

Notebooks by Armadilla scs Onlus

Syria: after seven years of war ...

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Introduction

Armadilla is a non-profit organization of social utility engaged in the field of international development cooperation. (www.armadilla.coop)

It also carries out training and information activities on the subjects of the 2030 agenda proposed by the United Nations, for the defense of human rights and for the achievement of the 17 objectives for human sustainable development:

<https://www.unric.org/it/agenda-2030>

In this context these Notebooks want to contribute to disseminate among students and the public opinion address to which Armadilla addresses, information, critical analysis, possible answers to problems priorities that are addressed.

The collection of all the Notebooks from 2015 to today can be found at:
<http://armadilla.coop/quaderni/>

In this Notebook we want to update information and analysis on the situation in Syria. Armadilla has been operating since 2006 in international cooperation activities. It has a local partner, the association Zaharet Al Mada'en - ZAM - and collaborates with OCHA, the Coordination Office of the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs and with UNICEF, Otto for Thousand of the Italian Waldensian Church office, Italian Development Cooperation Agency and the Autonomous Province of Trento, for the implementation of a humanitarian assistance program in the Damascus area, which provides aid for foodstuffs and child protection interventions for around 1,200 families affected dramatically from the consequences of the conflict.

In the Damascus area millions of people have been sheltered, forced to leave their homes, trying to escape the violence of the conflict. Together with ZAM, Armadilla manages a social center which in recent months has become a fundamental reference point for families to find support and protection.

Thanks to this project carried out in collaboration with the United Nations Agency, more vulnerable families will receive monthly food kits that will guarantee them a nutritional fundamental contribution, thus improving the conditions of access to food that due to the protracted conflict are becoming more and more dramatic and urgent. The project will also allow the realization of the important psycho-pedagogical support activities for children, which in a more traumatic way they live the consequences of conflict experiencing the sense of disorientation and lack of safety.

The Waldensian Church collaborates with the funds of Otto for Thousand with the Autonomous Province of Trento the Italian Development Cooperation Agency for the humanitarian aid activities that Armadilla is carrying out in Syria in the Damascus area, to give an immediate response to the most urgent needs of the population.

Thanks to this collaboration, Armadilla will support the local partner, ZAM, in its effort to rebuilding peace relations through emergency humanitarian aid and, above all, support psychologically victims of trauma caused by war, family grief and eradication from their community of origin.

The project to support local communities has allowed the continuity of psychosocial support actions to families and in particular to children who have suffered drama in a traumatic way, abandonment of their homes and the sad situation of widespread war.

The reference of existence of an aggregate Community, in a total situation abandonment by public institutions, is already an important result guaranteed by these projects.

Armadilla is also involved with various partners of the Emilia Romagna Region in support and exchange of good practices in the field of Disability and *Occupational Therapy*.

1.Understanding the reason for a war

An entire library is not enough to analyze and describe why the Middle East lives in one permanent conflict status. The causes of war are many and complex and succeed being impartial and intellectually honest is not an easy task. Currently everything seems force to take sides: with whom we are historically allied, with the good against the bad, with whom respects the need for democracy and freedom against genocide dictators. The first in war situations victim is always the truth and no one can ever proclaim innocent or direct responsibility for non-respect of international law.

The propaganda made by the different parties in conflict builds false news or evidence manipulated for blaming the opposing party, in accordance with the geopolitical interests of major regional or world powers, wanting to force everyone to register in a support among the parties and not even consider it for possibility of other options.

To know the history and understand the reasons of geopolitical choices on the part of the world powers of each era can be a good interpretation key.

The end of European colonialism has also led to the creation of nation states in the Middle East without respecting pre-existing territorial sovereignties, the self-determination of people, tribal and religious belongings. The will of the colonial powers prevailed (France and Great Britain) that have with the Sykes-Picot agreements of 1916, artificially born states favoring the contrast between them. They did not help in the second post war in the contrast between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and the division of the world into areas of US and USSR influence.

