



Syria, an endless inhuman drama

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Introduction

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It also conducts training and information on the issues of the 2030 agenda proposed by the United Nations, for the defence of human rights and for the achievement of the 17 Goals for sustainable human development: <https://www.unric.org/it/agenda-2030>

In this context, these notebooks want to help to disseminate among students and the public opinion to which Armadilla is addressed, information, critical analysis, possible answers to the priority problems that are addressed. The collection of all the Notebooks from 2015 to the present are found in: <http://armadilla.coop/quaderni/>

In this notebook we propose an update of what is happening in Syria.

After nine years of war, Syria's economic situation is tragic and the financial crisis, which also affected Lebanon, dealt the latest setback. In recent decades, Lebanon's banks have been a lightning haven for Syrian investors. With the collapse of the Lebanese lira to over six thousand lire for a dollar, and the fall of the Syrian lira itself, the severe financial crisis is overcoming the economic crisis in both countries.

In less than a year, the Syrian lira has lost more than 70 percent of its value against the dollar, while commodity prices have risen by 69 percent, according to the World Food Programme.

The quality of life of the Syrian citizen records these figures which reflect a situation that may be irreversible for the next few years. Since January 2010, the cost of basic food has increased by at least 27 times. The cost of essential food has tripled in the last five months. Average meat consumption has fallen by 95% in the last 8 years. Government ovens that subsidized bread distribution free of charge, producing 7 days a week, in May 2020, produce twice a week with a 75% decrease. Electricity consumption has plummeted by 60% with a daily reduction of 30% in the supply time. The Syrian government has created the system of distribution cards of primary goods (bread, eggs, sugar, flour, chickpeas, oil seeds and gas cylinders for the house) which has provoked the counter-chant of a thriving black market, which Syrians call "Real Market."

The defeat of ISIS and territorial control by the government in Damascus in almost all the country, unfortunately, did not lead to the dissolution of the conflict.

The presidents of Russia, Turkey and Iran met by video conference on July 1st and again expressed the belief that "the war in Syria cannot have a military solution but must be resolved only through a political process".

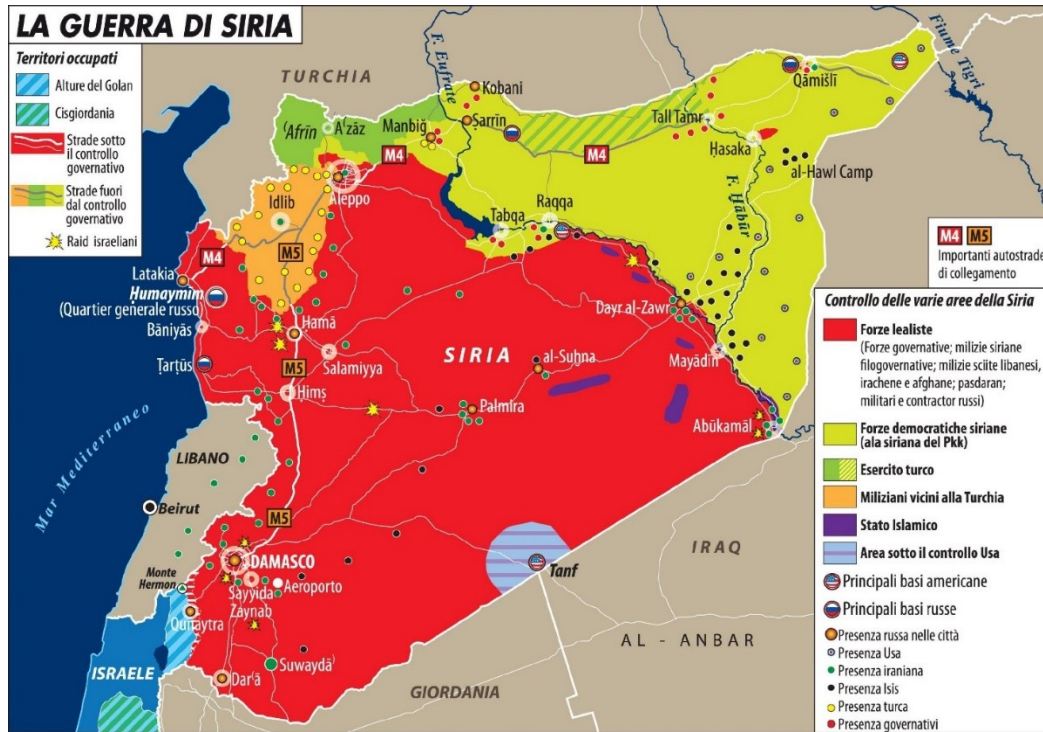
The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Otto Pedersen, continues the patient mediation work with, so far, little concrete results.

