own.
- The Afghan government is in a better condition than ever to do its job. The ball is definitely in the Afghans' court.
- The military tool has not been able settle the conflict, thus a political solution is needed.
- Negotiations for national conciliation are much more advanced. The Taliban are progressing towards their entry into the political game.
- It is vital not to fall into the temptation of completely abandoning the scene in order to avoid a repetition of civil strife that would see a return to ideal conditions for the re-establishment of Jihadism in the country.
- The most likely final scenario is similar to the one that existed before the war began and the king was expelled, albeit with a stronger central government. The leading role played by the ethnic groups and warlords, even though they have taken up a political approach, will be important, albeit accepting the

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<sup>(42)</sup> Declan Walsh, *The New York Times*, 15th August 2012.

<sup>(43)</sup> Saeed Shah.



higher authority of the president elect, who will be the interlocutor with the International Community. The government will have to use its resources to keep a balance between the different internal stakeholders and to avoid the overstepping of unacceptable limits.

- The growing of the poppy will still be important, though perhaps there will be greater diversification towards other drugs.
- The countries in the region, or with direct interests in Afghanistan, are interested in the stabilising of the country and in the exploitation its natural resources.
- The return of normality to the country will depend on how the situation unfolds in Pakistan, which is currently much more critical than the situation in Afghanistan.

In fine, even though the intervention in Afghanistan has been plagued with errors, a lot has been done for its development. It is now in the hands of the Afghans themselves not to roll back and to improve the condition of its people, an idea of which can be had to a great extent by means of analysing the indicators in the table:

**Table 12.2**

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		AFGHANISTAN	SPAIN
Area		652,230 km <sup>2</sup> (41°)	505,370 km <sup>2</sup> (52°)
GDP		US\$ 30.11 billion (110°)	US\$ 1.432 billion (14°)
Structure. GDP/ Active population	Agriculture	34.9%	4.2%
	Industry	25%	24%
	Services	40%	71.7%
GDP per capita		US\$ 1,000 (213°)	31,000\$ (43)
GDP growth rate		5,7%	0.7%
% Unemployment		35% (181°)	0.7%
Trade relations (Exports):		Pakistan 31.4%, India 28.8%, Tajikistan 8.3%, Russia 5.2%, Bangladesh 4.7%	France 18.2%, Germany 10.4%, Portugal 8.1%, Italy 8.1%, United Kingdom 6.5%
Trade relations (Imports):		USA 31.4%, Pakistan 20.8%, Russia 8.4%, India 5.6%, Germany 4.1%	Germany 12.6%, France 11.5%, Italy 6.9%, China 6%, the Netherlands 5%, United Kingdom 4.3%, Portugal 4%
Population		30,419,928 (40°)	47,042,984% (27°)
% Urban population		23%	77%

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		AFGHANISTAN	SPAIN
Age structure	0-14	42.3%	15.1%
	15-64	55.3%	67.7%
	Over 65	2.4%	17.1%
Population growth rate		2.22 (39°)	0.654% (142)
Ethnic groups		Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, other 4%	Mediterranean and Nordic types
Religions		Sunni Muslims 80%, Shiite Muslims 19%, other (1%)	Roman Catholic 94%, other 6%
Literacy rate		28.1% (43.1% - 12.6%)	97.7% (98.5% - 97%)
Population below the poverty line		36%	19.8%
Refugees			
Displaced persons		447,000	
GINI index			32 (104)
Military spending. % GDP.		1.9%	1.2%

Source: CIA The World FACTBOOK

As far as the mission is concerned, it must be highlighted that the capacity of international Jihadism has dropped radically. However, the duration of the war and the current economic situation would suggest that it is still rather premature to consider the situation as irreversible. Additional, long-term efforts are required and ones that are perhaps different to those made to date in order for sufficient stability and for hope in progress for Afghanistan to prevail.

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## CHAPTER XIII

# HOTSPOTS IN THE SOUTHERN CONE: PATAGONIA, IGUAZÚ REGION, INTEROCEANIC HIGHWAYS

*Miguel Ángel Serrano Monteavaro*

### **ABSTRACT**

Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, the crossing of Cape Horn and Antarctica are territories that have traditionally been disputed between Argentina and Chile due to the difficulty of marking certain limits: inaccurate demarcation that has come down from colonial times. Although there were moments of tension between the two countries, frictions have been amicably resolved.

On the other hand, to the north of those territories, on the borders of the Amazon region between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, lies Iguazu where there are no boundary conflicts but rather growing instability due to smuggling, drug trafficking and organised crime.

Lastly, the proposed land-river connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific, through Brazil, Bolivia and Peru, may yet upset relations between the Southern Cone countries. Meanwhile, the protests of the indigenous peoples affected by the roads are creating heavy tension in the area. It is as an expert in these lands that I write what follows.

### **Keywords:**

Geopolitics, Conflict, Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, Chile, boundary lines, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Iguazu, smuggling, drug trafficking, organised crime, Amazonia, indigenous reserves.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

For our purposes in this essay, we will take the geopolitical licence of calling the South American region that stretches from the Iguazu seas, southern Bolivia and the Lower Amazon to Cape Horn in southern Chile as referring to the Southern Cone.

Chile and Argentina would then extend their interest from the north to the south of the region and to its east and west, while Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay would maintain their connection with the Atlantic by way of the Mar del Plata; for its part, Brazil, plus Bolivia and Peru may manage to condition the central axis of the continent by opening a connection between the Pacific and the Atlantic. Of course, we understand that this scenario may have been selected capriciously, though, we must add, it will only prove as random as any other.

If any area of the American continent, no matter how small it may be, constitutes a whole by and of itself, that which we have chosen to call the Southern Cone entails an importance that affects the rest of the world.

However, we ask ourselves, now well into the 21st century, if geopolitical and geostrategic factors today condition the life of a country, an entire region and even the whole world, to the point that they seem to have done in the past.

I would be so bold as to say that a lot of things, if not everything, have changed..., in America and in the rest of the world. What happened to the climate factor, when now nobody can predict, if anyone ever really did, what might come to bear at the hands of nature, or indeed of man himself? Where did the human factors go that seemed to explain the meaning of nations, when, for example, population movements, apart from being unexpected, can completely put paid to any economic, and, above all, and bear this in mind, cultural, forecast? And what about economic flows that remain stagnant, unless moved by the spirit of gain, lest anyone ever doubted it? In this way have drug trafficking, organised crime and even terrorism found a breeding ground in a valueless society that has no respect for human dignity, and which is only governed by power whatever form it may take.

Nothing of this is of worth anymore.

Oil will run out, but before, well before, new sources of energy will appear, in spite of the fact that the so-called «black gold» producing countries will do everything possible, not to mention the impossible, to stymie them; even though the most intelligent of these are already working in that direction. Even drinking water will be replaced or supplemented by other fluids...

And, in the end, the only thing left will be that which is of genuine worth: man himself.

And man will continue conditioning the environment, the economy, politics..., in short, History.

America has a long road before it, but it is also tempted to take the odd short-cut. In June this year, Paraguay took centre stage, the laws of which served to remove the president of the Republic from office; a country where time seemed to have stopped. Now Mexico gives the impression that it has turned back on itself with the return of the PRI to government.

Nonetheless, America will always be America, particularly for the Spanish.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT IN PATAGONIA

For centuries, explorers and adventurers tried to find the so-called Northwest Passage that would connect the Atlantic with the Pacific at the north of the American continent, in spite of the dangers represented by the ice, which was impossible to cross for most of the year. No way was found until the 20th century when steam power and the Panama Canal had to all intents and purposes solved the problem.

There is also the possibility of crossing the mythical Cape Horn, which lies between the continent and the Antarctic, with its hurricane winds to the west, its currents and freezes, and which enables communication between both oceans in the southern hemisphere.

If we take a look at this particular region, the problems that may arise do not only involve possible friction between Chile and Argentina in Patagonia, but any country with interests beyond its own borders.

The northern limit of Patagonia can be freely marked by either Chile or Argentina, though in truth it is the ecosystem (particularly in Argentina's case), the changeover from the moist grasslands to the steppes, which determines it. On the other hand, the Andean peaks also seem to clearly suggest that the Western side is Chilean; narrow, mountainous, rugged coasts, rivers and glaciers that look out onto the Pacific. Meanwhile the eastern side of Patagonia, which is more extensive and open to livestock breeding, belongs to Argentina, as far as the Falkland Islands to the east of the country, the sovereignty of which Argentina wishes to claim as its own. Notwithstanding, the unstable glacier area has given rise to more than one dispute between both countries, given that the water dividing line is unpredictable.

It is more complicated to mark out the limits to Patagonia in the south, given that there is no way to establish where the Andes really end, with so many channels, islets and glaciers, etc. in continuous movement. That is to say, stability in the area is prey to the harmony that exists between both governments.

On the other hand, the colonial legal principle of *uti possidetis* was always quite indeterminate with respect to the south of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, given that Spanish colonisation never clearly reached those distant reaches of the continent.

From the legal perspective, and in the light of the Patagonia Region Foundational Treaty signed on 26th June 1996, Argentina holds that the Region is comprised of the following provinces: La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, Tierra de Fuego, the Antarctic, the Atlantic Islands and the Argentine Sea (including the Falklands), up to the isles in Drake Passage, that is to say practically one million square kilometres, where some two million people live.

For its part, Chile holds that Patagonia stretches from the Reloncaví River, to the north, down to the last foothills of the Andes in the south, that is to say, the following provinces: Magallanes, Coyhaique, Última Esperanza, Aysén, Palena, Tierra del Fuego, General Carrera and the Antarctic, which are inhabited by some 300,000 people.

Sheep, fishing, tourism and the oil in Comodoro Rivadavia and Neuquén are Patagonia's main resources.

Given the geographical features of this territory, there is no need to underline the strategic importance of the Patagonia region, not only for Argentineans and Chileans, but for every country in the world. This goes some way to explaining the friction and disputes between Argentina and Chile and between Argentina and the UK, etc.

It goes without saying that we start from the assumption that neither Argentina nor Chile, who share a border of over 3,000 km, will ever go to war for this land, in spite of some rather dangerous threats in the past. We believe this for two reasons; on the one hand, the intervention of other countries would prevent any such confrontation, and on the other hand, the military balance kept by both countries would make any such conflict highly unadvisable.

In geostrategic terms, both countries are completely different. Chile stretches out from north to south some 756,102 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to some 17,402,630 people; its GDP stands at \$294,540 million while its Human Development Index is to the order of 0.805 (very high). For its part, Argentina has a sur-

face area of 2,780,400 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 40,117,096; its GDP stands at \$710,690 million while its Human Development Index is to the order of 0.797 (very high).

The Andes represent an extremely difficult barrier to overcome in any direction, though in the unlikely event of war, the greater extension of Argentina would afford it the advantage of a more extensive rear-guard to better deploy its land forces. From an aerial perspective, both countries' air bases are situated on each side of the mountain range; and were the Argentineans to have their reserves on the Atlantic coast, they would have to cross the entire country to reach the Pacific coast, which would make them very easy to detect, while the Chilean targets, for the same reason, would have to be located nearby on the other side of the mountains. Both countries' naval forces would have Cape Horn itself and the Strait of Magellan as their battle ground; international crossings the transit through which they could not hinder in any way. On the other hand, the movement of squadrons along the enemy's coastline would be a genuine adventure given the land and seascapes to be negotiated. Any possible war would, therefore, be air focused and would be based on sophisticated detection, attack and defence resources that very few nations possess. As regards the preparation and enthusiasm of the human element, little could be said until fighting were to begin. Lastly, neither Chile nor Argentina ought to count on powerful allies to win the war; rather they could find themselves having problems with their neighbours to the north.

Fortunately, the solution lies in the method normally used by Enrique Iglesias, Secretary-General to Ibero-American Cooperation Secretariat, to sort out any dispute, namely that of «deal and then contract» between Argentineans and Chileans.

This is exactly how both Chile and Argentina have managed to solve any problems that have come up in the past. Let's take a quick look at these throughout history.

In 1843 the Chilean government under Manuel Búlnes built a military establishment in the Magellan Strait without first informing the Argentineans. Juan Manuel de Rosas's government made the corresponding complaint to Chile. However, in the light of the political situation that Argentina was going through at the time, things went no further, to the extent that in 1856, the President of Argentina, Justo de Urquiza and the Chilean President, Manuel Montt, signed a Trade Agreement, in which neither party mentioned any border issues.

Coinciding with the beginning of the war that broke out between Argentina and Paraguay in 1865, the Chilean government under Pérez Mascayano made a claim for the Río Negro and the Strait of Magellan to the Argentinean Bartolomé Mitre, which came to nothing.



In 1871, during the presidency of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in Argentina, the Chilean government under Federico Errázuriz claimed a large part of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego with the aim in mind of submitting the dispute for arbitration. Argentina rejected the claim stating that these were its territories. Tension between both countries intensified in 1873, while Argentina was suffering from serious internal problems, not to mention the rise in hostility along its border with Paraguay.

The dispute took a new turn with the signing of a Treaty in 1878, during the presidency of Aníbal Pinto Garmendia in Chile and Nicolás Avellaneda in Argentina. Pursuant to his treaty, Argentinean sovereignty would stretch along the Atlantic coast as far as Cape Horn. The reason behind the Treaty was Chile's interest in ensuring Argentinean backing in the war that was about to break out with Peru and Bolivia, the so-called Pacific War (1879-1884).

At the end of 1878 a minor naval incident took place between the two countries in the Strait of Magellan, which was resolved without problems given Chile was on the point of having to face Peru and Bolivia in the Pacific War. Meanwhile, Argentina embarked on a campaign against the Patagonian Indians and had to deal with its own border problems with Brazil and Uruguay. The truth is that Chile's concern was that Argentina might join forces with Peru and Bolivia in the war.

In 1881, the President of Argentina, Julio Argentino Roca, and his opposite number, Aníbal Pinto Garmendia, the President of Chile, signed a Treaty pursuant to which the Andean peaks were acknowledged as the border limits between both countries, while Tierra del Fuego was to be divided in two, with the west becoming Chilean and the east Argentinean. Furthermore, the Strait of Magellan could not be militarised. The intervention of experts from both countries, however, merely managed to complicate things, as later attested to by the incidents between Argentinean and Chilean detachments in Lonquimay, on the river Bío-Bío.

In spite of the protocol signed in 1893 between the Chilean, Jorge Montt and the Argentinean, Luis Sáenz Peña, doubts arose again between the diplomats and experts. Consequently, the following year both presidents agreed to submit the dispute to arbitration in England.

To make things worse, Bolivia agreed to transfer the Punta de Atacama to Argentina in return for favours in the past, a decision that led to protests by Chile, which had claimed that territory as its own. Having been submitted to arbitration in the United States, it was decided in 1898 that both countries should share the territory.

In the interim, gold fever had broken out in Tierra del Fuego, which brought with it the swift colonisation of these lands; a circumstance which, allied to Argentina's purchase of two battleships only served to increase misgivings between both countries.

The threat of a war led Julio Argentino Roca and Germán Riesco, Argentinean and Chilean presidents respectively, to sign the so-called May Agreements in May 1902, which the Argentineans believed to be to their detriment.

The year 1902 also saw the British arbitration decision commissioned back in 1894 with respect to Tierra del Fuego: another decision which the Argentineans believed to be to their detriment. At the same time, Bolivia transferred the northern border towns of Tacna and Arica to Chile.

According to Argentinean information services at the time, in 1929 Chilean forces showed signs of being about to embark on operations to occupy Comodoro Rivadavia and Viedma. The presidents at the time were Hipólito Yrigoyen and Carlos Ibáñez for Argentina and Chile respectively.

A Mixed Commission was set up in 1941 to mark out the border in Patagonia under the presidencies of Roberto Marcelino Ortiz in Argentina and Pedro Aguirre in Chile. Research findings remain unknown to this day.

A change to the border line brought about by mutual agreement in 1947 saw Argentina lose the town of Palena and Chile occupy California Valley, without the Argentinean President, Juan Domingo Perón, asserting his country's position.

The placing of beacons on the islet of Snipe in 1958 was on the point of causing a military engagement between the forces that both countries had dispatched there.

Even stranger was the event that took place in 1965. While the presidents of Argentina, Arturo Illia, and Chile, Eduardo Frei, were meeting in Mendoza, Chilean border guards penetrated into Laguna del Desierto. They were repulsed by Argentinean National Guards, though the incident was not casualty free this time round. Both countries then agreed to submit the incident to arbitration by a Latin American court, which found in favour of Argentina in 1994.

Another naval incident took place in 1967 when the Chilean torpedo boat, the «Quidora», was on the point of engaging with the Argentinean Air Force and an Argentinean patrol boat near Ushuaia.

Nevertheless, the most burning issue between Chile and Argentina is the dispute about the Beagle Channel to the south of Tierra del Fuego, a claim for

which was put forward by Chile in 1967. Quite incomprehensibly having been submitted for arbitration in England, given the dispute Argentina was at the time involved in with respect to the Falklands, the 1977 decision found in favour of Chilean interests, represented at that time by Augusto Pinochet. The Argentinean government led by Rafael Videla rejected the decision, which saw both countries prepare for war. It was only through the mediation of Pope John Paul II that war was eventually avoided.

The fact that relations between Chile and Argentina were quite bitter at that time is attested to by the complaints the Argentinians made for the «support» provided by the Chileans to the English during the Falklands War in 1982, whereas practically all of the other countries in the area showed themselves to favour the Argentinean cause.

Surprisingly, in 1984 the President of Argentina Raúl Alfonsín gave in to Chile's aspirations to a group of islands to the south of Tierra de Fuego.

Once again, both countries entered into dispute in 1990 about boundary posts this time, though they quickly reached an agreement, leaving pending the issue of the so-called «Patagonian Ice Fields» or «Continental Ice».

This is a semi-desert territory covering an area of some 3,500 km<sup>2</sup>, located over the Argentinean province of Santa Cruz, and one that is difficult to mark with boundary posts given the irregularity of the lakes and glaciers. Indeed, it is precisely these incalculable fresh water reserves that have caused the prob-

**Figure 13.1. Chile and Argentina**



lem. In the end, the governments of Eduardo Frei and Carlos Menem reached an agreement in 1999, based on the traditional, water dividing line formula on the Andean peaks.

At present, the northern entry point to the Strait of Magellan from the Atlantic called Punta Duquesne is Argentinean, while the southern entry point, Punta Catalina, belongs to Chile. The waters of the strait proper have been left in Chilean hands. Tierra del Fuego is divided into east and west, the former belonging to Argentina and the latter to Chile. The Wollaston Islands, Cape Horn, and the islands Diego Ramírez, Hoste and Navarino all belong to Chile.

## ■ THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PATAGONIA CONFLICT

Several observations come to mind in the light of these precedents.

On the one hand, we have been able to see how the claims of one country against another nearly always coincide with the surfacing of internal problems in each one. This leads us to believe that we are not dealing with chance events.

On the other hand, whenever a country embarks, more or less decidedly, on a claim, beforehand it always takes into account its own international problems and those that the other country may have.

Lastly, it can also be seen that it is nearly always Chile that has originated the claims. However, this attitude certainly has its logic, given that it is Argentina that has land that is open to being claimed; Chile only has the mountains and whatever it can negotiate with Argentina in Tierra del Fuego.