But behind the need for geopolitical control of the territories is always accompanied by economic interest and control of natural resources. The wars of these last years in the region are wars, above all, for oil and gas. The Arab Springs were used as a diversion on the real causes of this tragedy. Coal is now part of the past history: oil is running out and so the

futures energy is gas. The largest existing gas field of the world "South Pars / North Dome-gas condensate field" is located in the Persian Gulf between Qatar and Iran and only these two countries have the possibility to extract it.

In 2000, Qatar, proposed to its close allies (Saudi Arabia and Turkey) the construction of a 1500 km pipeline at an estimated cost of 10 billion dollars, that went through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria to arrive at Turkey and Europe to Bulgaria or even across the Mediterranean. It is important to remember that in those years the embargo of international trade prohibited Iran from selling gas from abroad.

In the meantime, Qatar gas could have never reached the European markets only if liquefied and sent by sea in a path that limits the volume and dramatically increases the costs.

This operation would have linked Qatar directly to the European energy markets through distribution terminals in Turkey, guaranteeing the huge latter revenues from transit fees.

The Qatar / Turkey gas pipeline would thus guarantee the Sunni countries total supremacy of the Gulf Perch for the world's natural gas markets and strengthened Qatar, the closest ally of the States United in the Arab world. Let's not forget that Qatar hosts two huge American military bases and is home to the Middle Eastern headquarters of the United States Central Command.

In 2009, Qatar proposed to Turkey the realization of this strategic engineering work Energy. Important to highlight the date of 2009, two years before the start of the season so-called "Arab Springs".

A problem arises when the Syrian government of Bashar Al Assad does not grant permission to passage of the pipeline on its territory. What are the reasons for this decision?

After all, he could have made huge gains from transit taxes, like Turkey. The rejection arises from a historical positioning of the Syrian Government of alliance with Iran (Shiite) and therefore also with Russia. Clearly the position of Syria is absolutely not welcome in Qatar (Sunni) because they know very well that this deposit is also Iranian property.

The European Union gets 30 percent of its gas from Russia and is therefore equally affected by the pipeline (Sunni), which would have guaranteed all European countries energy to lower costs and a major loosening of Russia's economic and political influence, Vladimir Putin. Turkey, Russia's second largest gas customer, was particularly anxious to end its dependence of its ancient rival and to position itself as a central axis transit to EU markets and beyond. The conduct of Qatar would have benefited all of the conservative Sunni monarchies of the Gulf, hoping to settle a major blow to rival Iran, a Shiite state and a close ally of Bashar Al Assad.

The prediction of the change in relations between the US and Iran was seen by Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a demotion of their regional power status and thus created the conditions for one war by proxy against Teheran in Yemen, provoking a genocide of the Houthi tribe,

sustained from Iran, a conflict announced by the massacre of the Shiites in Bahrain in March 2011.

Russia, which sells 70 percent of its gas exports to Europe through Gazprom, he saw this new Qatar / Turkey pipeline as a threat to his economy. Putin he considered this pipeline as a NATO plot to change the existing situation and depriving Russia of one of the most important pillars of its economy: energy.

In 2009, Assad announced that it would refuse to sign the agreement to allow the pipeline to cross the Syrian territory, "to protect the interests of our Russian ally".

Syrian President Assad further infuriates the Sunni Gulf monarchs, when he approves an "Islamic green gas pipeline" supported by the Russians. Built from Iran and through Syria arrives in the Mediterranean and/or to the ports of Lebanon. "The Islamic gas pipeline" would make Shiite Iran and not Qatar Sunnita, the main supplier to the European energy market, increasing considerably the influence of Teheran in the Middle East and in the world. Israel is understandably determined to boycott this hypothesis that would enrich Iran and Syria and, presumably, would strengthen their allies in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and in Palestine.

In 2009, according to WikiLeaks, immediately after Bashar Al Assad rejected the pipeline proposal of Qatar, the CIA began to finance opposition groups in Syria. It is important to take in consideration that this was well before the start of the Arab Spring in Syria. So at the beginning of the war in Syria, we find two opposing blocks:

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and then the USA, Great Britain and France, so we have to talk to Nato.

Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, Syria and clearly the Russians who do not want to lose the two military bases in the Mediterranean and perhaps with greater interest they do not want the "Sunni gas" to replace the one of Gazprom in Europe.