The mediation formula, advocated in the various negotiations, was based on the opposing principle of a government and an opposition, as if these two elements were the only actors involved in the conflict.

The Syrian government has never been represented by a monolithic entity, as has the opposition, composed of a patchwork of spurious alliances. Negotiations have failed due to the inability to include on the one hand the galaxy of actors linked to the different Islamist formations and on the other syrian civil society. Staffan De Mistura had proposed, at the time, the inclusion of civil professionals, women, human rights defenders, and the Syrian constitutionalist world at the negotiating tables. Following this example, Pedersen tried, during the Astana talks, to move in the same direction, aiming for greater enlargement and inclusion of most of the actors involved.

The United States failed to defeat the government of Bashar al Assad militarily and continues hostilities with new sanctions included in a new piece of legislation called the "Caesar Act". The law, which came into force on June 17th, 2020, sanctioning several Syrian figures, including President Assad, for war crimes committed against the civilian population and affects Syrian industries, from the military sector to infrastructure and energy, as well as individuals and Iranian and Russian entities providing funding or other assistance to the Syrian government. This is the first time that the European Community has been involved in the reconstruction of Syria.

The war shows no signs of ending and sees Syria at the mercy of external interests with effects that the local population continues to pay with deaths, suffering, instability, destruction of civil coexistence.



1. Syria, July 2020

The Syrian government armed forces control most of the country's territory. Conflicts persist in the north of the country, especially on the border with Turkey.

The economic crisis, the daughter of nine years of war, threatens to bring Syria back into the abyss. **The consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic and the closure it imposed are of little consequence in the face of the disaster in which millions of Syrian civilians will be found due to the economic sanctions under the "Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act", passed by the US Congress, also on the initiative of the Trump Administration, at the end of last year and enforce on June 17th, 2020..** o

After cancelling the international agreement on Iran's 2015 nuclear program and launching tough sanctions against TehandRan, the United States is now trying to strangle the Syrian economy and, consequently, Lebanon, a country they consider too influenced by the Shiite Hezbollah movement, an ally of Iran and the Syrian government.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), made up of Kurdish fighters and anti-government rebels, have recaptured Baghouz in Deir ez-Zor in northeastern Syria, the last city formally controlled by the Islamic State. Following the recapture of the last territories held by the Islamic State, the Fds have imprisoned tens of thousands of fighters over the years. However, Kurdish-Syrian forces, unable to process such large numbers of prisoners, have built numerous prisons and large refugee camps in the towns of al-Hol, al-Roj and Ain Issa. According to estimates published by the New York Times, these prisons would have housed about 11,000 inmates, of which 2000 are from more than 40 foreign countries, with 800 prisoners from Europe. Since the day the self-styled Islamic State was territorially defeated, Western governments have begun to fear the repatriation of their former fighters. However, at EU level, there has always been a lack of a shared strategy on how to deal with this issue. In fact, repatriation is a complex process for legal, security and economic reasons. The "Caesar Act" stems from revelations made by an anonymous Syrian police photographer that he would release 55,000 photos showing torture and violence in Syrian prisons.

The US government hopes that the worsening living conditions in Syria will trigger an uprising against the presidency and the government. Sanctions will discourage international investment in Syria and deepen its isolation from the global financial system. Reconstruction of the war-torn country, already held back by US and EU pressure, will remain frozen. **The "Caesar Act" only allows imports of essential food and the entry into Syria of humanitarian aid for the civilian population.**

At the same time, it provides for very strict control over aid from the United Nations and NGOs to ensure that they are "not benefiting" the government and President Assad. Lebanon, a traditional channel for trade and investment in Syria, will also be affected.

The disappearance of the dollar in Lebanon and the collapse of the 6 national currency (passed in a few days from 1500 to 6,000 Lebanese Lira for one dollar) increase the public's anxiety about the consequences of the "Caesar Act". The Lebanese also fear that, they will be without electricity: the country imports a significant share of its energy needs from Syria.

Not least, Syrian pharmaceutical companies risk closing once the available raw materials are finished. The medicines, produced mostly to cover the needs of the local market, have been

exported to more than 96 countries and sold at low prices. In addition, the production price is higher than that set by the government and this causes financial losses for the companies themselves. As a result, pharmacies and hospitals have shown a shortage of supplies and sometimes even common medical facilities.