These considerations are without a doubt par for the course in international relations, but this does not take away from the fact that Argentina and Chile have been disputing about border issues for two centuries, a problem that casts a shadow over their relations as neighbours. The reality represented by a particular territory and the good relations that hold between two peoples must not be tarnished by the sophistry of some unscrupulous experts, technicians and politicians.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

In our opinion, however, the situation changed dramatically in 2005 when a start was made on plans for a project between Chile and Argentina, which saw the light of day the following year with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between both countries, which in 2007 resulted in the creation of a Joint Military General Staff. Specifically, this refers to the setting up of the

Joint «Southern Cross» Peacekeeping Force, the mission of which is to make a decisive contribution to international peace. This force is made up of air, land and sea units, and its General Staff headquarters will alternate every year between Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile.

The United Nations considered from the very outset the opportunity of setting up this force, to which end the «Southern Cross» Force received its charter on 14th June 2011, forming part of the UN Reserve Forces System.

Should it prove necessary, the Force would be deployed in three phases:

First off, Argentina and Chile, in response to a request by the United Nations, would make available the troops, who would be given the required special training in accordance with the theatre of operations where they would have to operate. They would then be deployed to the place where needed by the UN and would begin to operate until such time as the UN declares the mission to have been completed.

The «Southern Cross» Force land contingent is currently made up of two battalions (around 1,000 men), the naval one by a Chilean patrol boat and an Argentinean corvette, while the air contingent consists of four Chilean and four Argentinean helicopters.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

It is not hard to imagine the meaning behind this military cooperation between Chile and Argentina after the friction that has existed between them for so many years due to border disputes and other problems. It is an experience that may perhaps be followed by other countries in the area, such as, for example, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, or indeed, by Central American countries. The intervention of a single country beyond its borders under the auspices of the UN, such as is the case with Brazil, can serve as a precedent.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT IN THE IGUAZU REGION

The destinies of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil are joined in the waters formed by the meeting of the Parana and Iguazu rivers, further enhanced by waterfalls the likes of which are not to be seen anywhere else in the world.

This region was already paradisiacal before the arrival of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who explored it in 1541. The Guarani people live there, who in former times had subjugated other primitive peoples in the exercise of their rule.

The recent history of this territory really begins in the 17th and 18th centuries when Spanish Jesuits, who at that time left nothing to chance, recognised that the region constituted a fluvial hub, which connected the heart of that part of the continent with Bolivia, and even further afield with Peru, southern Amazonia, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and with Uruguay to the south, to eventually run into Mar del Plata and the Atlantic; a genuine *aleph* of cultures and civilisations.

In this way, the Jesuits set up several *reducciones* (concentration of small settlements for better defence and cultural and economic development), among which San Ignacio Guazú, Nuestra Señora de Loreto del Pirapó and, above all, Santa María del Iguazú, stood out, the flourishing of which attracted the envy and greed of its neighbours, the inhabitants of Sao Paulo, whose gangs of Mamelukes and *bandeirantes* or slave-hunting groups managed to do away with them.

Regrettably, rivalries between the Spanish and Portuguese, and internecine struggles in the Catholic church during the Age of Enlightenment, must be added to the foregoing, thus dealing the final death blow to what was left of those *reducciones*.

Thereafter, it was not until the 20th century that the countries on the shores of the Parana and the Iguazu began to show an interest in the region; first came the need to set the border limits between one and other of these wild territories, then came the dispute about their waters, the scientific interest awoken by the area in other countries, the arrival of the first tourists, security and defence strategic interests, etc.

Such activity saw, in 1901, the emergence of the airport city of Puerto Iguazú, on the Argentinean shore, which today belongs to the Misiones Department, situated some 23 km from the falls; some 12 km away lies the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguazú, access to which is to be had over the Tancredo Neves bridge, while about 15 km away you have the Paraguayan town of Ciudad del Este. Puerto Iguazú has some 100,000 inhabitants and lies over 1,288 km away from Buenos Aires.

The city of Foz do Iguazú was founded in 1914 on the ruins of the *reducción* or settlement called Santa María del Iguazú, on the Brazilian shores of the river, which belongs to the State of Paraná. About 3 km away lies Ciudad del Este, while Puerto Iguazú is 12 km away. Foz de Iguazú also has an airport and over 300,000 inhabitants and is 1,053 km away from Sao Paulo.

The Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este was founded in 1957. It belongs to the Alto Paraná Department and lies 334 km away from Asunción. It too has an airport and is home to some 400,000 people. It is about 3 km from Foz de

Iguazú over the Puente de la Amistad bridge and is 15 km from Puerto Iguazú. Paraguay had to open a 200 km-long road in the jungle from Ciudad Oviedo in order to get to Paraná.

These cities, originally founded for strategic reasons, later began to live off tourism and a continuously flourishing trade. Later on, the energy needs of these countries brought with them the project to make industrial use of those water currents.

Thus, in the 1960s, Brazil and Paraguay made plans to build a giant water dam, the Itaipu, on the Parana river, upstream of its meeting with the Iguazu. In 1979, Argentina signed up to the project, with the first turbine entering into operation in 1984. At present, it is the second largest dam in the world, only superseded by the Three Gorges Dam in China.

Work on the giant dam attracted large numbers of people, even people not from the countries directly involved. In this way, masses of people began to arrive in the territory that became known as the «Triple Frontier». In addition to other South Americans, people came from China, Lebanon and other Arab countries, the Ukraine, Chechnya, etc. An uncontrolled emigration, which the International Organisation for Migration cannot quantify due to the lack of reliable statistics, accompanied by the occupation of the territory. It is not possible to calculate the inhabitants of the metropolitan areas. It is estimated at present that there are over 30,000 Chinese living in the area, while there are 10,000 Arabs in Ciudad del Este alone, where two mosques have been built, and about 12,000 in Foz de Iguazú, where there is one mosque.

## ■ CURRENT STATE OF THE IGUAZU REGION CONFLICT

The physiognomy of those three cities and the metropolitan area changed completely as a result of this immigration. They changed over from being sparsely populated to accommodating the figures we have given above, but above all they were converted into an international area for tourism, trading, smuggling (cars, gun running, domestic appliances, contraband often run by the *sacoleiros* or bag men, etc.) drug trafficking, the slave trade, money laundering, gambling, etc. all of which is perpetrated under an administrative and police permissiveness that borders on the corrupt, particularly on the Paraguayan shore. At present there are about a hundred hotels in the area, not to mention the dozens of banks to be found there.

The big Colombian and Mexican drug cartels set their sights on the «Triple Frontier» as an ideal place in which to launder money, carry out financial transactions and deal in gun running.

As a result of the foregoing, the region became a focus point of instability in the southern hemisphere.

Indeed, the situation became even more complicated when the intelligence services of the bordering countries found that Lebanese groups were raising money to send back to their families, but also to Hezbollah, even though this had become a political party in Lebanon.

If this was not enough, on 17th March 1992 the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires was attacked and on 18th July 1994 the Argentine-Israelite Mutual Association was also attacked, both of which resulted in over 110 people being killed.

As was to be expected, these terrorist attacks set off the alarm in Southern Cone countries, but what really served to change the world terrorist scene were the attacks made against New York's twin towers and the Pentagon on 11th September 2001; it can be said that this event represented a turning point in dealing with terrorism.

George Bush's government became belligerent against all types of terrorism around the world, particularly that of an Islamic origin. A lot of countries echoed this attitude, but others were more reluctant to follow their lead; the latter reluctance was based on two grounds: on the one hand, some countries did not see themselves as being directly threatened by terrorism, and even less so by Islamic terrorism, and on the other hand, others were not well disposed to going down the path taken by the United States. The Americans, therefore, decided to go ahead with their «crusade» by other means.

The National Security Strategy put into practice by Bush believed that terrorist threats would no longer come from some of the so-called «rogue states», but rather from organisations, which could even finance themselves, «Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organised to penetrate open societies and turn the power of modern technologies against us». The dangers also come from the «weak states», as long as a situation of poverty, though not in itself, can bring about criminal and terrorist acts.

Nevertheless, the strategy pursued by the United States after 2006 contains certain qualifications that we must now highlight: the danger of anti-American populism, the need for counter-terrorist «intelligence», the better use of diplomacy, etc., though still reserving the possibility of using force. As far as the American continent is concerned, it points out that the security of the United States needs democratic stability in the region, it seeks preferential relations



with Canada and Mexico, it maintains special relations with Colombia and rejects the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes.

We see, therefore, that it has changed over from so-called «pre-emptive military intervention», which gave rise to such rejection in practically all other countries, to «agreed intervention» and now to «invited intervention».

Thus, we are approaching the definition of terrorism proposed by the United Nations as referring to: «Any act... intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act».

Moreover, it was also true that terrorism on an international scale required heavy financing to carry out its activities, and it seemed that no country was willing to risk subsidising it, albeit merely in part, given that after what had happened in New York, it would incur the wrath of the United States.

It was then assumed that international terrorism would look for funding through drug trafficking. Furthermore, the sources of drug trafficking were to be found in certain areas of Asia and Latin America; and it was precisely the Bush family that had unfinished business in Iraq. Thus began a new stage in this war.

After some time had elapsed and with attention focusing on Asia, interest in Iguazu somewhat dropped; it then became, it seems, a terrorist «health centre», according to the MOSSAD, that is to say, a place where terrorists found temporary shelter.

Nevertheless, even though American interest had shifted for the time being to another part of the world, it never forgot «its» South America for one minute. The Arab population had increased in areas such as Mexico, Guayaquil (Ecuador), Montevideo, Brazil (where it is estimated that over 1,500,000 live) and Iguazu. It seems that some 6,000,000 Muslims live in Latin America, spread around the most commercial geographical areas.

In this way, the American, Israeli, Argentinean, Brazilian, Paraguayan, Uruguayan, Chilean, etc., intelligence services focused their attention on the Iguazu area, particularly the American (CIA, DEA), Israeli (MOSSAD) and Argentinean (SIDE) ones. It goes without saying that this confluence of secret services in the area gave rise to resulting rivalries and disputes.

Consequently, the Tripartite Command was created in 1996 between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, with American backing, the practices of which, as is

natural, are not known exactly, though it is suspected that it is trying to control drug trafficking activities and alleged terrorist movements in Iguazu.

«Misleading» information most definitely contributed to the confusion, that is to say, the good and bad information on any matter, complete or distorted, provided when of use, through the appropriate media, in the right places, etc., which merely managed to sow the seeds of doubt in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.

**Figure 13.2 Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay**



## ■ ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

If we add to this accumulation of circumstances the fact that a lot of countries and governments simply see the presence of the United States as interference in their national and international affairs, this explains why a new problem has arisen with respect to the Triple Frontier, known as the «Guarani Aquifer» issue.

It would seem that there is 45,000 km<sup>3</sup> of fresh water around Iguazu, in an area of 1,200,000 km<sup>2</sup> (840,000 km<sup>2</sup> belong to Brazil, 225,000 km<sup>2</sup> to Argentina, 71,700 km<sup>2</sup> to Paraguay and 58,500 km<sup>2</sup> to Uruguay) inhabited by some 15,000,000 people, thus, in the face of the likely future scarcity of drinking water in the world, some countries in the area, and outside it as well, have shown an interest in that water.

Consequently, and in line with the theory of the «control of natural space and resources», Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay launched the Guarani

Aquifer System Sustainable Development Environment Project in September 2001, which, under the aegis of the World Bank, the Organisation of American States (OAS) and other organisations, wish to protect, in addition to the Iguazu region, the basins of the following rivers: Paraguay, Uruguay, Pilcomayo, Bermejo, Grande, Parapema, San Lorenzo, Apa, Negro, etc.

In addition to the foregoing, an anti-terrorist conference was held in December 2002 between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and the United States, precisely in Puerto Iguazú, at which they were seen to be in agreement that «no specific, detailed information...», backs the theory that there are al-Qaeda terrorist cells or operatives in the Triple Frontier», a statement made before the American Anti-terrorism Coordinator from the State Department when appearing before the International Relations Committee. What does seem to have been proved was the presence of Colombian FARC members to exchange cocaine for arms and equipment.

Even so, that conference seems to have resulted in permission being given to the US to patrol the Parana river, thus, like the Jesuits before them, the Americans managed to wet their «boots in those waters».

As was to be expected, the opponents of US activities outside its own territory and apparently beyond the spheres of its interests, did not take long to air their differences, which were embodied in the I Triple Frontier Social Forum held in Puerto Iguazú from 25th to 27th June 2004, as part of the World Social Forum and the opposition movement to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), during the course of which the Nobel Laureate, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, denounced American interference in Latin American affairs.

On the other hand, the Latinobarómetro survey for 2010 pointed out that 27% of first degree murders in the world are committed in America. Every year nearly 200 million Latin Americans are the victims of some criminal act, thus explaining why 91% of the region's inhabitants feel threatened by the climate of violence. Notwithstanding, the differences there are between the different countries must of course be taken into account.

In fine, according to Latinobarómetro, the inhabitants of the region appreciate democracy to a great extent, and even more so at present given the buoyant economic situation, but they are demanding greater effectiveness from their governing class in the fight against corruption, violence and drug trafficking.

Having come to this point, the intelligence systems of some countries concluded, not without reason, that the Iguazu region, practically out of a natural determinism (though perhaps an artificial one too), had become a centre of destabilisation in the area, and even beyond it. Of course, any region or area

where poverty, inequality, injustice, corruption, drug trafficking, smuggling, etc. reign, is subject to protest, revolutionary, terrorist, fundamentalist, etc. movements.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Consequently, the Iguazu region could then be viewed in two ways: the Iguazu that had really become a centre for drug trafficking, organised crime and terrorism, or simply the US was using those suspicions to set up military bases and intelligence operatives in the area with the aim in mind of controlling the region, and especially an emerging Brazil. Whereas the existence of the aquifer would have become a mere excuse for America's enemies to attack them. Neither should it be forgotten that access to southern Amazonia, a sensitive point for Brazil, is to be had through this area.

In the meantime, Paraguay which expressed a certain indifference, as is nearly always the case, with its back to world, has recently suffered an upset with the parliamentary dismissal of the bishop, Fernando Lugo, as President. Brazil, delighted with its continued emergence, is getting into its role as a new continental and international power; in spite of the fragility of its social and ethnic structure. And indeed, it is Argentina that is being called into question, given that not for nothing is it, along with Uruguay, and most rightly so, the country that controls the region's access to the Atlantic, in addition to having to look after its interests in Tierra del Fuego and maintaining its rights over the irredentist Falklands.

For its part, the American government and its agencies, no sooner than having stated that they have no objective reasons for suspecting that there may be an Islamic terrorist base in Iguazu, are acting in the area as if there really was such a base.

This very year, the American Southern Command, the general HQ of which is in Miami, will have two more bases in the region, one in Chile (Valparaiso) and another, newly built, in Chaco in Argentina. In addition to those that are already up and running in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru and Paraguay.

The feedback from the information and intelligence services is quite considerable. At this stage of terrorist displays, one would have to wonder if any agglomeration of foreign people and, even more so, of Asians, could be suspected of having constituted a terrorist base; or whether drug trafficking, guerrilla groups and organised crime are inseparable from terrorist movements.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT OF THE INTEROCEANIC HIGHWAYS

King John II of Portugal was famed for his intelligence and astuteness, as he showed when he concluded the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 with the Catholic Monarchs pursuant to which Spain and Portugal shared out the new world.

According to the Treaty, Portugal would colonise the American territories approximately as far as the Western Longitude meridian  $46^{\circ} 37'$ , that is to say the westernmost part of Brazil that looks towards Europe; while Spain would be entrusted with the territories to the west of aforementioned line.

The marking out of the territories did not prove to be so easy. At the time it was difficult to find the land longitude and mapping was far from an exact science. The fact is that the Portuguese took advantage of these sophistries to make Brazil as a whole its own. In addition to the foregoing, one must also take into account that the population of Spain did not suffice at that time to colonise America, Africa, the East, etc., all at the same time.

Notwithstanding, the Spanish Monarchs had their revenge on the Portuguese by taking over the seven thousand islands that go to make up the Philippines, which pursuant to aforementioned distribution of the new world would have corresponded to the Portuguese. In the end, the Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1777 ignored that which had been agreed in Tordesillas, and Brazil was left definitively in the hands of the Portuguese crown, with the danger of the Spanish empire on the continent being cut in two.

Since then, the history of Brazil has evolved quite similarly to that of the other South American countries, but has recently embarked on an unprecedented take-off both economically, and in terms of economic prestige, which has seen it become the leader of the entire region.

## ■ CURRENT STATE OF THE INTEROCEANIC HIGHWAYS CONFLICT

One of Brazil's historical ambitions has been to carry its flag as far as the Pacific, something that the Andes have impeded to date. Nevertheless, modern-day technology enables the carrying out of projects of this nature. Therefore, taking into account the economic situation of Peru and Bolivia, Brazil has advanced the opening of favourable lines of credit to both of these countries so that they can build roadways through the jungle and the Andes, with the aim in mind of connecting up their coasts with the extensive Brazilian river network which flows into the Atlantic.

The works began in 2005 with the opening of a bridge over the Acre river, the border area between Brazil, Bolivia and Peru, which connects the towns of Assís and Iñapari.

A communications branch of this gigantic project strikes out from the Peruvian port of Paita, in Piura, near the border with Ecuador, in order to access the river port of Yurimaguas in the Pasaya Samiria Nature Reserve, already in the Peruvian Amazonia, as far as Iquitos. Then, by way of the Amazon, one reaches the ports of Macapá and Belém on the Atlantic seaboard.

Another branch starts out from Lima and goes to Cerro de Pasco, in Alexander von Humboldt Nature Reserve, as far as Pucallpa in the Peruvian Amazonia, thus reaching the Brazilian border.

Works are also being done to connect the Peruvian port of Chimbote with Pucallpa, with a view to reaching the Brazilian cities of Cruzeiro do Sul and R o Branco.

Another branch strikes out from La Paz, runs through Beni, Pando and gets to Rurrenabaque from where it continues on through Riberalta and enters Brazil.

A further one starts out from the Peruvian port of Ilom, enters Cochabamba in Bolivia and runs through the indigenous reserve and biosphere that is the Siboro-S ecure National Park (Tipnis), in the Beni river, between San Borja and Trinidad, until reaching the Brazilian river network.

We suspect, therefore, that goods shipment between both oceans will not be very profitable economically speaking, on combining land and river transport with difficulty, though it will afford an important thrust to Brazil in its take-off towards the heights of international prominence.

However, at present Brazil is a giant with clay feet. The social contrasts that hound it, the economic and cultural inequality, the unresolved ethnic problems, the abandonment with which it treats the indigenous peoples and the Amazonian ecosystem may ruin its plans.

On the other hand, for Bolivia this communications network will, to a certain extent, see the fulfilment of its long-awaited ambition to an outlet to the sea, which it lost in the 1879-1883 war with Peru and Chile.

Nevertheless, these works are of great political import, and when they are fully completed it will be possible to draw up a new map of strategic relations in South America.

## ■ ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

### ■ The Indigenous Peoples

**Figure 13.3. Bolivia, Brazil and Peru**



It seemed that the project was going well when all of a sudden a movement arose, first of expectation and then of protest, among the indigenous inhabitants of the areas through which the different highways were to run. Numerous calls to attention were later made by ecological and environmental organisations around the world.

The difficulties that arose did not exactly come from Brazilian territory, given that there the communication routes were fluvial for the most part, but rather from Peru and Bolivia, and more specifically from the native peoples who live in the Alexander von Humboldt Nature Reserve in Peru and the Isiboro-Sécure National Park in Bolivia.

It goes without saying that, from the point of view of the so-called first world, a new communication route increases prospects from all angles, but this panorama is not seen the same way from the perspective of some of the indigenous peoples that live on the land in question and for whom any changes to their way of life may lead to their disappearance.

When on 22nd March last, the World Water Day was held, which has been sponsored by the United Nations since 1992, and after having acknowledged

access to drinking water and basic sanitation as a Human Right at its 64<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, indigenous peoples' claims received the requisite backing.

Because we have to bear in mind that when the indigenous peoples speak of *pachamama*, they are not only referring to «mother earth», given that indigenous women also take «earth», «water», «trees» into consideration; for them, water is a living being, the blood of the earth. It cannot be bought or sold, nor can it be dammed up into giant reservoirs. Neither do indigenous peoples understand that the jungle's subsoil belongs to the state, nor that they be spoken to about the preservation of the environment, given that, for them, they themselves form part of that environment that ecologists are so given to defending in their proclamations.

On the other hand, the indigenous peoples have seen that oil explorations do not bring with them such mythical development to those lands; the companies simply extract the oil, destroy the natural surroundings and then go off somewhere else. 'Development' for indigenous peoples is «living well», *sumak-kawsay* in Quechua, that is to say, to continue living as they have done to date.

Consequently, protests by the indigenous peoples have not taken long in coming. Protests have been made in Peru against the Conga Project in Cajamarca, which is attempting to regulate the water of several lagoons; others have been made against the Cerro Condorhuain Project in Ancash, which involves controlling 84 «eyes of water» which up until now in had been the hands of the indigenous people. In Ecuador, native Indians objected in Quito on World Water Day to the fact that 1% of the property-owners control 63% of the irrigation water.

However, it is in Bolivia where tensions have reached their peak. The native Indians who live in the Isiboro-Sécure Nature Reserve, which is to be crossed by a highway, protested violently in La Paz, making President Evo Morales keep his electoral promises in favour of indigenous peoples. At least the inhabitants of the Reserve have managed to have the highway project looked at again.

Indigenous protests were also seen at the Rio+20 Conference, held over the 20th, 21st and 22nd June, the results of which have gone somewhat off the beaten track. Indeed, the different indigenous peoples were not listened to, in spite of the promises made.

Nevertheless, Brazil is the country that has committed most aggressions against the native Indians of Amazonia. Timber merchants, soya and maize growers, gold and oil prospectors, etc., have cornered many of the indigenous peoples in the jungle who are in danger of extinction.



President Lula da Silva's electoral programme contained numerous initiatives to protect the indigenous peoples, but regrettably fell into oblivion during the course of his presidency.

## ■ **BACKGROUN TO THE CONFLICT IN THE RIVER URUGUAY**

Before ending this brief overview of the history and unfolding of conflicts among some of the Southern Cone countries, fortunately dormant at present, we would like to make a quick reference to the pulp mills for paper making that were a source of dispute between Uruguay and Argentina for some time.

Back in 2001, Argentina and Uruguay began once again to face each other in the courts about the waters they share in the river Uruguay, which is subject to a Statute between them. This time the dispute centred on the planned pulp mills, which as is common knowledge, cause heavy air and sea environment pollution.

Tensions between both countries led Argentina to institute proceedings against Uruguay at The Hague International Court of Justice on 4th May 2006.

On top of all of this, in November 2007 the Finnish company, UPM, opened one of these mills in Fray Bentos in Uruguayan territory, while the Spanish company, ENCE, is looking for a site on which to build its planned mill.

After the corresponding formalities and allegations, the Court, in one of its characteristic decisions, found that, on the one hand, Uruguay was in breach of its obligations pursuant to the River Uruguay Statute as a result of having built the pulp mill without first reaching an agreement with Argentina, whereas Argentina had failed to show the existence of hazardous pollution levels. Whatever the case, and after the decision, on 30th August in the same year both countries signed up to the setting up of a Scientific Committee to study and find out the levels of environmental pollution in question, pursuant to the Court's recommendations.

In the meantime, ENCE decided to change the location of its planned mill and to shift it upriver to Paraje Pereyra.

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## CHAPTER XIV

# SRI LANKA

*Maria José Caro Bejarano*

### **ABSTRACT**

For 26 years Sri Lanka's history was marked by an ethnic conflict between Tamil rebels and the national army. In early 2002, the two warring factions agreed to a ceasefire, which was broken repeatedly by both parties. In early 2009 the national government launched an offensive against the rebels which lasted several months and ended in May with the annihilation of the guerrilla force and the death of its leaders. The end of the military conflict led to nearly 300,000 persons being displaced and allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and other abuses committed by both sides in the final stages of the conflict. Currently, international NGOs, in coordination with the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations, are striving to clear anti-personnel mines and assist the displaced persons who remain in the camps.

The two major threats facing Sri Lanka are military and political, the military one having been reduced significantly with the end of its long-running civil war. Politically, maintaining a large military presence in the Northeast suggests that the government is likely to stick to its hard-line policy on Tamil demands for greater decentralisation of power in the North and East.

### **Keywords:**

Sri Lanka, conflict, security, LTTE.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

### ■ Significance of the conflict

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean shaped like a tear, located some 28 kilometres from the Southeast coast of India, separated from the neighbouring Indian State of Tamil Nadu by the Straits of Palk. Historical and cultural relations between the inhabitants of the Jaffna peninsula, at the Northern end of Sri Lanka, and Tamil Nadu, with its 50 million Tamils, have always been close. Sri Lanka is some 500 km long from North to South and 315 km wide from West to East, with an area of 65,610 km<sup>2</sup>. Nowhere on the island is further than 150 km from the sea. The centre of the island is mountainous, with a maximum elevation of 2,530 m; the climate is tropical, with two monsoons, one in the Southeast from May to July and the other in the North between October and January. Sri Lanka occupies a strategic position close to important sea routes in the Indian Ocean; it is a strategic shipping link between Western and Southeast Asia, and a centre of ancient Buddhist religion and culture. Nowadays it is a multi-religion and multi-ethnic country in which nearly a third of the population follows religions other than Buddhism, particularly Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Sinhalese community constitutes the majority. The Tamils, who are concentrated in the North and East of the island, form the most significant ethnic minority. Other communities include Arab and Malay Muslims and «burghers» (mixed-race descendants of European settlers).

In the Failed States Index 2011 produced by the Fund for Peace, Sri Lanka appears in 29th place with 92.2 points, in the third group of countries. This conflict, although considered to have ended, was active for more than 50 years, and certain matters are still pending resolution such as the war crimes committed by both sides, the government and the Tamil separatist group.

The external dimensions of the conflict have four basic elements. Firstly, Sri Lanka's Tamil minority has close linguistic, cultural and religious links with India's much larger Tamil population. In the past, this population was an important source of external solidarity and support for the Sri Lankan Tamils' cause. Secondly, India is the dominant power in the region, and the internal conflict of Sri Lanka led to India's involvement at various levels. Thirdly, despite the government's military victory over the insurgents in May 2009, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE<sup>(1)</sup>) remain active among the million Tamils in exile spread among North America, Europe and Australia. This diaspora constitutes an important external support base for the LTTE. Fourthly, the changing international paradigms and standards, such as those relating to human rights and terrorism, have a growing impact on the post-conflict process and the conduct of both state and non-state actors.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Figure 14.1. Sri Lanka. Sources: CIA world Factbook



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#### ■ Geopolitical overview of the region

The population is approximately 21 million. Population density is greatest in the Southeast, where Colombo, the country's main port and industrial centre, is located. Net annual population growth is 1%. Sri Lanka has considerable ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. The population breaks down, approximately, into: 74.9% Sinhalese (concentrated in the densely populated Southeast); 11.24% Sri Lankan Tamils (of Southern Indian ancestry, spread throughout the country but forming a majority in the Northern province); 4.2% Indian Tamils<sup>(2)</sup>; 9.2% «Sri Lankan Moors» (descended from Arab traders) 0.2%

<sup>(2)</sup> The Indian Tamils, a distinct ethnic group. The British brought them to Sri Lanka (Ceylon as it then was) in the 19th century to work on the tea and rubber plantations, and they were concentrated in the so-called «tea country» of South-Central Sri Lanka. In accordance with

«burghers» (mixed– race descendants of European settlers, mainly Dutch and British), 0.2% Malays) and 0.1% other, including a small number of aboriginal Veddas. As regards the distribution by religious communities, 70% are Buddhists (Sinhalese), 15% Hindus (Tamils), 7% Muslim (mainly Sunni) and 8% Christian (Sinhalese and Tamils, mainly Catholic).

The new constitution of 1978 – which guarantees religious freedom – gives primacy to Buddhism. Sinhala or Sinhalese, an Indo-European language, is the native language of the Sinhalese. The Tamils and the majority of the Muslims speak Tamil, which forms part of the Dravidian linguistic group of Southern India. The use of English declined after independence, but it is still spoken in the middle and upper classes, especially in the capital, Colombo. The government is seeking to reverse this situation, for mainly economic but also partly political reasons. Both Sinhalese and Tamil are official languages.

The island was known in antiquity by various names, including Lanka, Taprobane (by the Romans), Serendib (in Arabic) and Selan, leading to its being popularly referred to as the «island of a thousand names». Sri Lanka in Sinhalese means «venerable island».

The prehistoric inhabitants of Sri Lanka were probably the ancestors of the indigenous Vedda people. The Sinhalese arrived in the island in the 6th century BC from the North of India. Buddhism was introduced from the Indian subcontinent three centuries later, and spread rapidly. The Sinhalese civilisation flourished in the North and centre of the island from around 200 BC to 1200 AD when invasions from the South of India, together with internal strife, pushed the Sinhalese southwards.

The island's contacts with the outside world were not long in coming: Romans, Arab traders, etc. At the beginning of the 16th century Portuguese traders in search of cinnamon and other spices took possession of the island's coastal areas and spread Catholicism. The Dutch replaced the Portuguese in 1658, and the British drove out the Dutch in 1796. In 1815 the British defeated the island's last native governor and established the colony of Ceylon. They established an economy based on tea, rubber and coconut plantations. In 1931 they granted Ceylon limited self-government.

During World War II Ceylon served as an important base for the allies in the war against Japan. The beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence in the country of a nationalist political movement aimed at gaining independence, which the British finally granted after the peace negotiations in 1948. In 1972 a new constitution was adopted and the country became a republic, called the

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the 1964 agreement with India, Sri Lanka granted citizenship to 230,000 Indian Tamils in 1988. Under this agreement, India granted citizenship to the remainder, some 200,000 of whom now live in India. A further 75,000 Indian Tamils, or their parents, requested Indian citizenship but chose to remain in Sri Lanka, and they were granted Sri Lankan citizenship.

Figure 14.2. Map of Sri Lanka. Source: United Nations, Department of Field Support Cartographic Section



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Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic of Sri Lanka. In 1978 the name was changed to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

For more than two decades Sri Lanka was marked by ethnic conflict between the national government and the insurgent movement the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). At the beginning of 2002 the warring factions agreed on a ceasefire, which was repeatedly violated by both sides. At the beginning of 2009 the national government started an offensive against the Tamil Tigers

which lasted several months and ended with the total defeat of the insurgents and the death of their leaders, but at a terrible cost in civilian lives.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ Historical and recent

- *Historical*

The conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the various Sri Lankan governments of different political persuasions has been described as a terrorist problem, a civil war, a war of liberation and secession, a complex humanitarian and political crisis and a long-running social conflict.

This conflict has complex roots, with many facets and causes. Among them are deep-rooted claims and other factors related to the marginalisation suffered by the Tamil population, which is a minority in the country as a whole but concentrated in the North and East of the island, which is where the armed conflict was centred, and their aspirations of self-determination and the creation of an independent Tamil state, which have never been met.

Under British colonial rule the Tamils had enjoyed certain social and economic privileges, which they saw curtailed when that rule came to an end. After independence the Sinhalese community took control of the positions of power and started a process of consolidation of privileges and exclusion of the Tamil minority, passing the «Sinhala Only Act» in 1956 making Sinhala (Sinhalese) the only official language. Added to this aspect are historical claims to territorial rights, access to power, failure in forming a post-colonial state, job discrimination in the public sector and the lack of opportunities to enter university. These grievances also include the lack of protection of minorities' rights, the increase in Tamil militancy, the manipulation of events by political elites, the role of religion and the use of terror and violence by all participants in the conflict.

In 1972 the majority Sinhalese parliament, against fierce opposition from the Tamil MPs, adopted a republican constitution establishing, in effect, a Buddhist, Sinhalese State and doing away with such safeguards for minorities as there had been. As a consequence, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF<sup>(3)</sup>) appealed for self-determination of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka in a national territory of their own (called Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Land). In 1976 all the Tamil political organisations unanimously adopted the Vaddukoddai Resolution, the purpose of which was the creation of a Tamil sovereign state. This demand for an independent state marked a new phase in the Sri Lankan conflict and brought an end to a series of failed attempts to construct a multi-ethnic Sri

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<sup>(3)</sup> Tamil United Liberation Front.



Lankan state which had started during the colonial period. In the elections that followed, the TULF won seats on a separatist platform and became the main opposition party.

The outbreak of armed conflict was preceded by several episodes of tension and violence between the two communities, including the anti-Tamil riots of 1958 and 1977/1978. However July 1983 was a critical moment, with attacks on Tamil civilians throughout the island after militants of the LTTE, founded in 1976, attacked an army patrol in the Jaffna peninsula, killing 13 soldiers, which led to riots and attacks causing the deaths of between 2,000 and 3,000 people.

As well as the conflict between the LTTE and the Sinhalese, there was also violence between the LTTE and Muslims in the East and North of the island from 1984-1985, culminating in the events of August 1990 and the terrible slaughter of some 300 Muslims at the hands of the LTTE. In one of the bloodiest incidents, 120 people were murdered while worshiping at a mosque in the Eastern Province. In October 1990, 75,000 Muslims were driven out of their homes in the districts of Jaffna and Mannar by the LTTE.

One feature of all the processes was tendency of the two main combatants, the government and the LTTE, to enter into bilateral negotiations, excluding the other political factions and opposition parties. Most of these negotiations were not based on inclusive processes or clear approaches to solving the problems.

International geopolitical interests were not a driving force in the Sri Lanka conflict.

The outside power with the most impact and influence on the Sri Lankan conflict was India, whose three main response were: Diplomatic and political initiatives such as mediation (Thimpu Negotiations ) and peace proposals (Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987); covert operations to train and equip militants, particularly the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO<sup>(4)</sup>) and the LTTE during the eighties; and direct military intervention through the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF<sup>(5)</sup>) in 1987. The Southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu played a crucial role in the conflict, especially in taking in thousands of Tamil refugees who fled Sri Lanka following the riots of 1983. This had two effects: firstly, it «internationalised» the conflict, and secondly it aroused violent passions among the Tamils of Tamil Nadu, who pressured state and national politicians to do something to relive the situation of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

An initial attempt at negotiation started in 1985 with the mediation of the Indian government, between the militant Tamil groups and the government of Sri

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<sup>(4)</sup> Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation.

<sup>(5)</sup> Indian Peace-Keeping Force.

Lanka in Thimpu, Bhutan. The demands of the Tamil negotiators were summarised in four principles: recognition of the Tamils of Ceylon as a nation; recognition of the existence of an identified homeland for the Tamils of Ceylon; recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation; and recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils of Ceylon.

The second attempt was on 29th July 1987, when Rajiv Gandhi travelled to Colombo to sign an agreement (the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord) with President Jayewardene. The government made a number of concessions to Tamil demands, including the devolution of power to the provinces and the official status of the Tamil language. As a result of this agreement, the IPKF was brought in to monitor a ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army; accept the surrender of weapons from the LTTE and other Tamil militants and disarm them by force if they refused, and to control the Northeast zone so as to allow the transfer of power from Colombo to the Tamil people.

The adventure ended in disaster, with the IPKF fighting the LTTE, and a new United National Party (UNP<sup>(6)</sup>) government headed by Premadasa calling for the withdrawal of the IPKF, whose last troops left Sri Lanka in March 1990. Initially the IPKF's involvement was considered a great success, because it established India as the dominant regional power, was well received by the civilian population in the North and East of Sri Lanka and by the majority of the international community, and for a short time it did manage to curb violent ethnic conflict. However by the time of its withdrawal, India's presence was no longer approved of, either by the Sri Lankan government or by the Tamils.

It was a cruel irony that the IPKF, which had intervened to protect the Tamils and prevent the defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan armed forces, ended up in open war with them.

Far from resolving the ethnic conflict, the debacle of India's intervention served only to exacerbate it, leaving successive Sri Lankan governments to negotiate with a strengthened LTTE which, when negotiations failed, resumed military operations.

India's strategic interest in Sri Lanka and the LTTE's struggle for self-determination were inevitable, since they shared common strategic resources, a common security zone, common international borders and ethnic ties to some parts of Sri Lanka.

Following the withdrawal of the Indian forces, clashes between the LTTE and the government resumed. In January 1995 the two sides agreed a cessation of hostilities as a prior step to peace negotiations, however three months later the LTTE unilaterally resumed hostilities. The government then adopted a policy

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<sup>(6)</sup> United National Party.

of military confrontation with the Tamil Tigers, which wrested control of the Jaffna peninsula from the Tamils in mid-1996. A Tamil counter-offensive, begun in October 1999, reversed most government gains and by May 2000 threatened government forces in Jaffna. In 2001 the fighting continued, with both guerrilla actions and conventional battles, in which both sides gained and lost ground, and during which they showed little respect for international humanitarian standards or Human Rights.

Confidential contacts between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government started in 1998-1999, with a view to considering whether to ask the Norwegian government to act as mediator. Norway was accepted by both sides, due to the following factors, among others: it had no geopolitical, ex-colonial or economic agenda in Sri Lanka; it had previous experience with peace missions (particularly through the Oslo Agreements); its development work was respected in Sri Lanka; Norwegian involvement was supported by India; and Norway was prepared to allocate a high-level team to the project, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It was also argued that the two sides found themselves in a position of «mutually hurting stalemate» and that events following 9/11 were exerting pressure on the LTTE. After a series of meetings a Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) was signed, but for it to take effect the LTTE had to be legalised. Naturally, this point proved problematic. Whereas the LTTE wished to enter the talks as a negotiating party on the same conditions as the government and as sole representatives of the Tamil nation and not as an illegal «terrorist» organisation, the hard-line Sinhalese nationalists continued to regard the LTTE as terrorists and the Tamils as simply a minority within Sri Lanka. Therefore according to them the LTTE should not have the same parity at the negotiating table. The government of Sri Lanka provisionally revoked the proscription of the LTTE on 5th September 2002, seven months after the ceasefire, allowing face-to-face talks to be held.

The agreement signed by the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE in February 2002 established the ceasefire modalities, which included details of the cessation of all military operations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces, the separation of the two sides so that they could each retain their basic positions, and instructions on the freedom of movement of all the forces involved.

Six rounds of talks were held, in Bangkok, Oslo, Berlin and finally Hakone, Japan, in January 2003. Shortly afterwards the LTTE withdrew from the negotiations, although they maintained the ceasefire. Talks centred more on technical matters relating to reconstruction, monitoring committees and development and humanitarian aid than on actual peace, which would have required more fundamental matters to be tackled, such as changes to economic and political structures, power sharing, interim administrations and the very nature of a «unitary» Sri Lanka.

The declaration issued at the conclusion of the peace talks held in Oslo in December 2002 included the phrase «the parties agreed to explore a solution based on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of Tamil speaking people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka».

But in April 2003 the LTTE withdrew from the peace talks, claiming they were not being treated as a negotiating party on equal terms. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that the LTTE were still proscribed by the US as a terrorist organisation. The LTTE were also criticised for continuing to recruit child soldiers and engaging in the selective assassination of opponents. The LTTE later refused to take part in the 2003 Tokyo Donor Conference (June 2003).

In October 2003 the LTTE put forward a number of proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA), in which they would have a majority of members and therefore control. However, the activity of the ISGA was seen as a direct threat to the unity of Sri Lanka. The Muslim and Sinhalese, representing 60% of the population in the Eastern regions that would depend on the ISGA, were also concerned about the consequences of living under an ISGA controlled by the LTTE.

November 2003 saw a new political crisis in the government, leading to a situation of political vacuum. Norway reached the conclusion that it was not worth the effort to continue trying to contribute to this peace process, and abandoned its role as mediator.

In March 2004 Colonel Karuna, commander of the LTTE in the Eastern Province, broke away from the main body of the LTTE taking his followers with him. Karuna was expelled from the LTTE, and faith in the unity and monolithic solidarity of the LTTE was destroyed. Both factions started a series of assassinations and attacks on each other throughout Sri Lanka, including the capital, Colombo.

In March 2006, Karuna's faction registered a political party, the Tamil People's Liberation Tigers (TMVP<sup>(7)</sup> in the Tamil abbreviation). The LTTE and Karuna's faction started to clash in several attacks. In late 2007, Sivaneshururai Chandrakanthan («Pillaiyan») took over the leadership of the TMVP. In March 2008, Karuna left the party and joined President Rajapaksa's party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP<sup>(8)</sup>) as Minister for National Reconciliation.

- *Recent*

In the tsunami of December 2004 some 30,000 people perished, and hundreds of thousands lost their homes. In June 2005 the government and the LTTE

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<sup>(7)</sup> Tamil People's Liberation Tigers.

<sup>(8)</sup> Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

reached an agreement on sharing \$3 billion in international aid. This agreement was the subject of a legal appeal and was never implemented. In August 2005, the LTTE assassinated the Minister for Foreign Affairs, an ethnic Tamil. Parliament approved new emergency laws which were extended every month from then on. These measures increased the powers of the executive, at the expense of fundamental rights, especially the freedom of association and expression (including the media), and of arrest and detention and deaths occurring in the course of the security operations being carried out.

The LTTE boycotted the presidential elections of November 2005 in the area under its control. As a result, Mahinda Rajapaksa, a hard-liner, leader of the SLFP party, won by a narrow margin.

In February 2006, exactly four years after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the government and the LTTE renewed their commitment to this agreement in the Geneva talks.

In 2006 attacks by the LTTE alternated with military reactions by the government.

The European Union added the LTTE to its list of terrorist groups on 30th May 2006. In June 2006 government and LTTE delegations travelled to Oslo to discuss the future of the Scandinavian Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), but the Tamil Tigers refused to talk directly to the government and demanded the withdrawal from the SLMM of observers from EU member states.

In October 2006, an LTTE suicide attack on a naval convoy killed 100 people. The Geneva peace talks in late October ended without progress. In December the government invoked the Prevention of Terrorism Act, enabling a military solution to the conflict. In that same month the LTTE tried to assassinate the Minister of Defence (the President's brother) in Colombo.

In January 2007 government troops took control of Vakarai (a city on the East coast that had been in the hands of the LTTE), leading to thousands of people being displaced. Throughout that year the attacks and counter-attacks continued on both sides.

In January 2008, the government finally admitted that the 2002 ceasefire was broken. Government forces continued their campaign to take control of the areas in the North that were dominated by the LTTE. The LTTE withstood the advances in the North and carried out attacks on economic and civilian targets in the South.

In May 2008 elections were held for the first time to form the new provincial committee covering the Eastern Province. The leader of the TMVP, Sivanesthurai Chandrakanthan («Pillaiyan»), was the new Prime Minister.

The conflict entered a new phase in September 2008 when government forces launched an offensive against the LTTE which led to their losing a significant portion of their territory. In January 2009 the Tamil Tigers' main territory fell together with its de facto capital, Kilinochchi. The government continued to regain territory in the North of Sri Lanka until May 2009, by which time the fighting was limited to a small area near Mullaitivu. On 19th May the government declared victory over the LTTE after announcing the recapture of the LTTE's last redoubt and the death of its founder and leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE publicly announced it was laying down its arms in an official communiqué.

The end of the military conflict left some 300,000 displaced persons amid allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and other atrocities carried out by both sides in the closing stages of the conflict. The displaced persons were initially held in camps in the Vavuniya area, but from December 2009 on they were permitted to move around freely. The majority of those displaced returned to their hometowns, to relatives' homes. There were many

**Figure 14.3. Based on UN map No. 4172 Rev. 3 (march 2008) and OCHA map (2006)**



Based on UN map No. 4172 Rev. 3 (March 2008) and OCHA map of Sri Lanka's Northern Districts Administrative Map (2006). The boundaries, names and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations or Crisis Group.

however who could not return home, due to the widespread presence of mines and the high-security zones decreed by the government. To date, international NGOs, in co-ordination with the government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations, have cleared 1.1 million mines. The humanitarian effort continues to move forward – it is estimated that as of May 2010, 68,000 internally displaced persons (IDP<sup>(9)</sup>) remained in the camps.

## ■ CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ Significant aspects

The two greatest threats facing Sri Lanka are military and political, although the former was much reduced when the government declared an end to its long civil war with the LTTE in May 2009. Although the LTTE lost its territory, some factions continue operating abroad among the displaced Tamils, who account for a third of the total Tamil population, and they are still committed to the goal of a separate state. The Northeast of Sri Lanka is firmly under government control. The behaviour of the security forces during the final months of the war attracted criticism from Western governments, criticism which the Sri Lankan authorities have ignored.

The organisations of expatriate Tamils have attempted to have the old political and military personages tried by the International Court of Justice, but without much success.

Following the victory of Mahinda Rajapakse in the presidential elections of January 2010, his party United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA<sup>(10)</sup>, a leftist grouping) won the parliamentary elections of April 2010, the local elections of March 2011 and the elections of September 2012 in the Eastern Province<sup>(11)</sup>. This constitutes an important change in the internal political scene, since previous general elections had not produced clear winners, meaning that coalitions had to be formed, which impeded effective policy-making. The government's increased popularity, won by claiming credit for ending the 26-year long civil war limits the opposition's prospects of wielding political influence. Although this majority makes for stability, the growing power of Rajapakse and his allies may lead to authoritarian forms of government with arbitrary political deci-

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<sup>(9)</sup> Internally Displaced Person.

<sup>(10)</sup> United People's Freedom Alliance.

<sup>(11)</sup> The UPFA could obtain the support of a centrist Muslim party which won seven seats, to achieve a majority in the 37-member council. The defeat of the Tamil National Alliance prevents any progress on its federalist aspirations, but negotiations with the central government have been at a standstill since January. The Tamil politicians regard the Eastern Province as part of the Tamil homeland, together with the Northern Province. However, unlike the North, where Tamils are the overwhelming majority, the East is almost evenly split among the countries main ethnic groups – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

sions. The decisive mandate of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) also means that significant advances are expected on the most pressing issues. Pacifying the Tamil minority deprived of its right to representation, tackling corruption, increasing salaries and attracting investors. In terms of international relations, there has been some distancing between Sri Lanka and the major Western countries, including the US and the UK, which have criticised Sri Lanka for its campaign during the war against the LTTE. Sri Lanka has found support from countries such as China, Russia and Iran.

Since the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, there have been no terrorist attacks or significant security incidents in the country, reflecting the insurgents' restricted operational capacity. However, the large arms and supply depots are still in the regions formerly controlled by the LTTE in the North and East. The freeing of nearly 12,000 LTTE ex-combatants following a rehabilitation process of nearly three years involves at least some risk that a minority of them may acquire weapons from as yet unidentified sites. On the other hand, the government has maintained its stance, tightening up the already strict anti-terrorist laws<sup>(12)</sup> while retaining a strong presence of security forces in the North and at strategic locations throughout the country.

Politically, maintaining a military presence suggests that the government is likely to stick to its hard-line policy on Tamil demands for greater decentralisation of power in the North and East. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA<sup>(13)</sup>), which brings together most Tamil members of parliament, although it no longer calls for a Tamil State, has tried to persuade the government to debate the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of 1987, which is still pending ratification and which devolves power to the North and East to an unprecedented extent. However, during 2011-12 talks between the TNA and the government came to a halt, and President Rajapakse declined to give any clear guidance on the fate of the amendment.

In spite of the Sri Lankan army's victory over the Tamil Tigers, it is likely that some form of Tamil separatism will continue, albeit low-level. The TNA's position suggests that a gap has opened up between the Tamil diaspora in exile, the majority of whom still support the idea of an independent Tamil State, and the more pragmatic aspirations of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. In late 2011, the remaining LTTE factions were trying to sustain the campaign for an independent state, one initiative of which was to elect a government in el exile with 135 members, to be known as the Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (PTGTE<sup>(14)</sup>). However no foreign government has recognised the legitimacy of the PTGTE, and it has not received the support of the Tamil members of parliament

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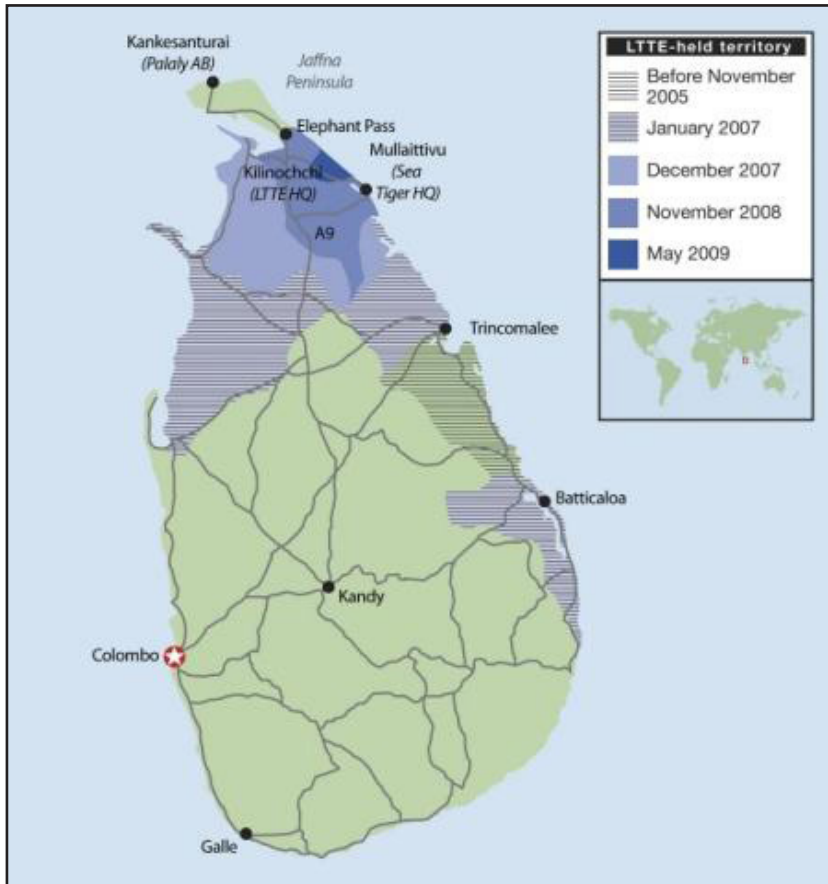
<sup>(12)</sup> In August 2011 the government introduced new anti-terrorism laws allowing people suspected of belonging to the LTTE to be detained. This amendment was enacted a few days before the state of emergency laws of 2005 and 2006 were abolished.

<sup>(13)</sup> Tamil National Alliance.

<sup>(14)</sup> Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam.



**Figure 14.4. Sri Lankan military's advance through the country. Jane's sentinel Country Risk Assessments**



in Sri Lanka. In 2011-12 the PTGTE declined in importance, although groups associated with the diaspora have kept up the campaign, without success, to charge leading Sri Lankan political and military figures with war crimes.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

For many years Sri Lanka's foreign policy agenda consisted in managing and containing the international dimensions of the neatly three decades of ethnic conflict. It was also concerned, though to a lesser extent, with strategic and economic aspects, foreign trade and investment and development aid, although these were often closely linked to the themes of conflict and peace.

Sri Lanka's foreign diplomacy has concentrated on obtaining financial, military and moral support from other governments and multilateral institutions .

One of Sri Lanka's most significant diplomatic initiatives since the mid-nineties was to persuade foreign governments to proscribe the LTTE by virtue of anti-terrorist legislation, thus cutting them off from international financing and the supply of military material. The government also took an active part in an international propaganda campaign to counter that of the LTTE.

### ■ Regional implications

- *India*

Given Sri Lanka's geographical situation and the close historical, social and cultural links with India, it is hardly surprising that Colombo's foreign policy should be dominated by this bilateral relationship. Sri Lanka maintains close diplomatic links with India, as shown by the frequent visits at the highest levels.

Before the 1980s there were difficulties because of India's support for militant Tamil groups, but this changed when India adopted a less interventionist role in the 1980s, motivated by the disastrous actions of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in the late eighties, the assassination of the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by Tamil separatists in 1991 and a growing preoccupation with human rights issues in the country. At present, New Delhi confines itself to offering declarations of support to the government, together with occasional guarantees in support of financial, technical or military resources.

India has adopted a more proactive approach, supporting the reconstruction of the regions affected by the war. In recent interviews President Rajapakse stressed the importance of trade and cultural links with India, indicating that they will be given priority over relations with China and Pakistan. This was a way of sounding out the selection of a national candidate for the post of Commonwealth Secretary-General. In 2013, Sri Lanka will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Sri Lanka had applied to host this meeting in 2009, but the decision was postponed due to concerns about the human rights situation in the country.

- *Norway*

Norway acted as mediator during the peace process of December 2001 and the ceasefire agreement of 2002 between the government and the Tamil Tigers, which included the setting up of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), although in the end it performed no peacekeeping function. Finally in 2004 the Norwegian Head of Mission resigned and was replaced by a Swede.

In 2005 and 2006 Norway continued to act as a mediator between the two sides. With another breakdown of the ceasefire in January 2009 Norway's role as facilitator and mediator was seriously questioned.

Sri Lanka ended Norway's official role as mediator following the demonstrations in Oslo pressing the Norwegian government to use its influence on Sri Lanka to bring an end to the violence.

It is likely that in the post-war period relations between Sri Lanka and Norway will continue to be strained, since the hard-line faction of the LTTE is living in Oslo. In May 2011, its leader Nediyanan was detained by Norwegian police and brought before an Oslo tribunal to give evidence to visiting officials from the Netherlands; he was later granted bail. Since 2010 attempts have been made to re-establish bilateral relations between the two countries. However, certain Norwegian opposition figures insist that relations with Sri Lanka will be normalised only when Norway adopts the EU's proscription of the LTTE.

- *China*

Sri Lanka maintains long-standing and cordial relations with China, which it has traditionally regarded as an important counterweight to India. Sri Lanka was signatory to one of the first bilateral trade agreements signed by the regime of Mao Zedong in 1952. Since then relations have been positive: China is one of Sri Lanka's most important donors. In the final stages of the war and its aftermath, China was also an important supplier of weapons systems.

China contributes to development projects in Hambantota, in the South of the island, where it is helping to build a complex that will include an international container terminal, a fuel storage system, an oil refinery, an international airport and other facilities. Hambantota could form part of what a US writer has dubbed the «string of pearls» in the Indian Ocean, with port development and construction projects financed by China, such as Gwadar in Pakistan and Chittagong in Bangladesh, to extend its soft power.

Concerns that China is moving to outflank India in the Indian Ocean Region was one of the main motives for Washington to make such efforts to establish closer relations with New Delhi.

India's policy of cultivating new allies in East and Southeast Asia was another contributory factor to these concerns. At present there are no signs of Hambantota being used by China's navy.

Trade relations with China continue to develop. In August 2011 China and Sri Lanka agreed on a contract with a consortium led by China to build a container terminal in Colombo. Oil exploration work has also been started, two thermal power plants are under construction, as is a highway, a tapioca silo, a motorway, a railway line and a housing complex in Jaffna for the army, while the

railway infrastructure is being modernised, etc. In return, Sri Lanka supports China's nomination as an observer in the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), which the other members have also backed.

- *United States*

Sri Lanka's relations with the United States have been largely determined by the state of US-India relations. The rapprochement between New Delhi and Washington since 2003 – motivated by initiatives for combating terrorism and Washington's rapid response to the tsunami of December 2004 – opened the way to a greater US commitment to Sri Lanka. However, Colombo continues to be determined to maintain an independent foreign policy, with a balance of interests between the US and China, and giving priority to the influence of India. In August 2011, following President Rajapaksa's announcement of the lifting of the emergency measures imposed in 2005, the US announced that it would review the implications of the new laws introduced to handle matters relating to terrorism. The US outlawed the LTTE in 1997, and Sri Lankan Special Forces commandos carried out an offensive against the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO<sup>(15)</sup>) in 2007. The US authorities continue to investigate the possible activities of LTTE activists that survived the war.

The US has granted Sri Lanka more than \$2 billion in aid since independence in 1948. Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it has contributed to Sri Lanka's economic growth, with projects designed to reduce unemployment, improve housing, develop the Colombo Stock Exchange, modernise the judicial system and improve competitiveness. In the Tokyo Donor Conference of June 2003 on Sri Lanka, the US promised \$54 million, including \$40.4 million in USAID financing. Following the tsunami of 2004, the United States contributed \$135 million in relief and reconstruction aid. The US provided more than \$1.4 million in humanitarian aid in 2009, and committed to at least \$34.5 million for 2010. The United States Armed Forces maintain limited relations with Sri Lanka.

- *United Nations*

Sri Lanka officially became a member of the UN on 14th December 1955, although the international organisation had been present in the country since 1952, when Sri Lanka became one of the first countries in the world to receive development aid.

Several UN agencies remain in Sri Lanka, with development and humanitarian aid work. Since 1960 Sri Lanka has been an active provider of personnel for UN peacekeeping missions.

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<sup>(15)</sup> Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation.

Relations with the United Nations were under considerable pressure from the final stages of the civil war at the beginning of 2009. UN reports<sup>(16)</sup> alleging rights violations by both the Sri Lankan army and the government led to a series of protests against the UN in the country.

In May 2009, in a joint declaration with Ban Ki-Moon, the President of Sri Lanka undertook to ensure that accounts were rendered on the alleged human rights violations committed during the armed conflict. That same year the Sri Lankan government established the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, a national commission of inquiry charged with examining the events of the armed conflict and drawing up recommendations to promote reconciliation among all communities<sup>(17)</sup>.

The Darusman report, which was published on 31st March 2011, revealed that «a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law was committed both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.» The publication of the report led to a new round of protests against the UN in Colombo. The report was sent to the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 2011.

On 22nd March 2012 the HRC passed a resolution calling upon the<sup>(18)</sup> government of Sri Lanka to investigate the allegations of war crimes committed in the final stages of the war in 2009 in which close to 40,000 Tamils died.

Among the countries voting for the resolution, which was adopted with 24 votes in favour, 15 against and eight abstentions, were the US., the European Union and India, among more than thirty co-sponsors.

These nations backed the proposal because they considered it essential for the promotion of reconciliation in the country and to ensure that the crimes committed both by the Sri Lankan army and by the Tamil Tigers were investigated.

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<sup>(16)</sup> The UN has also produced several Reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka, the last one dated 21st December 2011. Report S/2011/793, prepared in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009), is the fourth report presented by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka. This report covers the period from 1st February 2009 to 30th June 2011 and contains information on the situation prevailing in Sri Lanka, progress made, and fulfillment of the undertakings given regarding cessation of the serious violations and abuses committed during the last months of the conflict, in early 2009. Report A/66/657–S/2012/33 of 13th January 2012 by the Secretary-General of the UN Security Council provides information on conflict-related sexual violence in various countries including Sri Lanka.

<sup>(17)</sup> As was documented in a report published by Amnesty International in September 2011, the Commission lacked independence and did not properly investigate the allegations of war crimes.

<sup>(18)</sup> Resolution passed by the Human Rights Council, 19/2. Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. Published in the report of the Council on its 19th session (A/HRC/19/2), ch. I.

Among the 15 countries voting against were Cuba, China, Russia, Indonesia, Ecuador, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Thailand. The Sri Lankan representatives objected to the text, claiming that it interfered in their country's internal affairs and could torpedo the current process of reconciliation.

The government of Colombo has sought to evade its responsibility to investigate transparently and credibly the crimes committed by both sides, especially those committed by the army with the government's acquiescence.

- *European Union*

The European Union, Sri Lanka's biggest trading partner and aid donor, has been rather critical of the Sri Lankan government's behaviour during the final stages of the civil war.

Economic co-operation between the EU and Sri Lanka started in the late 1980s and has become an integral part of the EU's development aid strategy.

Initially the programme mainly consisted of technical assistance for sales promotion in support of local export industries. The programme has evolved into beneficial forms of mutual co-operation centred on: helping Sri Lanka to modernise its regulatory framework for trade and investment; and promoting broader trade and investment relations between the two.

To achieve these objectives a trade development project was established, together with a small project to promote trade and investment relations.

From the time of the ceasefire agreement of 2002 the EU transferred its aid to post-conflict rehabilitation and was involved mainly in the North and East of the country. The European Commission has provided more than €150 million to Sri Lanka since 1994. This makes the EU the biggest donor after Japan, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. The Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission also opened an office in Sri Lanka and provided significant humanitarian support for victims of the conflict and of the 2004 tsunami.

From 1st July 2005 Sri Lanka benefited from the new GSP+ (Generalised System of Preference) which offers specific incentives to countries that have ratified certain agreements on sustainable development and governance (no import duty on products under the GSP agreement and reduced duty on many other products). Sri Lanka is one of 14 countries in the world, and the only one in Asia, authorised to export goods to the EU without significant import duties (the EU is also the biggest importer). Sri Lanka enjoyed this privilege as a measure designed to mitigate the effects of the tsunami of 2004. However, in

August 2010, it lost its preferential status, not having been ratified by three of the 27 EU member states and after more than 12 months of investigation by the UN, which confirmed Sri Lanka's failure to comply with standards on human rights. This decision did not affect the volume of exports, since it was partly offset by other markets and export articles, including agricultural products and services. Since then, the European Commission negotiated with the Sri Lankan authorities in an attempt to improve the situation, offering them a six-month suspension of the withdrawal if they would show good faith in a tangible and sustainable way, an offer that received no response.

In October 2010 the European Commission allocated a further €10 million to Sri Lanka, to support humanitarian assistance to the more than 280,000 persons displaced by the armed conflict that has now ended.

The European Union has adopted a firm stance with regard to the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. However, despite the EU's being an important donor and trading partner, its sanctions have not had the desired impact.

According to a report by European think-tank FRIDE<sup>(19)</sup> the EU's policy of pressure on Sri Lanka is ineffective. «In particular, it argues that the EU did not take sufficient account of the strategic interests of China and India. The EU also failed to seize those opportunities for influence that it did have and did not coordinate its response internally or with other actors. The EU must change its approach to promoting human rights in South Asia in order to respond to changing regional power dynamics.»

As well as providing development and reconstruction assistance, the EU has promoted free and fair elections in Sri Lanka. Four electoral observation missions were deployed, in 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005, although the EU was not present during the presidential and general elections of January and April 2010. The EU observation missions were the most important international missions.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

According to some writers<sup>(20)</sup> the situation in Sri Lanka is calm for the time being, however the Tamil population, exhausted by war, heartbroken by defeat and sadly accustomed to authoritarian regimes after decades of control by the LTTE, will not necessarily remain calm for long. The Sri Lankan government is adopting policies that are bringing fundamental changes to the culture, demographics and economy of the Northern Province, and in so doing it is swing

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<sup>(19)</sup> SRI LANKA The failure of EU human rights sanctions, Clare Castillejo, January 2011, FRIDE.

<sup>(20)</sup> Sri Lanka's North I: The Denial of Minority Rights, Crisis Group Asia Report No. 219, 16th March 2012.

the seeds of future violence. These approaches that exclude the local population and ignore their need of economic, physical and cultural security serve only to stoke discontent.

On the other hand, the last legislative and parliamentary elections last September were a landslide for the government party, even in the majority-Tamil Eastern Province, and this may serve to muffle Tamil claims.

But in the Northern Province, the Sri Lankan army is in control and dominates reconstruction, which hinders international humanitarian efforts and heightens tensions with the Tamil majority<sup>(21)</sup>.

Since the war ended in 2009, hundreds of millions of dollars have been pumped into the province, but the local population, most of them left destitute by the conflict, have seen only slight improvements in their daily life. Instead of making way for responsible, overall development, the army is increasing its economic role and its control of land and apparently consolidating its occupation permanently. Many Tamils see these actions as an attempt to impose Sinhalese and Buddhist culture on the whole of Sri Lanka; this, together with the failure to tackle many social aspects of reconstruction after the conflict, may lead to an increased risk of reactivating the violence of past decades.

So although the North may be calm for the time being, and the population quiescent, this will not last long unless the long-running grievances about land, language and political marginalisation are tackled in such a way as to give the North effective control of its own future.

The UN and donor countries will have to place the government's responsibility, the needs of repatriated people and the expansion of a democratic political role for the Tamil minority at the centre of their aid policies, or risk contributing to a resurgence of ethnic extremism.

The situation is not irreversible, and could be redirected with an approach that followed the general principles of participative and transparent development. The political processes that would give the Tamil majority in this province a say in their future would help reduce the risks. To act with the responsibility of making an additional effort and insisting that they be allowed to reconstruct the Northern Province following the war in a way that does not lead to renewed violence.

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<sup>(21)</sup> *Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military, Crisis Group Asia Report No.220, 16th March 2012.*



## ■ CHRONOLOGY

### ■ TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT

Table 14.1

CRONOLOGÍA DEL CONFLICTO	
FECHA	ACONTECIMIENTOS
1948	El país obtiene la Independencia de Gran Bretaña
1956	La Sinhala Act instituye al cingalés como única lengua oficial Se institucionaliza la discriminación a los tamiles
1976	Creación de la guerrilla de los Tigres de Liberación de la Patria Tamil (LTTE)
1983	Disturbios. Ola de violencia sobre la minoría tamil que provoca miles de muertos y refugiados. El ejército cingalés se despliega al norte y al este del país.
1985	Fracaso de las conversaciones de paz para pacificar el conflicto intercomunitario
1987	jul – India y el gobierno de Sri Lanka firman un acuerdo para la creación de unos consejos regionales, que otorgarán autonomía limitada a los tamiles, en el noroeste del país. India compromete el envío de tropas para apoyar el acuerdo
	oct – El LTTE se desentiende del acuerdo alcanzado y se enfrenta a las tropas indias, que pierden a más de un millar de efectivos
1990	jun – Las conversaciones de paz fracasan. El LTTE protagoniza nuevos ataques al norte del país
1991	may – Una terrorista suicida, presuntamente vinculado al LTTE, acaba con la vida de Rajiv Gandhi, primer ministro de la India
1993	may – El presidente de Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa, es asesinado por un terrorista suicida
1995	ene – Se acuerda un alto el fuego y el gobierno (presidido por Chandrika Kumaratunga) y la guerrilla, reemprenden las conversaciones de paz
1996	ene – Militantes suicidas del LTTE atentan contra el Banco Central del país. El atentado causa más de un centenar de víctimas mortales.
1997	oct – El gobierno de EE.UU. incluye al LTTE en su lista de grupos terroristas. En respuesta, se produce un atentado contra la sede del World Trade Center, en Colombo.
1998	ene – El LTTE atenta contra el templo más sagrado del budismo en Sri Lanka, el de Kandy, que acoge una reliquia de Buda.
1999	dic – La presidenta Kumaratunga logra sobrevivir a un atentado suicida del LTTE, aunque resulta gravemente herida.
2000	may – Da comienzo la implicación noruega en el proceso de paz srilankés. El país nórdico designa a un enviado especial para mediar en el conflicto.
2002	feb – La gestión noruega parece dar sus frutos. Gobierno y guerrilla firman un alto al fuego, que se mantendrá vigente hasta 2008.
	dic – El LTTE anuncia su renuncia a conseguir un Estado independiente para los tamiles. El LTTE se muestra además, abierto a retornar progresivamente, el control de las zonas que administra al norte y al este de la isla.

<b>CRONOLOGÍA DEL CONFLICTO</b>	
<b>FECHA</b>	<b>ACONTECIMIENTOS</b>
2006	nov - Mahinda Rajapakse, un político de perfil duro, es elegido nuevo presidente del país.
2006	ene - El ejército inicia una ofensiva a gran escala contra los territorios bajo dominio de la guerrilla. Pese a ello, ambas partes sostienen que el alto el fuego sigue estando en vigor.
	jun - La Unión Europea incluye al LTTE en su lista de grupos terroristas.
	jul- El ejército obtiene sus primeras victorias importantes en territorio controlado por los tamiles.
	ago - 17 cooperantes internacionales son asesinados al este del país. Aumentan las voces que denuncian los abusos sobre los derechos humanos.
	oct - Un atentado suicida contra un convoy de la marina causa la muerte de 100 personas. Se insinúa la posibilidad de reunir a las partes en Ginebra, para negociar, pero la opción se desestima ante la exigencia de la guerrilla de que se reabra la comunicación por tierra con la Península de Jaffna, ahora bajo control gubernamental.
	nov - Uno de los principales líderes de la Alianza Nacional Tamil, es asesinado en Colombo. Los líderes del LTTE afirman que mantendrán la lucha armada hasta las últimas consecuencias.
	dic - El gobierno pone en vigor el Acta de Prevención del Terrorismo, que da alas a una solución militar del conflicto. El hermano del presidente, que ejerce de secretario de defensa, sobrevive milagrosamente a un atentado en Colombo.
	ene - El ejército arrebató al LTTE la ciudad de Vakarai, clave para la estrategia de la guerrilla. Aumentan las cifras de desplazados que huyen de la violencia. Naciones Unidas afirma que desde mediados de 2006, son ya 216.000 personas.
2007	mar - El LTTE realiza su primer raid aéreo sobre posiciones del ejército colindantes con el aeropuerto internacional de la capital.
	jul - El ejército afirma que ya ha logrado hacerse con el control de todo el este del país.
	oct - El LTTE lleva a cabo un ataque a gran escala sobre una base militar del centro del país.
	nov - S.P Thamilselvan, líder del brazo político del LTTE, fallece víctima de un bombardeo del ejército. El antiguo líder y ahora disidente del LTTE, el coronel Karuna, es detenido en Gran Bretaña por portar documentación falsa.
	ene - El gobierno de Sri Lanka admite finalmente que el alto al fuego está roto. Se registran nuevos atentados contra la clase política.

<b>CRONOLOGÍA DEL CONFLICTO</b>	
<b>FECHA</b>	<b>ACONTECIMIENTOS</b>
2008	jul – Karuna regresa a Sri Lanka después de haber sido enjuiciado en Gran Bretaña.
	oct – Karuna entra a formar parte del parlamento nacional
	nov – El ejército logra el control del oeste de la isla.
	ene – Cae el principal feudo de la guerrilla tamil en el norte, y su capital de facto, Kilinochchi.
2009	abr – El gobierno anuncia que ha conseguido acorralar a la guerrilla en una zona de tan sólo 17 km, al noreste del país y da un ultimátum de 24h para que sus efectivos se rindan. La población civil huye despavorida.
	may – El presidente de los Estados Unidos, Barack Obama, insta a ambas partes a paliar el drama de la población civil. El cerco se ha reducir a tan solo 2,5 km. El ejército lanza la ofensiva final contra los reductos del LTTE. El líder histórico del LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, muere víctima de los combates. Un comunicado oficial de la guerrilla anuncia públicamente que el grupo abandona las armas.
2010	ene - Rajapakse gana un segundo mandato presidencial
	abr – La coalición gubernamental UPFA venció en las elecciones parlamentarias.
	finales - La diáspora tamil elige a un gobierno transnacional provisional (PT-GTE) de 145 miembros
2011	mar – la UPFA vence también en las elecciones locales
	ago – Sri Lanka pone fin al estado de emergencia que impuso en 1983 para combatir la guerrilla tamil, pero se conserva la Ley de Prevención del Terrorismo.
	nov – el Parlamento aprueba un nuevo comité de “Reconciliación Nacional” para formular soluciones políticas a los asuntos referentes a la división étnica.
2012	mar – El Consejo de Derechos Humanos de la ONU aprueba una resolución que insta a Sri Lanka a investigar las alegaciones de abusos de derechos durante la etapa final de la guerra civil.
	sept – la UPFA vence también en las elecciones de la Provincia Oriental

**Table 14-2. GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS**

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		SRI LANKA
Area		65,610 km <sup>2</sup> (122°)
GDP		US\$ 118 billion (66° in 2011)
Structure. GDP/Active population	Agriculture	13% GDP (est. 2011)
	Industry	29.6% GDP
	Services	57.4% GDP
GDP per capita		US\$ 5,700 (144°)
GDP growth rate		6.96% (in 2011)
% Unemployment		21.3% (49° est. 2009)
Trade relations (Exports):		US\$ 10,890 million (2011 est.) (90°) USA 20.1%, United Kingdom 9.3%, India 6.3%, Italy 5.1%, Germany 5%, Belgium 4.5% (2011)
Trade relations (Imports):		US\$ 20,020 million (2011 est.) (76°) India 26%, China 15.9%, Singapore 7.1%, Iran 6.2%, Japan 5% USA 1.32% (2011)
Population		21,481,334 (57°)
% Urban population		14% (1.1% annual increase)
Age structure	0-14	23,5% (*)
	15-64	68,1%
	Over 65	8,5%
Population growth rate		0.913% (123°)
Ethnic groups		Sinhalese 75%, Arab 8.2%, Hindu Tamils 5%, Sri Lankan Tamils 11.4%, other 0.4% (2001 census)
Religions		Buddhist (official) 69.3%, Hindu 15.5%, Muslim 7.6%, Christian 7.6% (2001 census)
Languages		Sinhalese (official and national language) 74%, Tamil (national) 18%, English 8%
Literacy rate		91%
Infant mortality rate		9.47 per 1,000 (148°)
Life expectancy		76 years (72 - men, 79 - women) (82°)
Population below the poverty line		8.9% (2009 est.)
Refugees		-

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS	SRI LANKA
Displaced persons	460.000 (Tamils and non-Tamils, due to the long civil war between the government and Tamil separatist movement) (2007)
GINI index (distribution of family income)	49 in 2009 (25°) (40. en 97° according to HDI 2011 (+))
Human Development Index	691 (97°) (according to HDI 2011 (+))
Military spending. % GDP.	2.85% (US\$ 1.41 billion in 2010)

\* The GINI coefficient: measures the degree of inequality in income distribution (or consumption) among individuals or families in a specific country, from the point of view of perfectly equal distribution. A coefficient of 0 expresses perfect equality, and 100 expresses maximum inequality.

Sources: CIA The World FactBook, US Dept of State, Military Balance 2011 (\*) and Human Development Report 2011 (+)

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## CHAPTER XV

# SOUTH CHINA SEA

*Alejandro MacKinlay Ferreirós*

### **ABSTRACT**

The South China Sea is a potential scenario for conflicts owing to the sovereignty claims over the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos and the surrounding waters. These involve Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, as well as China and Taiwan, whose claim is overwhelming since it extends to 90% of the waters in that particular sea. Underlying such pretensions is competition for natural resources, and in the case of China this has huge geopolitical significance, as its control over the south china Sea, which marks the big geopolitical core of Asia, would completely transform regional balances and oust the United States from its position as the guarantor of security in East Asia, leaving the freedom of navigation through the waters of the South China Sea to depend on Beijing's goodwill.

### **Keywords:**

South China Sea, Paracel, Spratly, sovereignty claim, freedom of navigation, security status quo in Asia.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea<sup>(1)</sup> is a scenario for potential conflict due to sovereignty claims over the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos and the host of small islands, reefs and banks which lie strewn across its waters. These claims extend to the surrounding waters and involve Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, besides China and Taiwan, whose claim is not merely the same, but also overwhelming, as it means the pretension to sovereignty over 90% of the waters of this Sea. The claims of these nations to islands and waters have very differing and assorted justifications. China bases theirs on remote historical rights, while the Philippines rests its case on rights acquired during the Spanish period and the extension of its continental shelf, an argument also used by Malaysia and Brunei. Vietnam, which is the only nation to dispute the Paracel Islands with China, hinges its claim on historical rights established by France, its colonial power, in the middle of the 20th century. All of these claims have an underlying motive of competing for the fishing and energy resources which the South China Sea stores in abundance. In the case of China it has huge geopolitical significance as sovereignty over these waters would afford Beijing an enormous strategic advantage and completely transform the balance of power in East Asia.

The increase in China's relative power in the Asia-Pacific region represents a genuine revolution for the security system in Asia, in place since the end of World War II, in which the USA, and in particular its military might in the region, have guaranteed stability since then. Nevertheless, China's hugely boosted economic, political and military power in recent decades, in spite of the statements by the Chinese leadership to the effect that «Beijing's policy is to overcome the (violent) manner in which other great powers have emerged»<sup>(2)</sup>, in fact has an extremely significant impact on Asian geopolitics, and the South China Sea lies right at the heart of the Asian scenario. As Kagan says «power is the ability to have others do what you want and avoid them doing what you don't want them to do»<sup>(3)</sup>. Thus, however absurd its claim might seem, if Beijing were to have the will and coercive means for other coastal nations to accept its dominance over the waters of this Sea, i.e. the Asia-Pacific region's natural centre of gravity, besides the fishing resources and those the sea bed holds, China would also obtain strategic primacy over a vast area spanning from the Japanese archipelago to Australia's coasts, thus ensuring it had free access to the Indian Ocean and, re-establishing China's central position in Asia.

This chapter intends to set out both the current situation and developments concerning disputes about sovereignty and waters in the South China Sea, and

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<sup>(1)</sup> This sea is likewise known as China's Southern Sea, whereas the Philippines refers to it as the West Philippine Sea.

<sup>(2)</sup> BIJIAN, Zheng. *China's «Peaceful Rise» to Great Power Status*, Foreign Affairs 84, No. 5, 09/10 2005, p. 22.