The story told by the media in our countries states that the bad guys are on one side and we Westerners are on the right side, with the good guys. But this is just propaganda and different conflicting interests, not honest analysis.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have organized and financed the entry of the Sunni radicals in Syria in order to destabilize the Government of Bashar Al Assad. They are called Al Nusra, Al Qaida and finally ISIS.

At the beginning of the war in Syria they also told us about the important presence of moderate forces, of democratic rebels, but this too proved to be an inadequate evaluation: most of these rebels were Jihadists and so NATO supported groups that then became part of ISIS. International entities that deal with humanitarian aid can not be content with the role of "saviors of human life" without addressing the problem of the causes of many wars and carnage.

Like Armadilla, since 2011, we have denounced the fact that the choice of the war and the militarization of the conflict was not an appropriate choice to solve the problem. We hoped and still hope that the United Nations efforts to find a peaceful and mediated solution prevail.

The proposal made for a "permanent truce in Syria", to allow "measures to rebuild the trust" between the warring parties, identifying a "deadline for the termination of any support to all foreign fighters" who in the meantime will have to leave the region governmental bodies, both represented on the government council, will have to "guarantee respect for the truce, jointly combat terrorist organizations and regain control of the national territory." In practice, they will have to fight together against the jihadist formations, Isis in first place.

2.In May 2018, in Syria

It is probable, according to multiple sources, that the most relevant clashes in Syria will cease at the end of this year. The small clashes between the various ethnic groups will therefore not end yet among their external referents; but the bulk of the armed actions will certainly cease, now that the areas of influence have stabilized. The first thing that catches the eye is that, despite everything, the forces of Bashar al Assad won. All international actors operating on the ground, friends or enemies, do not have difficulty recognizing it. Of course, neither Bashar nor Russia have the strength to do it alone, reconstruction of the country, but the western countries, especially those who participated in the struggle against Assad and the others, less present, they all plan to participate in the reconstruction for influence again, but this time peacefully, this is Syria.

Pope Francis has repeatedly, in recent months, invited to pray for Syria and appeals "Once again to all political leaders for justice and peace to prevail. I'm deeply disturbed by the current world situation, in which, despite the instruments a disposition of the international community, it is difficult to agree on a joint action in favor of peace in Syria and other regions of the world".

For years the United Nations has been working to ensure humanitarian aid to the victims of the conflict and, with the special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, a long and difficult job of mediation to arrive to peace.

After more than 7 years of a bloody civil war, about 500,000 dead and a half million injured, the troubled Middle Eastern country could, by 2018, turn the page. The Government of Damascus, has commented, De Mistura, "he knows that both Russia and Iran do not want to remain on the ground forever nor can they provide the over \$254 billion needed to start rebuilding the country. It would be useful to accept a process of sharing power (powersharing), that is to agree to write a new Constitution that, when the absolute power is closed, leads to sharing of responsibility and powers. Thus, within 18-24 months, democratic elections should be held, with the supervision of the UN involving the majority Sunni, the various minorities that are part of the Syrian mosaic. Only in this way will people's suffering end and we will not risk one enlargement of the conflict, starting with a harsh potential confrontation between Israel and Iran".

Today there are few things that the international community can do to prevent and manage conflicts internal to sovereign states. The "red line" that no government can overcome is the respect for civilians in conflict zones and the ban on the use of chemical or bacteriological weapons.

These are the only cases, at least according to international law, in which the sovereignty of the states is limited by some general behavioral rules that if not respected can lead to the intervention of other nations in the conflict. These pillars of the current international order are not only guaranteed by the United Nations but also by the Geneva agreements in their different editions, from World War II to today.

In the Syrian case the use of chemical weapons with civilian victims seems to have been broken in the last months and this violation would justify the armed intervention against the Syrian government accomplished from the United States, Britain and France on April 14th.

But what evidence have been shown to blame those who did this crime? To date, in fact, none irrefutable evidence was presented before the international community, but the question is the latest news in recent days when a first report was published by the Expectors of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons which denounces the use of weapons to the chlorine during the clashes occurred last February near the city of Saraquib, in the north of the country.

Although it seems from the testimonies and scientific evidence gathered by the United Nations United Agency that chemical weapons have been used with civilian victims, the question remains as to who has used them.