Faced with this scenario and the prospect of further deterioration, in a remote session of the Security Council on 16 June, Geir Otto Pedersen stated that the current risk is a famine.

Specifically, according to the UN envoy, there are currently 9.3 million Syrians suffering from food insecurity, while another 2 million could soon face such a problem, which is in addition to concerns about the spread of coronavirus, in a country characterized by a health system weakened by about 9 years of conflict. Finally, Pedersen emphasised the latest episodes of popular mobilization, which occurred mostly in the South-West and the Suweida Governorate, which risked turning into an escalation of violence.

In the joint statement issued on the sidelines of the July 1 meeting, the presidents of the three states, Recep Tayyip Erdogan for Turkey, Iran's Hassan Rouhani and Vladimir Putin for Russia, said they were committed to safeguarding Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and highlighted the need to continue to counter the terrorist threat and illegitimate autonomy initiatives, which are also seen as a threat to Syria's national security. In this context, the Heads of State said, a ceasefire in Idlib must also be guaranteed through its agreements. Among the other points highlighted, the three presidents of the Astana Agreement agreed to promote the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons and to safeguard their rights. In addition, the three sides also discussed economic issues and the sanctions imposed by Washington on 17th of June against the Syrian government and its allies...

In this regard, Iranian President Rouhani has said that such legislation violates "human rights", representing a form of inhumane "economic terrorism". Therefore, he urged the US to abandon Syria, and to put an end to both its own economic pressures, which will not lead to the defeat of terrorism, and to "illegal" actions that will not hinder the link between Syria and its allies. Iran, for its part, will continue to support the Syrian people and their legitimate government.

A meeting entitled "Conference on Support for the Future of Syria and the Region" was also held remotely on 30th of June, at the invitation of the United Nations and the European Union, attended by representatives of some 60 governments and non-governmental agencies. The event follows more than nine years of conflict, which has led to the Syrian population reaching unprecedented levels of poverty. The situation was further aggravated by the entry into force of the so-called Caesar Act.

Although this is lower than the USD 10 billion requested by the United Nations agencies, the amount promised at the June 30 meeting is higher than expected, given the economic damage suffered by several countries internationally due to the coronavirus pandemic. In this regard, the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock,

said he was aware of the difficulties experienced by each country and the unsympathetic circumstances in finding the resources necessary to support the Syrian people. Despite this, several parties are committed to allocating funds. These included Germany, which offered about 1.58 billion euros, and Qatar, which has pledged 100 million dollars. The promised money will be used to provide food, medical care and education for the millions of Syrians displaced or forced into exile, many of whom are suffering from food insecurity.

Finally, the European Union has pledged to provide EUR 2.3 billion in humanitarian aid in the period 2020-2021, as specified by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. However, the latter has shown that the situation in Syria is still serious, and, therefore, the parties involved in the conflict have been urged to respect the ceasefire reached on 5 March by Russia and Turkey. Borrell stressed that the opportunity should be seized to reach a political solution and all parties involved should force the Syrian government to engage in negotiations and to put an end to the "political repression". In addition, according to the High Representative, the stability of Syria is relevant to Europe, and therefore it will be committed to supporting the Syrian population and neighbouring countries hosting refugees and asylum seekers.

Following the appeal made by the United Nations in recent days, the European Union has also called for a cease-fire across the country to help ensure a better response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The European Union, grappling with the containment of the pandemic and national selfishness in a scattered order, does not seem able to look towards the time bomb that is in danger of exploding in Syrian refugee camps. However, if the inaction of the international community in the nine years of war has remained – essentially – unpunished, this time things could be different and there are already those who speculate that precisely from the refugee camps could start a wave of return of the Covid-19 virus, ready to invest the West.

In spite of the sporadic violations, the cessation of fighting has allowed more than 281,709 Syrians to return to their homes in Aleppo and Idlib, according to data reported on 27 May by the Response Coordination Group, but, according to the same organization, 1,041,233 citizens are forced to evacuate from these areas as a result of the continuous offensive and military operations conducted previously.