<sup>(3)</sup> KAGAN, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, London: Atlantic Press, 2008, p. 15.



then go on to focus on analysing the zone's geopolitics, the tide of expansion of Chinese power, and the consequences this has for its coastal nations and for those others for which the freedom to ply its waters, which would be compromised by Chinese claims, is a top priority strategic concern. The analysis also gives overarching consideration to the consequences of the clash of interests arising in the region between the up-and-coming power that is China and the predominant power in the security scenario in the shape of the USA, with whom most of the nations afraid of Beijing's rise are trying to forge stronger strategic ties. On the other hand efforts have been made to avoid a detailed study of the various different claims and any assessment of whether these might be more or less legitimate since, even if they lie at the source of the conflict, these are unlikely to prove reconcilable and are currently irrelevant compared to the major geopolitical implications of the dispute.

## ■ BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### ■ Geography of the South China Sea

The South China Sea, or China's South Sea, is a tongue of water in the Pacific Ocean covering 3.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, which, running southwest to northeast lies bounded by the Southeast coast of Asia, between the Taiwan Strait and the tip of the Malay Peninsula, taken up by Singapore, and at its southernmost point

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Figure 15.1



lie the Greater Sunda islands, whereas Borneo and the Philippine archipelago separate it from the immense mass of the Western Pacific, with which it joins up via the Luzon Strait, its Northern vertex reaching the Hengchun peninsula at the southernmost end of Taiwan. The sea is speckled with a total of over 30,000 islands, islets, atolls, cays and sandbanks, which are a source of numerous disputes over their sovereignty among the coastal nations, notable among these being the Paracel<sup>(4)</sup> and Spratly<sup>(5)</sup> archipelagos as the chief focal points of conflicts.

The Paracel archipelago is opposite the Gulf of Tonkin, roughly equidistant 180 nautical miles eastward of the Vietnamese coast and southeastward from the Chinese island of Hainan. The archipelago comprises some 30 islands, reefs and sandbanks, which are split into two main groups: Amphitrite to the northeast and Crescent to the Southwest, while the two groups are separated from each other by a sound of 45 NM. The main islands are Woody in the north-eastern group and Pattle in the Southwest. The archipelago was occupied by China following a military clash with South Vietnam in January 1974, and its only permanent inhabitants are civil servants and a Chinese military garrison. In June 2012 the People's Republic of China established the municipality of Shansa which takes in these islands and the Spratly Islands.

The Spratly archipelago is made up of an extensive group of over 100 islands, cays and atolls located to the west of the Philippines and northwest of the Malaysian state of Sabah and the Sultanate of Brunei, on the island of Borneo. The Spratly Islands are scattered across an area of over 450,000 km<sup>2</sup> of sea and account for a miniscule combined territory of less than four km<sup>2</sup>, which confers upon them tremendous importance in the demarcation of the region's sea boundaries. The islands have no permanent inhabitants, 45 of them being occupied by China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia for the purpose of staking their claims to sovereignty, these being nations which, as well as Brunei, lay claims to all or part of the archipelago. As with the Paracels, this archipelago is rich in fishing resources, which have for centuries been freely exploited by fishermen from the coastal nations, China, Vietnam, Malaysia or the Philippines, and besides this the seabottom area of these islands could, according to various estimates, hold up to 28 billion barrels of oil and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas<sup>(6)</sup>.

## ■ History

The claims to the waters in the South China Sea are complex, as the area has been dominated by nations from outside the region since the 16th century.

<sup>(4)</sup> The Paracel islands, or Paracels on English charts, are known by the Chinese as the Xisha islands and by the Vietnamese as the HoàngSa islands.

<sup>(5)</sup> The Spratly Islands are known to the Chinese as the Nansha, to Vietnam as Truong Sa and to the Philippines as Kalayaan.

<sup>(6)</sup> US Energy Information Administration. *Country Analysis Briefs: South China Sea*, 2008, available at [http://www.eia.gov/emeu/cabs/South\\_China\\_Sea/pdf.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/emeu/cabs/South_China_Sea/pdf.pdf).

Whereas China remained withdrawn in its shell from the early part of the modern age through to the mid-20th century, ignoring the sea about it and carrying out very few naval campaigns, the most notable of its seafaring ventures were the seven trading expeditions undertaken by Zhen He in the 15th century, during which he reached eastern Africa, and the conquest of Taiwan in 1683 by Shi Lang. Even so, the claims to waters by the coastal nations, in particular the Chinese ones, actually base the bulk of their line of argument on alleged historical rights<sup>(7)</sup>. On the other hand, the existence of nation states on the shoreline of the South China Sea is a relatively modern feature, for which reason up to the period following World War II the exercise of sovereignty, except in the case of China, fell to the colonial powers of France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Japan, Spain, and from 1898, the United States (see Table I, Timeline of the Conflict).

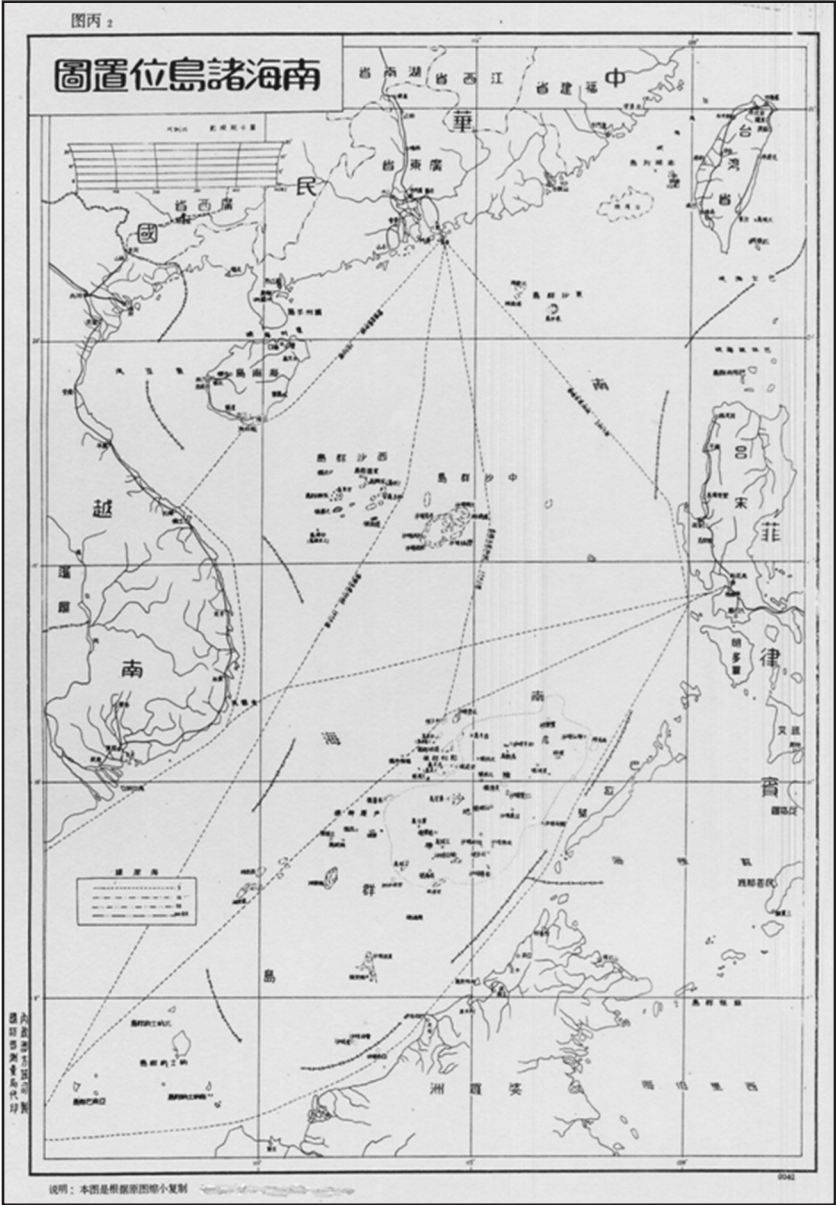
The Chinese sovereignty claim over the waters of the South China Sea traces its prelude to a vague 11 dotted line sketched in 1947 by the Kuomintang government on a map of the area. This was something that was done without determining geographical locations, and in a moment when the attention of the Beijing government of the time was really focused on facing up to the consequences of the recently defeted Japanese invasion and the civil war with the communists. After Mao Zedong's victory in 1949, the claim was taken up by the new Communist government. In 1953 the map was changed to a nine-dotted line which, despite persisting with a lack of definition as regards geographical coordinates, constitutes the reference point for the Chinese claim to these waters. At that time the other nations paid little or no attention to the Chinese claim, as they were then at an early stage of their respective national independence movements, or else they simply thought of the claims by the governments in Beijing or Taipei as ludicrous, due to their inability to back them up with adequate naval power, particularly in the area of the Spratly Islands, lying far away from the coasts of China.

In the Paracel Islands region, China started to press home its claim in 1946 by occupying Woody Island, where it stationed a tiny garrison to enforce sovereignty over the Amphitrite Group. France immediately occupied the Crescent Group, as it had laid claim to the entire archipelago in the 1930s in the name of its colony of French Indochina. In 1974 Beijing launched a naval operation to expel the Vietnamese from the Crescent Group, which it succeeded in doing after a naval engagement with forces from the erstwhile South Vietnam. As regards the Spratly Islands, the sovereignty demands began before World War II with a claim along the lines of that involving the Paracels by France, which in practice was confined to the setting up of weather stations. In 1945 the Republic of China claimed the whole archipelago following the Japanese with-

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<sup>(7)</sup> See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. *Historical Evidence to Support China's Sovereignty over Nansha Islands*, 17-11-2000, available at <http://www.fmprc.cn/eng/topics/3754/t19231.htm>.

Figure 15.2



drawal by sending a warship to occupy Taiping<sup>(8)</sup> (Itu Aba on English charts), the largest and only inhabitable island; since 1988 the People’s Republic of China has occupied several islets and reefs such as Cuarteron, Gaven (Burgos on Philippine charts) and *Mischief*, occupied in 1995. The Philippines annexed

<sup>(8)</sup> The island is termed by the Philippines as Ligao and by Vietnam as Ba Binh.

the archipelago in 1978, occupying the islands of Thitu (Pagasa) and West York (Likas). Vietnam has had military garrisons on numerous islands and islets since 1975, while Malaysia has too since 1980. For its part Brunei claims the waters around Louisa Reef, although it does not occupy any geographical feature.

### ■ Geopolitics in the South China Sea

It is in fact the South China Sea which represents the predominant geographical feature in southeast Asia. Around its edge converge the 650 million inhabitants of Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan, which are joined by China's population of 1.3 billion. A huge concentration of humanity which meets the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent through the Strait of Malacca, making this sea the gathering place for the world's largest hub of population. Additionally, in its immediate vicinity are to be found some of the world's largest economies — China and Japan, which are second and third ranked, and, together with Taiwan and Korea, are completely dependent on this sea as the corridor through which to transport goods and energy supplies, without which their industries would be unable to function.

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The South China Sea connects with the Indian Ocean via the Strait of Malacca, through which pass 66,000 ships a year, which is about half the world's tonnage, and some 14 million barrels of crude oil per day<sup>(9)</sup>, approximately 70% of the energy import supplies of South Korea, 60% of those of Japan and Taiwan, and 80% of those for China<sup>(10)</sup>. The Strait of Malacca between Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular has a narrower passing point of only 1.7 NM opposite the island-state of Singapore, which turns it into a bottleneck. A blockade of the Strait of Malacca would force the maritime traffic to make a diversion towards the straits of Sunda, between the islands of Sumatra and Java, and Lombok, which separates the islands of Bali and Lombok. Both straits can easily be blocked and lie in Indonesian waters<sup>(11)</sup>.

The South China Sea also represents a geographical area that is inevitable for projecting military might over East Asia and controlling East Asia's seafaring traffic. Through its waters one can access China's coastal shorelines and the East China Sea, where the main ports, and industrial, and population centres of the Far East are to be found, for which reason control of the South China Sea is vital if one is to manage to block the lanes of the sea traffic travelling

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<sup>(9)</sup> According to «World Oil Transit Choke Points» US Energy Information Administration, February 2011. Available at [http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Choke\\_points/Background.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Choke_points/Background.html).

<sup>(10)</sup> See LABORIE, Mario. *Tensions in the South China Sea*, Madrid, IIEE, 30-07-2012.

<sup>(11)</sup> The freedom of transit regime applies to these straits used by international shipping, as according to Part III of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982.

to and from the ports in this part of the world. The guarantee of the freedom to navigate through these waters has thus become a security requirement for those nations that depend on the sea traffic which passes through it, especially for China, a nation whose geography has provided it with a tremendously long coast of over 14,500 km, and a host of ports, but which at the same time has saddled with a precarious strategic situation where all its accesses, to ocean waters are under the control of potential rivals.

## ■ CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT

### ■ Latest Developments

1988 marked the beginning of a set of incidents involving the use of force in the Spratly Islands, when Beijing took possession of an islet in the archipelago for the first time after an armed skirmish between Chinese and Vietnamese boats in Johnson South Reef. In 1995 there was a serious incident between China and the Philippines when it was discovered that Beijing had set up some surveillance towers on Mischief Reef, a shoal within the waters of the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) 130 miles to the west of the Island of Palawan, in an incident which recurred in 1999, when China reinforced its infrastructure on the shoal. After a few years of calm, in March 2009, Chinese civilian vessels harassed the US surveillance ship USNS Impeccable 50 miles southeast of the Island of Hainan. In May 2011 Chinese ships cut the cables of the prospection equipment that belonged to South the Vietnamese oil exploration ship BINH MINH 02 80 miles East off the coast of Vietnam and 600 miles to the south of the coast of Hainan. In June there was a similar incident between Chinese ships and a Norwegian scientific ship hired by the Vietnamese state company Petro Vi, in waters of the EEZ claimed by Vietnam. That same year, between April and July, there were a series of incidents in quick succession between the Philippines and China in Scarborough Shoal (Masinloc<sup>(12)</sup> for the Philippines), a sandbank opposite Luzon which is not part of the Spratly archipelago, which gave rise to an escalation of tension between both countries, interrupted by the providential arrival of typhoon Butchoy, which forced the withdrawal of the ships in the zone, although China then went on to set up a territorial administration for the islands and the Central Military Committee ordered the establishment of a standing military garrison<sup>(13)</sup>.

### ■ The Expansion of Chinese Interests

China is currently in a process of expanding its naval capabilities on the way to becoming a major sea power, something which stems from a new perception of Beijing's interests, as a result of the enormous increase in its economic,

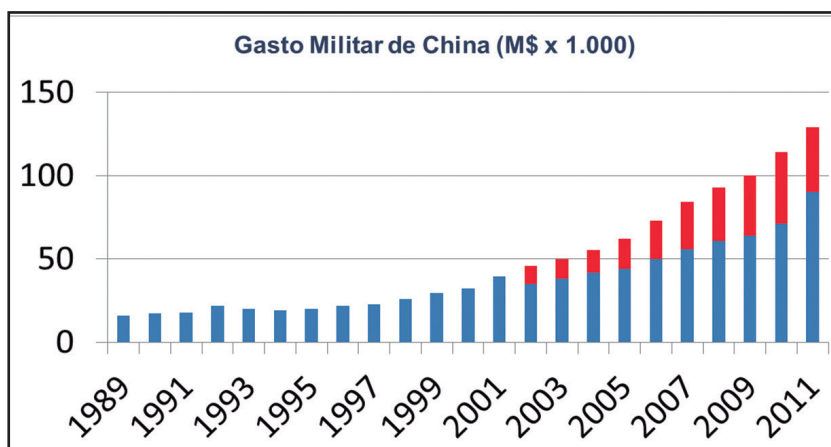
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<sup>(12)</sup> The Philippines know the Scarborough Shoal as Bajo Masinloc, in the original Spanish, indicating that it was shown thus on Spanish charts since the 18th century.

<sup>(13)</sup> *China to formally garrison disputed South China Sea*, REUTERS, Beijing, 22-07-2012.

political and military power in the last few decades, and which particularly affects its seafaring front. As Robert Kagan says, «with new power come new ambitions»<sup>(14)</sup>. A radical change to how China has historically satisfied its geopolitical imperatives, by focusing its resources on maintaining the cohesion of the Han nucleus of its population, and on defending its inland borders. However, now its enormous economy, integrated within the global system, allows it to enjoy great international influence, while the resources it generates permit China to step up its level of ambition. Beijing, with its land-based borders secure for the first time since the beginning of the modern age, is turning toward the maritime, where it faces a twin strategic challenge: on the one hand, it has pretensions to securing its seaward flank, by setting up a safety buffer around it<sup>(15)</sup>, while on the other hand it aspires to controlling the lanes for its maritime trade, and the routes through which energy supplies and raw materials, which supply its industry and are essential to ensuring the continuity of China's development path.

Figure 15.3



Fuente: Military Expenditure Data Base Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2012

Responding to this double challenge forces Beijing to devise a maritime strategy to project its growing naval power in the South and East China Seas and from there reach the Indian Ocean via the straits of Malacca and Sunda, and the Western Pacific through the straits of Luzon and the Ryu Kyu Islands. An expansion

<sup>(14)</sup> Ibid. 3, p. 17.

<sup>(15)</sup> Chinese strategists have established a series of chains of islands which mark out the maritime perimeter which China has pretensions to controlling as its naval power expands. The «first chain of islands» comprises the waters between the Chinese shoreline and the Japanese archipelago, the Ryu Kyu islands, Taiwan, the Philippines and the Indonesian archipelago, taking in the whole of the South China Sea, while the «second chain of islands» extends the perimeter to the Mariana islands and Guam, fanning out towards the southeast to New Guinea. See LI, Nan. *The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From «Near Coast» and «Near Seas» to «Far Seas»*, *Asian Security*, 5: 2, 144 – 169, 2009.

process which, as the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) grows<sup>(16)</sup>, has an increasingly great effect on the balance of power in East Asia and therefore augments the risk of potential conflicts between Beijing and the Asian seafaring nations, and naturally the USA, whose navy has the capacity to blockade Chinese maritime traffic and has bases around China, in Japan, Korea and Guam.

The Chinese naval expansion in the South China Sea is presumably designed to gradually take control of the islands, atolls and shoals, so as to ensure it holds sway over the seabed's natural resources, and even more importantly, to consolidate its strategic presence. Beijing has tried to secure this goal by sticking to its position of rejecting the claims of other parties while pursuing an approach to the problem that, leaving aside issues of sovereignty, lays emphasis on the joint development of natural resources by China and the other parties, to dampen the risk of conflict, which is something it had to avoid while its naval capability was still weak. Beijing also sought to deal with each of the parties individually and avoid a united bloc forming that might limit its power. China has also tried to keep the handling of incidents that have arisen since the 1980s within the scope of its civil maritime agencies, so as to keep a low profile<sup>(17)</sup>, proof of which is that in most such events Beijing has only used ships belonging to these civil maritime agencies, and kept the PLAN from becoming involved<sup>(18)</sup>.

Any abandonment of the containment line which Beijing has maintained so far, by attempting to impose its territorial claims on coastal nations by force, would mean that the situation would become especially critical on the grounds of the sovereignty issue. Therefore any incident linked to exploiting fishing or energy resources, such as those that happened in June 2012 in waters around Scarborough Shoal, could easily trigger a regional conflict. Beijing's historic claim to sovereignty of 90% of the South China Sea makes it very difficult to achieve a compromise to put an end to the dispute between Beijing and the other parties concerned, which transforms this into a potentially dangerous scenario as it is precisely in this sea where China needs to make its status as a great regional power count, and doing so, faces the risk that its neighbours could «evolve into a balance of power based on equilibrating threats»<sup>(19)</sup>. Chinese claims to waters in the South China Sea, such as those it has in other territories such as Taiwan, appeal to the nationalism of the Chinese people, which to a large ex-

<sup>(16)</sup> Different newspaper reports point to the commissioning in August 2012 of the first Chinese aircraft carrier, the former *Varyag*, purchased from Ukraine in 1998 and modernised at the Dalian shipyards, China. See *New carrier, new war scenarios*, Asian Times, Honolulu, 12-07-2012, available at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/NG12Ad01.html>

<sup>(17)</sup> Until only recently over a decade of Chinese expansion has managed to keep a low profile in line with the policy established in the 80s by Deng Xiaoping and which is reflected in his phrase «keep a cool head, a low profile (outwardly), don't take the initiative, but aim high».

<sup>(18)</sup> China has used military force on only two occasions: in taking the Paracels in 1974 and in the attack on Johnson South Reef in 1988, on both occasions against Vietnam.

<sup>(19)</sup> KISSINGER, Henry. *On China*, London: Penguin Books, 2011, p. 514.



tent has replaced Communist doctrine as the ideological base of the system<sup>(20)</sup>, by presenting these waters as part of Chinese territory, any compromise could be seen by public opinion as a climb-down, making it indignant and undermining the solidity of the Beijing regime. On the other hand any action by Beijing regarding the dispute that seeks to confirm its position and is aimed at public consumption would have the effect of stirring up the situation in relation to the other parties in the quarrel. China has thus probably let itself become caught between «a rock and a hard place» as regarding to the issue, so it has no other long term option than to try to gain control over the South China Sea, which is something that Beijing will without doubt try to delay, at least until it becomes the dominant air and naval power in the region.

### ■ The Approach of the Coastal Nations

Up to the beginning of the last decade the general approach of those nations with claims to the archipelagos and waters in the South China Sea — Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and China — was to be openly competitive; it was almost exclusively oriented towards stepping up their individual presence and control with regard to the most salient geographical features, which left very little room for compromise. Nonetheless, China's huge claim to almost the whole of the waters contained within the «nine-dotted line», the increasingly apparent expansion of its power in the region and a more hard-line response to incidents in the area, has produced the effect that, while the coastal nations maintain the full extent of their sovereignty claims in the area, they are trying to force Beijing to accept a multilateral approach to the disputes.

In 1995 China acceded for the first time to tackle the issues concerning the South China Sea with ASEAN<sup>(21)</sup> and, as a result of the subsequent round of talks, in November 2002 a declaration was signed on the conduct of the parties concerned (DOC), in which China and the ASEAN countries pledged to act with restraint and avoid taking any action that might complicate or escalate the disputes. They likewise undertook measures to boost trust, and respect freedom of navigation and overflight rights, as it established in the UN convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The DOC has however languished without any headway being made into applying its principles, while the number of incidents in the area has only increased in recent years. The escalation in tension last June concerning Scarborough Shoal led the region's nations to press ahead with an agreement on a Code of Conduct (CC) for the South China Sea, as part of the trust-boosting measures stated in the DOC. It appears that ASEAN and China managed to arrive at a commitment regarding the CC, although this

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<sup>(20)</sup> SHIRK, Susan L. *China: Fragile Superpower*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 62-64.

<sup>(21)</sup> ASEAN, which stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was founded in 1967 with the aims of speeding up economic growth and fomenting regional peace and stability. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Cambodia are current members.

was not made public due to disagreement on the final communiqué on the meeting, which is something that was viewed as an attempt by Beijing to weaken ASEAN's role as a multilateral forum for resolving disputes<sup>(22)</sup>. It should be noted here that the UNCLOS would only apply to demarcating waters and the EEZs when disputes over islands have been resolved.

Figure 15.4



The coastal nations and the whole of southeast Asia have also reacted to the perception of Beijing's increasing military power and their willingness to use it, both by asking the United States to take a bigger hand and match China's expansion in Southeast Asia, and by pursuing programmes to acquire air and sea capabilities to offset the step-up in Chinese power. Even though they have enjoyed a period of stability and sustained growth since the 1997 crisis, the Southeast Asian nations have been incapable of modernising their armed forces in step with China. The latter has, over the same period not only brought its military capabilities up-to-date, but it has also shifted its strategic employment mind-set from armed forces for territorial defence to a model capable of projecting power in its seaward periphery. A particularly striking case is the Philippines, which has neglected its air and sea capabilities in recent decades, and devoted the most important part of its military efforts to counter-insurgency operations. The Southeast Asian countries are thus trying to make up for lost time by sharply increasing their defence budgets (see Table II, geopolitical

<sup>(22)</sup> See THAYER, Carlyle A. *Code of Conduct in the South China Sea Undermined by ASEAN Disarray*, US Naval Institute Press, 19 07 2012, available at <http://www.usni.org/>.

indicators) and embarking on programmes to modernise their forces<sup>(23)</sup>. Notable here are: the acquisition by Malaysia of «SCORPENE» class submarines; Vietnam's purchase from Russia of six «KILO» class submarines, for delivery between 2014 and 2017, two «GEPARD» class frigates equipped with SS-N-25 anti-ship missiles, supersonic anti-ship missile systems SS-N-26 «YAKHONT» and modern Su-30MKV fighter aircraft; the Philippines has acquired old US Coastguard patrol boats for its dismantled fleet, while its Air Force has a programme underway to equip itself with modern fighter-bombers<sup>(24)</sup>.

## ■ THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS

### ■ The presence of the USA in Asia and strategic interests

The major factor defining the balance of power in Asia since the end of World War II is the US military presence in the Far East where, in the words of Defence Secretary Gates, Washington is a «resident power»<sup>(25)</sup>. The presence is underpinned by a system of bilateral alliances and security agreements with the region's nations, which provide bases to station US forces, those most longstanding and foremost are with South Korea, Australia and Japan, all of which came into being following World War II, whereas the association with other Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand or Singapore dates from a while later, and lastly Washington's rapprochement to nations such as Vietnam or India can trace its strategic grounds to China's military resurgence. Its presence in Asia has also been in the US national interest<sup>(26)</sup> since 1898 when it received the islands in the Philippines and Guam from Spain. The advanced military deployment in the Far East does not merely guarantee access to continental Asia, but it also provides a mainstay for the US strategic interest of ensuring both: freedom to navigate on the world's seas and oceans, and control over sea accesses to North America. Hence the unavoidable need on the part of USA to stand up to Chinese pretensions of recognition of the waters in the South China Sea within the «nine-dotted line» as territorial waters, a sovereign area, and to Beijing's demand<sup>(27)</sup> of authorisation to be required for foreign naval vessels through its territorial waters and EEZ<sup>(28)</sup>.

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<sup>(23)</sup> Information according to (2012): Chapter Six: Asia, *The Military Balance*, 112:1, 205-302

<sup>(24)</sup> CHANG, Felix K. *China's Naval Rise and the South China Sea: An Operational Assessment*, FPRI, Washington, 2011.

<sup>(25)</sup> The term «resident power» applied to the presence of the United States in Asia was used for the first time by Defense Secretary Robert Gates during his participation in the Shangri-La talks in Singapore in June 2008.

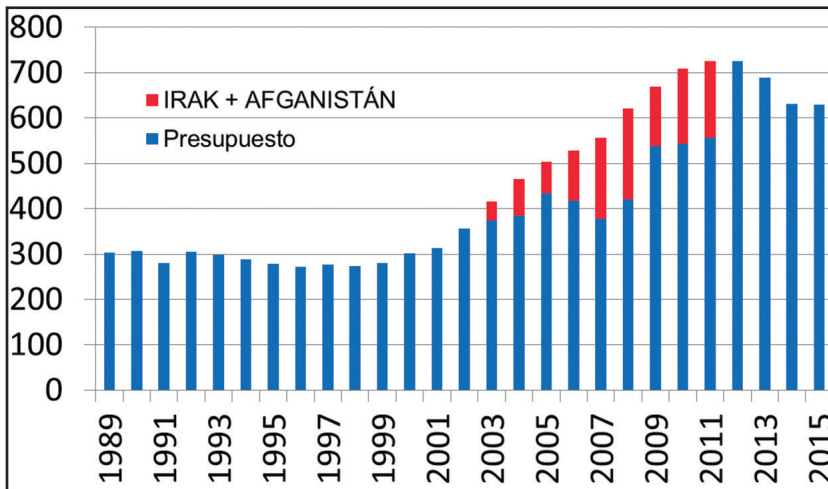
<sup>(26)</sup> See HOLMES, James R. and Yoshihara, T. *Mahan's Lingerin Ghost*, USNI Proceedings Magazine, 12-2009.

<sup>(27)</sup> See the details of Chinese pretensions in US Department of Defense. *Maritime Claims Reference Manual (DoD 2005. 1-M)*, 23 06 2005, p. 126-130.

<sup>(28)</sup> In Part II, Section 3, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 establishes and defines the right to innocent passage through territorial waters, including for warships, and in Part V, article 58, recognises the freedom of navigation and overflight regarding EEZ waters.

Over the years when US strategic attention was focused on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, China continued to boost its military, economic and political power until it reached, where the regional balance in East Asia, which came into being after World War II, became unsustainable in current terms, and, the growth of Beijing's relative power has profoundly changed the perception of the whole of Asian geopolitics. Washington therefore needs to reconsider the terms of its presence in the region, particularly its military presence, which requires the redeployment of its forces on a global scale, this is something already described in the strategic defence guidelines — «we shall of necessity rebalance (the deployment of US forces) towards the Asia-Pacific region»<sup>(29)</sup>. Thus the United States is carrying out an ambitious shift of military capabilities towards the region which, among other measures, involves: investing 15 billion dollars in upgrading installations on the island of Guam<sup>(30)</sup>; the agreement signed by president Obama during his visit to Australia in November 2011 for the joint use of the bases in Darwin, Northern Territory<sup>(31)</sup> and; a possible return of US naval forces to the Philippines<sup>(32)</sup>, after abandoning the Clark air base and the Subic Bay naval station, the old Spanish Navy Arsenal at Olongapo, in 1991, as well as the deployment in Singapore of a squadron of «Littoral Combat Ships (LCS)»<sup>(33)</sup>. These are steps which reveal Washington's

**Figure 15.5. US Military Expenditure and forecast**



Fuente: Military Expenditure Data Base Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2012

<sup>(29)</sup> Department of Defense United States of America. *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, Washington, 05 01 2012, p. 2.

<sup>(30)</sup> HOLSLAG, Jonathan (2010). *Chapter Two: Engaging the Hegemon*, Adelphi Papers, 50: 416, p. 33

<sup>(31)</sup> See A US Marine Base for Australia Irritates China, New York Times, 16 11 2011.

<sup>(32)</sup> See Philippines may allow greater US military presence in reaction to China's rise, The Washington Post, 25 01 2012

<sup>(33)</sup> See Navy's next stop in Asia will set China on edge, The Washington Post, 18 11 2011.

commitment to regional security, although naturally their primary justification is the US national interest, however they must be accompanied by maintenance and an increase, in the level of forces currently, in east and southeast Asia (mainly naval and air), as this theatre is predominantly maritime by nature.

Although the US air-sea effort in East Asia could have major limitations, as the USA has to make cuts in public spending to bring down its huge fiscal deficit. These cuts are already affecting major military programmes, such as the fifth generation F-22 RAPTOR fighter aircraft, where only 183 planes have been built, with their production ending in 2011, due to the soaring costs associated to them<sup>(34)</sup>. On the other hand, the US Navy's construction programme, with a requirement of over 320 warships, aircraft carriers, amphibious slips, submarines, destroyers, cruisers and logistical support ships<sup>(35)</sup> envisages the building of a total of 276 ships up to 2040. However the Congress Budget Office (CBO) has expressed doubts as to the feasibility of Navy's plan<sup>(36)</sup>, estimating the average annual cost of funding this programme at some 19 billion dollars (at 2010 constant currency levels), which would necessitate a rise in the Navy's annual budget for naval construction of 3.1 billion dollars throughout the entire period.

The limited availability of ships currently by the US Navy means that it will be impossible in the near future to match Beijing's growing power in the South China Sea<sup>(37)</sup>. However, the simultaneous emergence of future security challenges in the Far East and the Persian Gulf region, identified by former Defence Secretary Gates<sup>(38)</sup> as predominantly «sea and air, whether in Asia, the Middle East or in any other part», could lead to overstretching of the steadily shrinking number of warships available, thereby placing at risk not only the US Navy's ability to exert an influence on a global scale, but also Washington's military primacy around Asia, which is vital to ensuring its strategic security interests.

#### ■ The Position of Japan, Korea, Australia and India

The South China Sea is the big hub linking flows of seagoing trade around the whole of Asia's maritime geography, and it is therefore an area of priority stra-

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<sup>(34)</sup> The total cost of the programme works out at over 77 billion dollars, for a total number of 188 items. See United States Government Accountability Office (US GAO). *Report to Congressional Committees Defense Acquisitions, Assessments of Selected Weapon Programs* (GAO-11-233SP), 03 2011, p. 140.

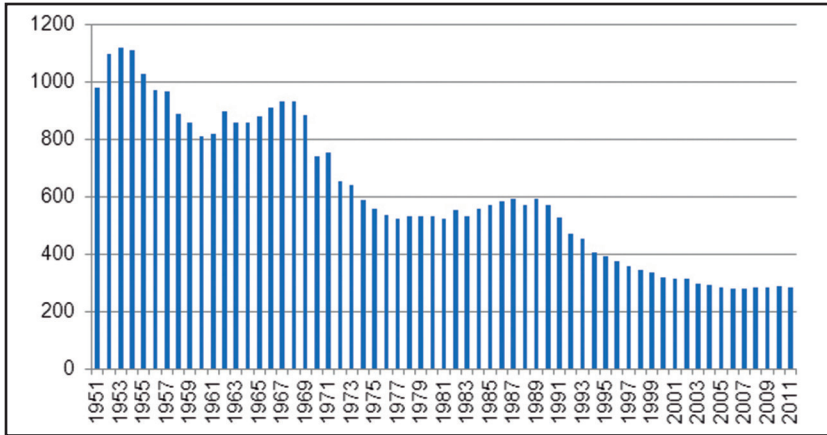
<sup>(35)</sup> Data according to the Department of the Navy. «*Report to the Congress on Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for FY 2011*», Washington, 02 2010, available at <http://www.militarytimes.com/static/projects/pages/2011shipbuilding.pdf>

<sup>(36)</sup> Data according to the Congressional Budget Office, Congress of the United States (2010). *An Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2011 Shipbuilding Plan*, Washington 2010.

<sup>(37)</sup> See HERNÁNDEZ-ECHEVARRÍA, Carlos. *The US Navy is growing in the Pacific to control China*, General Navy Magazine, 06 2012, p. 829 – 832.

<sup>(38)</sup> From the speech by Defense Secretary Robert Gates at the West Point military academy on 25th February 2011. Available at <http://www.stripes.com/news/text-of-secretary-of-defense-robert-gates-feb-25-2011-speech-at-west-point-1.136145>.

Figure 15.6. Historic. U.S. Navy's siphns. 1951-2011



Fuente: U.S. Navy Active Ship Force Level 1886-present Naval History&Heritage Command, 2011

tegic interest for the Asian powers of India, Japan and Korea, besides for all the coastal nations and, naturally, for Australia, whose sea traffic reaches the South China Sea through the straits in the Indonesian archipelago. All these countries need to have guaranteed freedom of navigation in the waters around Asia, for which reason they share a common strategic interest in maintaining the current status quo, and avoiding or delaying Beijing's access to effective control over the waters of this sea.

The case of Japan is especially significant, as it is even more dependent on sea trade than China, for this reason Tokyo is not just concerned with maintaining the current situation in the seas around Asia, but is also engaged in a similar dispute with Beijing in the waters of the East China Sea regarding sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu archipelago and the extension of the EEZ of the Ryu Kyu archipelago. Although there is a big difference between the two disputes owing to Tokyo's greater relative power, Japan is the third largest economic power in the world and very close to China, besides its possession of what is held to be the second biggest navy in the world, the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF). In addition to this, relations between Beijing and Tokyo are particularly strained due to periodic outbreaks of anti-Japanese violence, sometimes incited by the Chinese leadership itself, which benefits from manipulating the population's nationalistic feeling<sup>(39)</sup> originating from the huge resentment that still exists in China about the horrendous acts committed by the Japanese during the last war (1937-45)<sup>(40)</sup>.

Japan feels a sense of panic about Chinese vengefulness and responds to the situation by trying to guarantee its defensive alliance with the

<sup>(39)</sup> See *Japan's Options against an Assertive China*, STRATFOR, 18 10 2010, available at [www.stratfor.com/](http://www.stratfor.com/).

<sup>(40)</sup> *Ibid.* 20, p. 171.

USA<sup>(41)</sup>, and maintaining its forces at a level capable of dissuading Beijing from taking any unilateral action. All of this is referred to in the «National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG)» for 2010<sup>(42)</sup>, a document which identifies the growing possibility of conflict due to matters of sovereignty in regional areas and notes concern about China's military modernisation. Likewise the NDPG reinstates the alliance with the USA with its central role in Japan's defence, establishes the need for cooperation with Korea, Australia, India and the ASEAN countries and sets out a programme for stepping up naval capabilities, envisaging a rise in submarine numbers from 16 to 22, the acquisition of two new AEGIS «ATAGO» class destroyers and three «HYUGA» class helicopter destroyers, actually flat through-deck aircraft carriers of 19,000 tons fully loaded.

In the case of Korea the situation is similar to that of Japan, although the country is conditioned to a great extent by the position and relations with North Korea, with which is still formally at war<sup>(43)</sup>. Korea is more than anything an exporter nation and needs to ensure it has access to markets, and raw materials and energy supplies from abroad, most of which enter and leave Korea through the South China Sea, for this reason Seoul has to back measures which guarantee freedom to navigate on this sea. Korea can sustain this stance as long as the presence of US forces in its territory persists and North Korea continues to provide a «buffer» separating it geographically from China. A situation which Beijing<sup>(44)</sup> has a principal interest in cultivating, but which is subject to high volatility, owing to the impoverished economy and unsustainable social system in North Korea, which could well end up in collapse and, as a result of a potential Korean unification, Seoul could be forced to completely redefine its position with respect to the Chinese colossus.

In the case of Australia, which lies in an eccentric position relative to East Asia, though connected to the region through the South China Sea and the Indonesian archipelago, the main concern would be to maintain the current situation<sup>(45)</sup>, where the benefits of trade and exporting raw materials to China are huge<sup>(46)</sup>.

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<sup>(41)</sup> See *Kan Backs US Military Role in Asia*, Wall Street Journal, 14 11 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/>.

<sup>(42)</sup> See *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and beyond*, approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on 17th December 2010, available at [http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/policy/decisions/2010/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/01/27/ndpg\\_e.pdf](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/policy/decisions/2010/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/01/27/ndpg_e.pdf).

<sup>(43)</sup> On 27th July 1953 an armistice was signed putting an end to open hostilities between belligerent parties and creating a demilitarised zone along the boundary of the 38th parallel North.

<sup>(44)</sup> *Ibid.* 19, p. 497.

<sup>(45)</sup> See WHITE, Hugh. *Power Shift: Australia's Future between Washington and Beijing*, Quarterly Essay No. 39, 09 2010.

<sup>(46)</sup> According to official figures the total sum of Australian exports to China was 71,561 million Australian dollars in 2011, of which 44,050 million are exports of iron ore and concentrates. See Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Fact Sheet China*, 2011. available at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/chin.pdf>.

Maintaining the current «status quo» is a remote possibility, as the Chinese challenge to US primacy in East Asia has become genuinely credible and the more likely setting for this to happen would be the South China Sea, whose waters connect Australian trade with Asia. Canberra, like the other nations in the Asia-Pacific region, will have to decide between strengthening its strategic ties with Washington, and the other regional powers, or else taking a neutral stance in connivance with Beijing's interests and allowing Chinese power to expand, while it continues to benefit from trading with Beijing. Although both the 2009 Defence White Paper<sup>(47)</sup>, which defines a naval programme to renovate the navy<sup>(48)</sup>, and the agreement for the use of the Darwin base by US forces illustrate Canberra's concern over Beijing's growing air-sea power and the taking of preventive measures regarding its potential consequences.

In the case of India strategic competition with China covers several aspects, from the territorial disputes on their common border, in the Karakoram and the Himalayas, to issues associated with New Delhi's «Look East» policy<sup>(49)</sup>, which seeks to strengthen strategic ties with the Southeast Asian countries<sup>(50)</sup> and which China perceives as an intrusion by New Delhi into what it considers as its own sphere of influence<sup>(51)</sup>, and which is reciprocated by Indian suspicion over Beijing's support for Pakistan. Likewise the competition between both Asian giants is marked by India's perception of itself as a great power, making it impossible to accept a position of being subordinated to China, which leads New Delhi to feel threatened by any potential penetration by the Chinese navy into the Indian Ocean, where New Delhi needs to expand its naval power to dissuade potential adversaries, and control their access the Indian subcontinent. China considers the Indian Ocean a key arena within the process of securing power for itself<sup>(52)</sup>, especially as it is a source of, and crossed by, the flows of energy it needs to be supplied with.

Beijing's control of the South China Sea, the antechamber of the Indian Ocean, and the potential inclusion of the coastal countries within the Chinese sphere of influence, would allow the PLAN unlimited access to Indian Ocean through the

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<sup>(47)</sup> Australian Government, Department of Defence. *Defence White Paper «Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030»*, 2009.

<sup>(48)</sup> The construction of part of this programme is being carried out in Spain (the amphibious craft (LHD) CANBERRA and ADELAIDE) or with design work and technological input from Spanish companies (three anti-aircraft destroyers (AWD) of the ALVARO DE BAZAN class.

<sup>(49)</sup> The «Look East» policy was begun in 1991 under the Narasimha Rao government and continued by all the subsequent administrations. It represents a strategic change of the first order for New Delhi and constitutes the first move to reconsider India's position on the international stage for the 21st century and will likely be followed by other moves, such as a strategic partnership with the United States.

<sup>(50)</sup> See LADWIG III, Walter C. *Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, «Look East», and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific*, *Asian Security*, 5: 2, 87 – 113, 2009.

<sup>(51)</sup> KAPLAN, Robert D. *The India-China Rivalry*, STRATFOR, 24 04 2012.

<sup>(52)</sup> See LOU, Chunhao. *US-India-China Relations in the Indian Ocean: A Chinese Perspective*, *Strategic Analysis*, 36:4, p. 624-639, 2012.



Strait of Malacca, which means that, for India, limiting Chinese presence and influence in the region is a strategic concern. With its «Look East» strategy New Delhi intends to forge closer links with the coastal nations in the South China Sea, using measures such as the strategic partnership declaration signed in July 2007 between the Hanoi and New Delhi governments<sup>(53)</sup>, joint projects to develop hydrocarbon fields in waters disputed with China, and naval deployments such as the one carried out in June of this year by an Indian naval task group which visited several nations in the area, including China itself, and which was actually intercepted by the PLAN as it crossed the South China Sea<sup>(54)</sup>.

### ■ The Outlook and Possibilities for European Powers

The situation in the South China Sea is viewed with aloofness from Europe, and also with some degree of perplexity, as the Europe of today has been built with the intention of overcoming the kind of geopolitical confrontation that drove the continent into two disastrous World Wars, and which has given rise to a new European order which seeks to transcend power-based relationships between nations and «should be a model for a world modelled on the European Union in which Europe would be strong»<sup>(55)</sup>. Nonetheless the reality in East Asia is that China's rise means a return of geopolitics, and that the potential conflicts in the South China Sea are shaped by geopolitics. Something hard for the European mind-set to understand and which makes it unlikely that Europe will become embroiled in the region's conflicts in any other sphere beyond the diplomatic. Even were there to be any such wish, nowadays the European maritime powers lack the naval capabilities required to exert any influence in the region<sup>(56)</sup>, and here it is significant to point out the surprising scaling down of Britain's Royal Navy, which was until only recently the second most powerful navy in the world and which is now ranked third or fourth among Europe's most powerful navies<sup>(57)</sup>.

The European nations do however have a principal interest in the South China Sea and this is none other than the freedom of navigation through its waters

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<sup>(53)</sup> Available at <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/nr040807104143/nr040807105001/ns070709091229>.

<sup>(54)</sup> See *In South China Sea, a surprise Chinese escort for Indian ships*, India Defence News, 14 06 2012, available at <http://indiandefencenews.in/in-south-china-sea-surprise-chinese-escort-indian-ships/>.

<sup>(55)</sup> *Ibid.* 3, p. 21.

<sup>(56)</sup> At the time of writing of this chapter the only aircraft carrier with a catapult available in Europe is France's «CHARLES DE GAULLE».

<sup>(57)</sup> The UK's «Strategic Defence and Security Review» (SDSR) of 2010 has resulted in a more substantial scaling down of the number of ships in Britain's Royal Navy, up to now the biggest in Europe, and the phasing out of capabilities such as on-board fixed-wing aircraft, which are fundamental for naval power projection. This capability will be restored in around 2020 when the second of the two new aircraft carriers under construction comes into service, taking on board F-35 (JSF) fighter-bombers, at which time the first of the two vessels will take on low enlistment status. The SDSR is available at <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/StrategicDefenceAndSecurityReviewPublished.htm>.

which allows goods to flow between two of the world's major economic regions, Europe and East Asia. Preserving the freedom to navigate is precisely one of the interests which the European maritime powers share in common with the USA, with whom the Europeans have a vital interest in maintaining a strategic coupling. So it is perhaps unlikely that we will in the future see deployments of European navies on the seas of East Asia, a region where European strategic security interests might not be strictly in line with those of Washington, although the European nations may contribute to the shared interest of freedom of navigation by plugging the gaps on the seas which the US Navy leaves behind as it shifts its capabilities from the Atlantic and Mediterranean towards the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, in spite of Washington's lack of faith in the ability of its European allies to cover the empty strategic spaces that will gradually emerge as the USA redeploys<sup>(58)</sup>.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The feuds in the South China Sea have no easy remedy, because of their predominantly geopolitical nature, which has to do with China's rise being so influential upon them, as well as they are regarding a competition for energy and fishing resources, which is also a feature of the conflict and which, at any moment, also due to the enormous emotional charge which such disputes awaken among the populations of the nations involved, could well become the trigger for a show of force by one, or other, of the parties involved. Something which in principle is in everybody's interest to avoid, as both China and the other countries in the dispute stand to benefit from the mutual trade, and also with the rest of the world, most of which passes through the South China Sea. Nevertheless, the steady increase in Beijing's power is starting to shift the strategic balance in East Asia and causing China to act with an increasingly heavy hand and belligerence in the disputes with the nations about that sea, all of this has a formidable impact on the stability of security in the region, whose center of geopolitical gravity lies in the South China Sea.

The United States perceives China's ascent, as with all the powers in the area, as a change in the paradigm of security in the Asia-Pacific region, where, for many decades now, Washington has been the predominant military power. The end of the preponderance of US military power as guarantor of the security and stability in Asia would bring about an enormously powerful China. This country would surely establish a sphere of interest in the region over which it would exercise more or less beneficial patronage and which would embrace the

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<sup>(58)</sup> Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned in his speech on the future of NATO at the Atlantic Council meeting on 10th June 2011 in Brussels of the dangers to the cohesion of the alliance of the limited military capabilities of the European allies and their reluctance to participate with significant forces in allied military operations. The speech is available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2011/06/10/transcript-of-defense-secretary-gates-speech-on-natos-future/>.

entire Far East. A situation which the countries in the area would not easily accept, and which would also endanger the control over the Oceans around Asia enjoyed by the US Navy, and by extension Washington's ability to access to the continent. It is precisely the awareness of this possibility that means that both, the nations in Southeast Asia and Japan are trying to get the United States even more committed to maintaining the balance of power in Asia, while India and Australia are also trying to strengthen their strategic ties with Washington and their air-sea capabilities.

A situation which is still a long way from resembling a mechanism to contain China, and which for the moment is nothing more than a limited reply to China's build-up of air-sea power, which is still limited and which one should not compare against just that of the United States. Any power equation should also factor in Japan's formidable naval capability, as well as other very substantial ones. The result of this is not very favourable for Beijing, which is another reason to expect restraint on China's part. The problem for the United States, and its regional allies, is precisely to maintain the delicate balance between deploying forces in the region and keeping up a strategic advantage, able to dissuade China from resorting to military power, without prompting Beijing to perceive the deployment as an imminent threat, and deciding as a result to step up its military power even more. Such a reaction would be bound to lead to the adoption of a mechanism, whether formal or not, to contain China and thus to raise tension in the area.

It is actually this concern to avoid an open conflict in the region, which would have grave consequences for the entire world. This means that the parties involved may continue to behave with restraint, even China, which will without doubt continue to try to beef up its presence in the South China Sea with military deployments and using units of its civil services to reinforce sovereignty claims, all of that in order to arouse the patriotic sentiment of the Chinese people, and which Beijing's Communist government can only give up, as in the case of Taiwan, at the cost of renouncing to its legitimacy. While it remains possible, in other words, as long as China's power is still limited, the other coastal countries will continue to try and involve Beijing in negotiations in multilateral framework, although these are unlikely to prove conclusive due to China's extant position of dealing with disputes its neighbours bilaterally.

As far as the European nations are concerned, it is hard to imagine participation in combined military deployments in the South China Sea, or other neighbouring scenarios, as European national interests are very varied with respect to relations with China, and the naval capabilities available to send over to the region are really limited. Nevertheless strategic security interests to include and coincide with those of Washington as regards freedom of navigation on the seas around Asia, and maintaining its strategic alliance with the USA is also a

priority for Europe, for that reason it is sound to believe that the European maritime powers will back up the US redeployment toward the Asia-Pacific region by covering the seas and oceans where the US naval presence is scaled down, and where this is not interpreted as an open threat to Beijing, the Indian Ocean being the most suitable space for this. For this to happen it is required that Europe manages to overcome the current crisis, which takes up all of its strategic attention, and avoids its gradual slide towards international irrelevance.

The outlook for the future of the disputes in the South China Sea points to controlled tension, since nobody stands to gain from overt confrontation, as for the time being the losses for all those involved would far outweigh any possible benefits. The South China Sea is however an area which is right at the centre of the new world geopolitical scene, and both China and the United States have to control it to establish their strategic supremacy in East Asia. Thus in the near future we could continue to see actions aimed at strengthening the presence of the parties in those waters, which is something that does not have to necessarily mean a clash between China and the United States, and its allies, if the countries concerned act with a sense of realism and restraint, and avoid maximalist postures. Although this goes beyond the situation described here and is something that falls to the leaders of the powers with interests in the South China Sea to solve.

## ■ CHRONOLOGY

**Table 15.1. Timeline of the conflict**

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
16th century	Presence of European maritime powers in the region
1683	The Qing dynasty in China conquers Taiwan
1898	Spain cedes the Philippines and Guam to the USA
1931	France claims the Paracelsus and Spratly archipelagos for Indochina
1933	French meteorological stations are established in Spratly
1935	The Republic of China claims sovereignty over Spratly
1940	Japan occupies Indochina
1945	The Republic of China claims Spratly and occupies the island of Tai-ping (Itu Aba)
1946	The Republic of China occupies Woody Island in the Paracelsus, Amphritrite group France re-takes the Crescent Group in the Paracelsus islands
1947	The Kuomintang government in China establishes the "11 dotted line"
1949	Communist victory in the Chinese civil war.
1953	The People's Republic of China defines the "nine dotted line"
1956	Cloma, a Philippine, takes possession of Kalayaan Territory in the Spratly islands
1974	China forcibly removes Vietnam from the Crescent Group, Paracelsus islands
1975	Vietnam establishes several military garrisons in the Spratly islands
1978	The Philippines formally annexes the Spratly islands under the name Kalayaan
1979	Malaysia lays claim to the Spratly islands
1984	Brunei lays claim to the Louisa Reef area of the Spratly islands
1988	China forcibly removes Vietnam from the South Johnson Reef, Spratly
1995	China installs watchtowers in Mischief Reef, there is an incident with the Philippines China agrees to negotiate affairs of the South China Sea with ASEAN
1999	Re-occurrence of the incidents in Mischief Reef
2002	Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea between ASEAN and China
2005	Vietnamese fishermen die in an incident with the Chinese maritime police
2009	Chinese warships harass USNS Impeccable at 50 mn to the SE of Hainan

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT	
DATE	EVENTS
2011	Chinese units interrupt prospection by the Vietnamese ship BINH MINH 02
	Chinese warships harass a Norwegian ship hired by Petro Vietnam
2012	Serious incident between China and the Philippines in Scarborough Shoal
	China formally establishes military garrisons in the Spratly islands

**Table 15.2. Geopolitical indicators. (Sources: CIA The World Factbook and The Military Balance\*)**

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		BRUNEI	MALAYSIA	PHILIPPINES	VIETNAM	TAIWAN	CHINA
Area KM2		5765(173°)	329,847 (67°)	300.000 (73°)	331,210 (66°)	35,980 (139°)	9,596,961 (4°)
GDP (PPP) M\$		21,240 (126°)	453,000 (30°)	395,400 (33°)	303,800 (42°)	887,300 (20°)	11,440,000 (3°)
G D P structure of active population	Agriculture	0,8%	12%	12,8%	22%	1,3%	10,1%
	Industry	66,7%	40%	31,5%	40,3%	32%	46,8%
	Services	32,5%	48%	55,7%	37,7%	66,9%	43,1%
GDP per capita (PPP) \$		50.000 (9°)	15.800 (77°)	4.100 (160°)	3.400 (166°)	38.200 (27°)	8.500 (121)
GDP growth rate		1,9%	5,1% (65°)	3,7% (102°)	5,9% (45°)	4% (98°)	9,2% (10)
% Unemployment		2,7% (22°)	3,1% (27°)	7% (80°)	2,3% (19°)	4,4% (44°)	6,5% (70)
Trade relations: Imports		Singapore 33.2%, China 15.5%, South Korea 12.2%, Malaysia 10.7%, Germany 9.6%	Singapore 20.5%, China 13.7%, Japan 10%, US 7.9%, Thailand 6%, Indonesia 5.6%	China 14.6%, Japan 12.3%, US 9.4%, South Korea 8.4%, Singapore 8%, Thailand 5.6%, Indonesia 4.1%	China 22%, South Korea 13.2%, Japan 10.4%, Taiwan 8.6%, Thailand 6.4%, Singapore 6.4%	Japan 20.7%, China 14.2%, US 10%, South Korea 6.4%, Saudi Arabia 4.7%	Japan 11.2%, South Korea 9.3%, USA 6.8%, Germany 5.3%, Australia 4.6%
Trade relations: Exports		Japan 45.6%, South Korea 16.5%, Australia 11.8%, Indonesia 8.4%, India 4.8%, China 4.6%	China 17.9%, Singapore 12.8%, Japan 10.6%, USA 8.6%, Thailand 4.4%, Hong Kong 4.1%	China 21.3%, Japan 14.1%, USA 13.9%, Singapore 8.9%, Hong Kong 7.5%, South Korea 4.7%	USA 18%, China 11%, Japan 11%, Germany 3.7%	China 28.1%, Hong Kong 13.8%, USA 11.5%, Japan 6.6%, Singapore 4.4%	USA 17.1%, Hong Kong 14.1%, Japan 7.8%, South Korea 4.4%, Germany 4%
Population		4 0 8 . 7 8 6 (175°)	29.179.952 (43°)	103.775.002 (12°)	91.519.289 (14°)	23.113.901 (51°)	1.343.239.923 (1°)
% Urban population		76%	72%	49%	30%	69,94%	47%

TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS		BRUNEI	MALAYSIA	PHILIPPINES	VIETNAM	TAIWAN	CHINA
Structure.	0-14	25,5%	29,6%	34,6%	25,2%	15,6%	17,6%
	15-64	70,9%	65,4%	61,1%	69,3%	73,4%	73,6%
age	Over 65	3,5%	5%	4,3%	5,5%	10,9%	8,9%
Population growth rate		1,691%	1,542%	1.873%	1,054%	0,171%	0.481%
Ethnic groups		Malays 66.3%, Chinese 11.2%, indigenous 3.4%, other 19.1%	Malays 50.4%, Chinese 23.7%, indigenous 11%, Indians 7.1%,	Tagalos 28,1%, cebuanos 13,1%, ilocanos 9%, bisayos 7,6%, ilonggoses 7,5%, bikoleses 6%, warayos 3,4%, otros 25.3%	Viet 85,7%,  Tay 1,9%,  Thai 1,8%, Muong 1,5%, Khmer 1,5%, Mong 1,2%, Nung 1,1%, otros 5,3%	Taiwaneses 84%, chinos continentales 14%, indigenas 2%	Chinos Han 91,5%, Zhuang, Manchú, Hui, Miao, Uighures, Tujia, Yi, Mongoles, Tibetanos, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Coreanos y otros 8,5%
Religions		Muslim 67%, Buddhist 13%, Christian 10%, other 10%	Muslim 60.4%, Buddhist 19.2%, Christians 9.1%, Hindu 6.3%, other Chinese religions 2.6%, other 2.3%	Catholics 84.9%, Muslim 5%, Evangelical 2.8%, other Christians 6.8%, other 2.5%	Buddhist 9.3%, Catholic 6-7%, Hoa Hao 1.55, Cao Dai 1.1%, Protestant 0.5%, Muslim 0.1%, no religion 80.8%	Buddhist and Taoist 93%, Christian 4.5%, other 2.5%	Taoist, Buddhist, Christian 3%-4%, Muslim 1%-2%, official atheism
Literacy rate		92,7%	88,7%	92,6%	94%	96,5%	92,4%
Poverty line		-	3,8%	32,9%	14,5%	1,16%	13,4%
Refugees		-	76,120 Burmese	-	-	-	3 0 0 , 8 9 7 Vietnamese, 3 0 , 0 0 0 - 50,000 North Koreans
Displaced persons		-	-	300.000	-	-	90.000
GINI index		-	46,2 (34°)	45.8 (36°)	37.6 (74°)	32.6 (101°)	48% (27°)
Military spending % GDP		4,5% (20°)	2.03% (63°)	0.9% (136°)	2,5% (59)	2,73% (52)	4,3% (21)
Military spending M\$*		404	4.540	2.340	2.660	9.900	89.760
Incrém. Mil. Spend. 2011*		9,4%	33%	9,8%	14%	6,4%	17,5%
Armed forces personnel*		7.000	109.000	125.000	482.000	290.000	2.285.000
Battle ships*		14	66	104	138	150	725
Military aircraft*		33	129	93	352	560	2.186

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