In the Douma massacre, 70 people died on April 7th 2018, most of whom were civilian fighters. The doctors recognized the signs of an intoxication, not better specified, but in the victims similar to that from Sarin gas. The chemical weapons used at Duma, it has been said, seem to be weapons at the chlorine similar to those of Saraquib. Actually chlorine weapons, unlike for example Sarin gas, are easy to manufacture and certainly not as innovative or complex as they need a big technological research. Also the ISIS, according to BBC, would have made use of chemical weapons with chlorine-like substances on at least two occasions between the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018.

In this complex picture of conflicting truths what is certain is that the Syrian army possessed, at least until 2013, an arsenal of chemical weapons that also included lethal gas sarin (as ascertained by UN inspectors at the time). Since October 2013 Assad, responding at a request from the international community, adhered to the Convention for the dismantling of the chemical weapons and since then Damascus denies being directly in possession of this kind of arms.

It now seems that it is possible to reunite the country under the leadership of the current government. There is possibility of a total victory of Assad, united to the result of the recent elections in Iraq where he has a government that sympathizes with Iran's triumph, for the USA, Israel and Saudi Arabia one gloomy scenario in which an Iranian traction Shiite bloc controls the entire Middle Eastern region, from Pakistan's borders to Lebanon.

The possibility of a Shiite-led Middle East, besides worrying Israelis about the Iranian threat, is also dangerous for Americans who see the clear shadow of Moscow behind this new geostrategic structure.

It is therefore possible that the accusation of using chemical weapons, true or presumed, may turn into a new reason to overturn the fate of the conflict. In this case it is not surprising that the position of France, which from the first moment supported the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime, nor of the Britain is increasingly linked to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.

Moreover going back with the memory of a few years will remember that it was the accusations moved to Saddam on weapons of mass destruction, accusations that proved to be largely unfounded, to determine the American intervention in Iraq of 2003.

However, unlike then, the United States seems weakened in their ability to intervene and Russia is involved in regional affairs with an intensity not seen since the end of the Cold War. A direct intervention by NATO could open a very serious tension in the international front with unimaginable consequences, enough to make the Ukrainian crisis compare.

The UN Security Council has been advocating a transition process for 4 years which leads to the cessation of armed conflict.

The Council called on all parties to "put in place a political process led by the Syrians which leads to a political transition capable of embracing the legitimate aspirations of the people of that country". The transition involves the formation of "a transitional government with executive powers, that will be formed on the basis of mutual sharing while continuity of the government institutions". The UN document articulates the three-step solution process: negotiations, transitory phase and final definition of a new Syrian state structure.

The duration of the negotiation phase is left to the Syrians themselves, but must be based on the first declaration of Geneva, which provides for "a transitional arrangement" for the "permanent cease-fire" and "the collaboration and the merger of combat forces, excluding terrorist factions; reform of the security systems up to the "formation of transition authorities".

The duration of the transition phase will also be established by the Syrians. In the framework of "permanent truce", the "measures to rebuild trust" between rebel groups and the government will be launched. The two parts will have to identify a "deadline for the termination of any support to all foreign fighters" who in the meantime will have to leave the country, rebels and government, both represented on the government council, will have to "guarantee respect for the truce, fight jointly terrorist organizations and regain control of the national territory".

"Immediately after its establishment, the transitional government will have absolute powers for all military and security matters and will oversee the Joint Military Council," reads the document. The task of proposing is delegated to the transitional government and the military

council document for the establishment of a "Syrian National Congress" that will replace the current one, and will have to launch "a national dialogue and a constitutional reform". The document also provides the reform of the army, security and justice system, which are "maintained", as it is explicitly stated that the Baath governmental party will not be dismantled, contrary to what happened in Iraq.

The transition phase will end with the convening of "presidential and legislative elections sponsored by the United Nations, which will also have to offer technical support".

The success of the process to bring Syria finally to a permanent peace is emphasized in the draft plan, depends on the "support that will be given by the regional and international parties "through "a contact group" that will help the UN envoy.

But the difficulties in implementing this plan have pushed Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey to autonomously take on a role of mediation and have signed a memorandum (in Astana) where they agree to create four areas for the reduction of armed conflicts (de-escalation), between the conflicting parties.

The four identified areas are:

1. The Governorate of Idlib (until Latakia, Aleppo and Hama) on the border with Turkey.
2. The north area of Homs that has been controlled by jihadist components for a long time.
3. The eastern part of Damascus (East Gouta) now under the control of the Syrian government.
4. The area of Dar'a and Al Quneitra close to the Golan, where Israel is willing to prevent direct access to the Golan of pro-Syrian Shiite groups (Hezbollah above all).

Four areas of different international influence that do not facilitate the return to a single nation state as Syria was before the conflict.

The defeat of Daesh in almost all areas of Syria leaves the problems of the Kurds unresolved (which they demand an independent state that none of the other parties involved wants) and security areas with Israel and Turkey.

3.Humanitarian aid in Syria

Over seven years of war have created in Syria the biggest humanitarian crisis of the last 50 years. About 13.1 million people in Syria require humanitarian aid.

Of these, 5.6 million people are in conditions of great necessity due to a convergence of the vulnerabilities arising from shifts, exposure to hostilities and limited access to goods and property basic services. 2,300,000 people, in the city of Damascus alone, are at risk of malnutrition of the impossibility of access not only to quality food, but to the minimum vital requirement.

The immediate and long-term consequences of the conflict continue to be the main drivers of humanitarian needs, with the civilian population in many parts of the country exposed to significant risks of protection that threaten human life, dignity and well-being on a daily basis.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), more than half of the population was forced to leave their homes: 4.8 million people have sought refuge in neighboring countries and elsewhere; 6.3 million are internally displaced (almost half of them minors); 13.5 million need different forms of assistance and many Syrians have fallen below the poverty line, seeing themselves forced to make choices that endanger their dignity and their their rights.

Exhausting the possibility of using safe and dignified means for their livelihood, people are inclined to implement survival strategies that expose them to high risks such as sexual exploitation, child labor, forced marriages and minors. Children, young people, women, people with disabilities and the elderly are the most vulnerable groups. Minors are both witnesses and victims of experiences of extreme violence due to the deployment of heavy weapons in civil areas, for bombing and recruitment by the various groups involved in the conflict.

More than 5.8 million children under the age of 18 require humanitarian assistance and specialized services that protect its protection. It is estimated that between 2015 and 2016 1.75 million children do not have the opportunity to access school services, which 1.35 million continue to be at risk of school abandonment and that around 2 million school-age children have been displaced more than once.

Young people, which comprise 56% of the population, grow isolated and without prospects for the future, given the lack of opportunities in the scholastic/academic field and in the workplace; factors that do nothing but increase the development of dangerous survival strategies.

Women who become head of household due to the absence of husbands, because they are dead, sick or disabled committed to the front, usually suffer more pressure than men, given the systematic discrimination against them on the labor market, also caused by traditions patriarchalism spread in local communities. The context of profound insecurity also makes women more vulnerable to physical abuse and the risk of sexual exploitation.

The elderly, people with physical or mental disabilities, especially those who can not count on sufficient family or community support, are at risk of social exclusion, poverty, extreme violence due to lack of mobility, discrimination and lack of availability to access to services designed to meet their specific needs.

According to the United Nations, Syria's development situation has regressed for about four decades. Today four out of five Syrians live in extreme poverty while life expectancy among the Syrians, has declined more than 20 years since the beginning of the crisis in 2011.

All 12 indicators of the Millennium Development Goals have been reversed, while the Syrian economy recorded a recession of around 40% as a result of the fort devaluation of the national currency, economic sanctions, price hikes food and fuel, the collapse of domestic production and damage to social infrastructure. It follows that the communities still present in Syria have lost access to the usual means of livelihood.

To create the conditions to guarantee emergency humanitarian aid to civilian populations throughout the Syrian territory, such aid must comply with the code of conduct which is based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Humanitarian aid is unrelated to any purpose politics and are addressed to the neediest, without distinction of nationality, religion, sex, ethnic origin or political affiliation.

So states and humanitarian entities can not choose priority territories based on sympathy policies but only with the criterion of urgency and dramatic situations.