The EU has promised to pay 71%, or 4.9 billion euros (2.3 billion euros from the European Commission and 2.6 billion euros from EU member states). With this amount, the EU remains the largest donor to the Syrian crisis with more than EUR 20 billion in aid mobilized since 2011. The conference, reads an EU communiqué, renewed its support for the UN-led efforts for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict and provided a single platform for dialogue with civil society. Brussels has revealed that by 2020, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria will amount to USD 3.4 billion for the survival of 9.8 million people within Syria's borders. Instead, we

need USD 5.2 billion for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan to provide humanitarian assistance to more than nine million refugees and vulnerable communities spread across Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

The Conference also reiterated that the solution to the Syrian conflict goes through the Geneva Peace Conference (2012) and the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), which effectively requires a Syrian-led political process, facilitated by the United Nations, to find a political solution to satisfy the Syrian people. It also called for the drafting of a new Constitution for free elections under the supervision of the UN."

2. Communication to the UN Security Council

The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Otto Pedersen, made a statement to the Security Council on 16 June.

It summed up the current situation and the risks that the crisis aggravated by the pandemic and the new embargo poses for the international agenda.

"We know that the crisis in Syria cannot be solved solely by drafting a new constitution. But if the Constitutional Committee could work seriously, it could create a climate of trust,, make an important contribution to a political solution and be an open door for peace," Pedersen said..

"I am ready to convene a third session of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva as soon as the global travel conditions allow. We do not know, of course, when this will be possible. But let me point out, as both co-chairs have told me, the importance of a third substantive session on the agreed agenda and the equal importance of the lack of preconditions for moving on to other points of the Constitution in subsequent sessions, consistent with the mandate and internal regulation of the Committee's functioning..

We remain in contact with both co-chairs to assess when the next session will be possible. I also recently offered a briefing to the civil society members of the Committee. Those who wished to participate and could do so were updated on the agenda agreed between the co-chairs. I believe that all three members of the committee have been provided with the information necessary to prepare for a substantial and forward-looking session when conditions allow.

I have been in close contact with the Advisory Committee on Syrian Women, whose members have met several times in recent weeks. They underline the role of active leader that Syrian women are taking on in their communities, in a context of severe economic crisis and humanitarian needs of Syrians throughout the country and beyond its borders. They called for a special priority to help and protect the most vulnerable Syrians, including refugees and internally displaced persons; children and the elderly; women who experience violence and abuse; and the detainees and abductees who are now at greater risk because of the pandemic. They reiterate to me that a political process under Resolution 2254 is the only way forward, with Syrian women as full partners at the table.

I have also heard from a wide range of Syrian men and women, including civil society interlocutors throughout Syria and the region, through our Civil Society Support Room. Many continue to impress me for their ability and desire to build bridges within Syrian society.

Almost everyone perceives that the political process, and not limited only to the Constitutional Committee, has stalled.

All continue to highlight the fundamental importance of real progress in the file of detainees, abductees and the missing. Claims of responsibility for serious crimes and violations of international law are often invoked. Everyone is concerned about the declining economic reality throughout Syria.

Debates on the issue of sanctions continue. Many also noted that COVID-19 has created new stresses for Syrian refugees and host countries.

Everyone is looking for concrete steps towards creating a safe, calm and neutral environment throughout Syria on which a comprehensive and credible political solution can be built. These are the same conditions that would allow the safe, dignified, voluntary and informed return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Many civil society interlocutors have also raised the issue of elections. We note that the parliamentary elections have been postponed, as it is one of the precautionary measures against the transmission of COVID-19 announced by the Syrian government.

I would like to take this opportunity to note that these elections would be within the current constitutional framework. The United Nations is not specifically in charge and we have not been asked to engage in these elections.

I remain focused, in the context of the UN-facilitated political process under Resolution 2254, to work towards free and fair elections under a new constitution that are administered under the supervision of the United Nations in accordance with the highest international standards of accountability and transparency and are inclusive of all eligible Syrians, including the diaspora.

In conclusion, let us remember that there have been too many episodes in the last ten years in which fleeting opportunities to transform dynamics towards a political path have been lost. Those missed moments were followed by renewed violence and a strengthening of positions between regional and international actors. We must not repeat this pattern. With a little calm, with the common threats of COVID and ISIS, and with the Syrian people continuing to suffer, I want to stress that renewed and meaningful international cooperation, building trust and trust between

international stakeholders and Syrians, including through reciprocal measures, is essential - and could unlock progress.

I believe that the Russian-American dialogue has a key role to play here and I encourage them to pursue it.

The states that discuss Syria in the Astana group are also protagonists, as are you members of the Council.

Ultimately, it is necessary to come together to support a renewed effort in a Syria-led political process, which is owned by Syria and facilitated by the United Nations, led by Security Council Resolution 2254, towards a political agreement that can fully satisfy the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and restore Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity.