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NATO Intervention left Libya without hope

A country raised without experience of unity, where society and army were both kept weak, knew nothing of how to react as a vicious uprising took hold, breeding countless militia factions, all fighting for a similar cause.

(/@listentomeadam)

Adam Chamberlain (/@listentomeadam) in International (/categories/international)

09 Jun 2015, 14:03 GMT | Comments (0) | Report

     1 



February of 2011, armed men who identified themselves as Interior Security stormed the home of Fathi Tarbel, a courageous Libyan human rights campaigner. His wife and kids were left shocked as they were given no explanation to the reasons behind his arrest. When Abdullah Senussi, Intelligence chief, and brother in law of Muammar Gaddafi, ordered his arrest, he sparked unrest throughout Libya. This led to the end of Colonel Gaddafi's controversial, merciless, 42 year regime.

A country raised without experience of unity, where society and army were both kept weak, knew nothing of how to react as a vicious uprising took hold, breeding countless militia factions, all fighting for a similar cause.

However, having lived in a country where teamwork had always been discouraged, they failed to join together to create a larger single force. Various different militant organisations contributed towards the eventual destruction of the regime, some paid a higher price than others nonetheless they all claimed the right to leadership. This created confrontation between the different militant groups, once power had been gained through use of violence, it proved a difficult habit to break.

The only thing these numerous militant groups had in common was their animosity towards Gaddafi, however, they were divided by dissimilar ideologies, religious, regional and ethnic.



So where did Nato step in?

Col. Gaddafi and his government were visited five or six times by western leaders from 2004–2009. They were affably assured that relations between Libya and themselves were, and are to remain, comfortable and that they are happy with the progress Libya has made. Libya's literacy rate had increased to over 94% and the World Health Organisation reported the life expectancy steadily rising to above 70. *So why did it turn sour?*

Anglo-Dutch oil company Shell had a deal in place worth over 500 million pounds for gas exploration rights off the coast of Libya, an area thought to be hugely oil rich. Various other oil companies including, Exxon-Mobil, Marathon Oil Corporation, Hess Company and ConocoPhillips all had their hands in Libya's oil pie. Libya is the Ninth largest oil reserve on the planet, so surely co-operation from western governments was a given? Yes it was, until January of 2011 when Gaddafi stated his country was looking into nationalising Libyan oil, putting himself in control of the price.

Then in February, almost immediately after the hint of Nationalisation of Libya's oil resources, sparked by an arrest, the uprising began. By March the upheaval was in full swing. NATO, under the pretense of "humanitarian intervention" initiated a 'no fly zone' above Libya; this was the beginning of NATO's involvement.



Two days after the no fly zone was established, NATO started air strikes, which continued for seven months. During this time there were numerous civilian casualties including those of Gaddafi's closest family, to which NATO denied all knowledge of. All this was disguised under the pretext that they were "taking all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country". However, it seems that NATO did not want nationalisation of Libya's oil resources, and done all that they could, under any disguise needed, to stop it.

October 2011, after a 7 month UN authorised air campaign, there was a messy regime change and a brutal man evicted from power. Propaganda fed Westerners saw the intervention as a success. The civilians of Libya had been saved.

Almost immediately after the campaign was over and western leaders got what they wanted, Libya was abandoned. Left to fend for itself. After a short time a new government was formed, which had control over Tripoli, not much else. Libya

became a country without leadership. A breeding ground for militant groups, such as Isis. The various different militia factions who contributed to the overthrow of Gaddafi before and during the NATO Campaign, all wanted to fill the power gap. Different towns and cities were run by opposing organisations; suddenly Gaddafi's Libya didn't seem so bad?

Now a country without direction, bordering on a civil war, Libya has huge internal affairs and has become a foundation for extremist militant groups and people smugglers to flourish. No wonder there is half a million refugees looking to enter Europe.

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About the contributor

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I'm Adam Chamberlain a 23 year old Sign maker living with my girlfriend and daughter in the UK. I have decided that I would like to dive into the world of journalism and see where it takes me! Please follow me on my journey and read and share all you can!

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World | Tue Jun 9, 2015 12:23pm BST

Related: WORLD, LIBYA, MIDDLE EAST

Islamic State seizes power plant near Libyan city of Sirte

TRIPOLI



Libya Dawn fighters fire an artillery cannon at IS militants near Sirte in this file photo taken on March 19, 2015.

REUTERS/GORAN TOMASEVIC

Islamic State militants have seized a power plant west of the [Libyan](#) city of Sirte which supplies central and western parts of the country with electricity, the group and a military source said on Tuesday.

"The plant ... was taken," Islamic State said in a message on social media, adding that the capture of the plant meant that the militants had driven their enemies out of the entire city.

Forces loyal to the self-declared government that controls the capital Tripoli pulled out of the plant after Islamic State attacked it on Tuesday morning. Three soldiers were killed in the attack, the military source said.

(?)

Islamic State has exploited the general turmoil and security vacuum in Libya, where two governments are vying for power four years after the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi, to build up a presence in several cities.

The militants earlier this year captured most of Sirte, Gaddafi's home town, seizing the airport and driving a force loyal to the Tripoli government out to the city suburbs.

ADVERTISING



Since the start of the year militants in Libya loyal to Islamic State have claimed responsibility for killing dozens of Egyptian and Ethiopian Christians, as well attacks on Tripoli's luxury Corinthia hotel, embassies and oilfields.

Libya's internationally recognised government has been working out of the east of the country since losing control of Tripoli and western Libya in August.

(Reporting by Ayman al-Warfalli, Ahmed Elumami and Ahmed Tolba; Writing by [Ulf Laessing](#); Editing by [Dominic Evans](#))

Tuesday, June 9, 2015, 00:01 by Ivan Grech Mintoff

Libya intervention is wrong

EU foreign ministers have taken steps to launch a military campaign in Libya to eliminate human trafficking into Europe. This military adventure will further destabilise Libya without helping the refugees and breach the Maltese constitutional neutrality.

We Maltese experience the ever-increasing loss of innocent human life in the Mediterranean first hand. We encounter the refugee crisis every day and we want a solution.

In the past the preference of decision makers in Paris, London and Berlin was to kick the can down the road by holding a well-staged photo opportunity at which the dignitaries would express their shock at the loss of life and pledge immediate action and humanitarian aid only to forget about the issue once the cameras have been turned off.

This time it is different. This time the EU actually wants to do something, but their solution requires that we breach our Constitution.

Federica Mongerino, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has pledged to obtain a UN Security Council resolution allowing the use of force and she has made clear that the EU will mount a military mission even in the absence of such a resolution.

All EU states, including Malta, have agreed to the plans for what the EU itself calls a "military campaign". Despite the good intentions, this "campaign against smugglers" is destined for failure.

Libya is a country three times the size of the UK, so monitoring the movements of all vessels (legitimate or otherwise) leaving and entering Libyan waters will be hard. Entering Libyan harbours and scouring the coastline with special forces to destroy rickety boats will be very difficult.

Can we ask of a second lieutenant to determine, in hostile territory and at night, if a boat is to be used for human trafficking or is owned by a fisherman to feed his family and village? Once the boat sets off for Europe, air strikes are out of the question.

Having the navies board the boats and return the migrants to Libya against their will, and the will of the Libyan government (in breach of immigration laws) would be a hostile act.

Furthermore, it would not prevent the refugees from again risking their lives to escape from total desperation.

The Libyan governments have not been consulted by the EU. One of the issues on which both Libyan governments agree is that they do not want any military intervention by the EU. An invasion of Libya by European military units would be an act of war. The Libyans have stated that they are prepared to fight such an incursion.

European 'boots on the ground' would also give terrorist groups a legitimate excuse to 'fight the crusaders illegally entering Muslim territory'. Naturally, it will all of course spill into mainland Europe – and the nearest EU country and perfect soft target is Malta.

The Constitution states that Malta is a neutral state actively pursuing peace, security and social progress among all nations by adhering to a policy of non-alignment and refusing to participate in any military alliance. The planned mission can only take place in breach of the Maltese Constitution and will only further destabilise the region and increase the misery of the migrants.

Malta enjoys a derogation with regard to military cooperation in order to preserve and protect our neutrality. Malta cannot take part in military adventures and other states cannot use Maltese land, territorial waters or airspace to facilitate a military campaign.

When the government agreed to and participated in the planning of such a campaign, its actions breached the Constitution and were invalid and illegal.

To make matters worse, our Parliament has not been given a proper chance to debate the matter.

In January the Tripoli government formally requested that the Maltese government host peace negotiations to be held under the auspices of the UN. The Constitution obliges Malta to work actively for peace and the government ignored this request.

Combining the refusal to assist in the peace negotiations with the active illegal participation in the planning of a military campaign must be the most shameful behaviour of a Maltese government in a long time.

The only real and long-term viable solution to the refugee crisis is to engage with both Libyan governments and support the peace negotiations with the aim of assisting in the creation of a stable Libyan government with which we can negotiate regarding actions to reduce human trafficking.

This government must be asked why it is provoking war and instability rather than working towards peace in Libya and stability and security for Malta.

Can we ask of a second lieutenant to determine, in hostile territory and at night, if a boat is to be used for human trafficking or is owned by a fisherman to feed his family and vi

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New information about the Islamic State's hierarchy

9 GIUGNO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



The *New York Times* reported on June 8 that according to United States officials, American intelligence agencies have extracted valuable information about the Islamic State (IS)'s leadership structure, financial operations and security measures by analyzing materials seized during a Delta Force commando raid last month that killed a leader of the terrorist group in eastern Syria.

The information harvested from the laptops, cell phones and other materials recovered from the raid on May 16 has reportedly helped the United States identify, locate and carry out an airstrike against another Islamic State leader in eastern Syria, on May 31. American officials expressed confidence that an influential lieutenant, Abu Hamid, was killed in the attack, but the Islamic State, which remains resilient, has not yet confirmed his death.

The article notes that Mr. Baghdadi meets periodically with regional emirs, or leaders, at his headquarters in Raqqa in eastern Syria. To ensure his safety, specially entrusted drivers pick up each of the emirs and demand that they hand over their cell phones and any other electronic devices to avoid inadvertently disclosing their location through tracking by American intelligence, the officials said.

Wives of the top Islamic State leaders, including Mr. Baghdadi's, play a more important role than previously known, passing information to one another, and then to their spouses, in an effort to avoid electronic intercepts.

The raid on the multistory residence of Abu Sayyaf, described by American officials as the group's top financial officer, reportedly illustrates that American intelligence on Islamic State leaders is improving. At least one informant deep inside the group played a crucial role in helping track Abu Sayyaf, said a senior military official who was briefed on plans for the raid.

Abu Sayyaf's wife, Umm Sayyaf, who was captured in the operation, has also provided information to investigators, one senior American official was quoted as saying by *The New York Times*.

Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter said last month that the killing of Abu Sayyaf dealt a “significant blow” to the group. The militant leader was said to be involved in the Islamic State’s kidnap-for-ransom activities and helped direct its oil, gas and financial operations that raised the funds necessary for the organization to operate.

Since the raid, senior administration officials and top military officers have dropped only broad hints about the value of the materials that were scooped up in the predawn operation, which was carried out after weeks of surveillance from satellite imagery, drone reconnaissance and electronic eavesdropping, American officials said.

Over the past decade in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American military and intelligence agencies have reportedly developed vast expertise in analyzing materials seized in commando raids, sometimes quickly enough to generate new raids within a matter of hours.

Within two weeks of the raid, American officials were able to use information gathered from the materials to attack Abu Hamid in the vicinity of Ash Shaddadi, near Hasakah in northeast Syria. American officials described him as the emir of Shariah and tribal affairs.

The materials also revealed new details about how the Islamic State has allocated revenue from oil production. About half goes to the group’s general operating budget; the remainder is split roughly between maintaining the oil-field production facilities and for salaries to the workers, American officials said.

These workers, once thought possibly to be conscripted locals, are now believed to be salaried Islamic State employees, thus making them legitimate targets, officials said.

American counterterrorism analysts have learned new information about the Islamic State’s hierarchy. One leader, Fadel al-Hayali, also known as Abu Mu’taz, who had been believed to be the head of the Islamic State’s military council, appears to have played an even more important role than previously known.

Abu Mu’taz, a former lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi military intelligence agency of President Saddam Hussein, reportedly led the council of six to nine military commanders who directed the Islamic State’s military strategy.

The military council has a subgroup known as the Security Council, which is in charge of leading Islamic State assassinations, kidnappings, interrogations and other attacks.

There were reports in November 2014 and again in February that Abu Mu’taz died in coalition airstrikes but the Islamic State never put out a confirmation, he said.

Although Abu Sayyaf himself was not well known, he was important as much for who and what he knew about the Islamic State’s hierarchy and operations as for his actual job, American officials and independent analysts said.



A year of ISIL: 'There is no future for Iraq'

Displaced Sunnis say they are ready to fight to win their land back, but the central government is not helping them.

Megan O'Toole | 09 Jun 2015 11:26 GMT | [War & Conflict](#), [Middle East](#), [Iraq](#), [ISIL](#)

Kirkuk, Iraq - When fighters with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) began threatening his life if he failed to pay a \$500 monthly bribe, Abu Ahmed knew it was time to leave home. "I refused, and they said, 'We will kill you,'" Abu Ahmed, who spoke under a pseudonym out of fear for his family's safety, told Al Jazeera.

Abu Ahmed, 63, is among thousands of Sunni residents who fled the Hawija district of northern Iraq after

ISIL overran it one year ago. His home was converted into an Islamic court, and he now lives in neighbouring Kirkuk city, sharing a modest home with more than a dozen family members.

Perched on a thin mattress laid atop the concrete floor, Abu Ahmed described how ISIL cemented its grip on Hawija's residents through fear.

"If you don't join them, they kill you directly," he said. "To save your life, you will tell them, 'I am with you.'"

[OPINION: Kirkuk foreshadows challenges for a post-ISIL Iraq](#)

Residents in the Sunni stronghold of Hawija have long opposed the Shia-led Iraqi government, citing systemic discrimination and a litany of abuses against Sunnis by security forces.

Two years ago, [deadly clashes](#) erupted in the district after Iraqi security forces raided a protest camp where Sunnis were demonstrating against former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

It was this antipathy towards the ruling regime that prompted many Hawija residents to initially welcome ISIL's advance in June 2014, Abu Ahmed said. They expected a "revolution", he recalled.

"But then everything changed," Abu Ahmed said, noting ISIL soon exhibited tactics similar to the Iraqi army -

storming homes and assaulting residents to settle vendettas.

"The army under Maliki used to treat us all like terrorists, and today there is no government. It is a militia. It is no different from ISIL," Abu Ahmed said.

"There is no future for Iraq, no future at all."

Hasan Mahmoud Sofi, a Hawija-based commander of the Sahwa (Awakening Council) that years ago helped the Iraqi government and US troops fight al-Qaeda in Iraq, echoed Abu Ahmed's sentiments.

Sofi, who also fled Hawija after ISIL's takeover, said the district is now suffering from critical water and electricity shortages, as well as a lack of jobs.

Sitting with fellow Sahwa members on the floor of his home in the heart of Kirkuk, Sofi said they want to fight to win Hawija back, but lack the necessary tools.

"The government didn't give us any weapons to defend ourselves... We repeatedly asked for weapons from the Iraqi government, but they never responded to our demands," Sofi told Al Jazeera, noting the Hawija-based Sahwa are best positioned to drive ISIL out of that territory. "You need to know the area to win the war."

Kemal Kirkuki, the Peshmerga commander for western Kirkuk, warned against arming the Sahwa, suggesting the group could become "ISIL in another form". The Peshmerga have been making gains in the battle against ISIL, controlling strategic oil and water reserves in the area, he told Al Jazeera.

Yet even as ISIL fighters in Hawija have suffered setbacks in recent days, with dozens reportedly killed after [anti-ISIL air strikes](#) last week targeted a warehouse in the district, Kirkuki said the group

has been pushing every day to try to expand its reach. At this point, he believes the sectarian divides in Iraq have become too entrenched for the country to find unity, noting any future will necessarily entail separate states for Kurds, Sunnis, and Shia Muslims: "We are not brothers," Kirkuki said.

BLOG: An illusory calm along Kirkuk's front line

Meanwhile, Colonel Idriss Rifaet of the Asaish of Kirkuk, a Kurdish security force, cited growing concerns about the influx of internally displaced persons [IDPs] into the Kirkuk area.

"They are coming daily; we cannot stop them," Rifaet told Al Jazeera. "The main problem for us is that even

when ISIL is pushed out, the IDPs are staying here and not going back."

Rifaet says security forces believe there are sleeper cells among the IDP population, although he could not estimate how many.

As for the danger from neighbouring Hawija in particular, Rifaet notes that the trouble there began brewing long before the ISIL invasion.

"They are ex-Saddam people," he said, "and they think Kurds are their enemy, coming to control their lands."

Follow Megan O'Toole on Twitter: [@megan_otoole](https://twitter.com/megan_otoole)

Source: Al Jazeera



U.S. considers whether ISIS wives playing key role in operations

By **Barbara Starr, CNN Pentagon Correspondent** ⓘ Updated 1311 GMT (2011 HKT) June 9, 2015



Key ISIS figure in Syria, killed in U.S. raid 01:20

Washington (CNN)—The U.S. is now looking at the possibility that wives of ISIS figures may play a greater role in operations and communications than previously thought because the terror group believes U.S. intelligence pays less attention to them.

Last month, an Army Delta Force raid in eastern Syria killed Abu Sayyaf, a senior ISIS leader involved in finance and other operations, and also led to the capture of his wife. The raid yielded significant intelligence that U.S. officials said adds to their understanding of ISIS's structure and communications.

Several officials cautioned, however, that all of the intelligence gathered and information gained from the interrogation of the captured wife must be vetted and confirmed.

[READ: Carter: ISIS raid a 'significant blow' to terror group](#)

As CNN has previously reported, a U.S. official said the raid netted terabytes worth of data in external hard drives and hard copy, a higher volume than had originally been anticipated. The U.S. is reviewing it all to determine if it leads to anything that can be acted upon.

A second official said one U.S. airstrike in eastern Syria just a few days ago that killed a local ISIS emir was conducted on the basis of information gained from the raid.

The raid also provided details on ISIS's oil business. The official confirmed to CNN that the U.S. now believes about half of ISIS oil revenues are allocated for their military and battlefield operations, as first reported in The New York Times.

The rest is used to pay oil workers and support production facilities that are routinely targeted by coalition airstrikes. The official said the U.S. cannot be certain whether some of the ISIS oil workers are really part of the organization or are intimidated into working for it.

Abu Sayyaf was a key senior ISIS operative in the organization's oil business and kept significant records about those operations.

The first official said that computers, hard drives, cellphones and other material seized have confirmed that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who heads ISIS, had been in direct contact with Abu Sayyaf in the past, but the official could not say how the contact or communication occurred.

CNN has learned that over the last several months, the U.S. has had intelligence indicating possible locations for Baghdadi. Because the intelligence was either too late, too vague and incomplete, or unverifiable, the U.S. has not been able to launch airstrikes or special operations raids with the mission of targeting Baghdadi, a senior U.S. official told CNN.

The problem has been the lack of real-time intelligence either from operatives on the ground, from overhead aircraft or from satellites that can verify information to the point a raid can be planned.





been identified as potential sites where senior ISIS operatives may have been at various points in time, but the buildings cannot be struck by coalition warplanes because of the ongoing presence of civilians in the immediate vicinity. It is not known if ISIS has ordered civilians into the area in order to keep the area from being struck. Officials have not said if they believe the ISIS leader has ever been at those sites.

Much of the initial intelligence about Abu Sayyaf and his wife came to the U.S. from a woman from the region who escaped from the Sayyafs' last year and told U.S. forces in Iraq what she knew about them.

As CNN has also reported, the U.S. then began monitoring the Sayyafs' home in eastern Syria in March using satellites and electronic eavesdropping to establish a visual and electronic "pattern of life" for the couple before moving with the raid in May.

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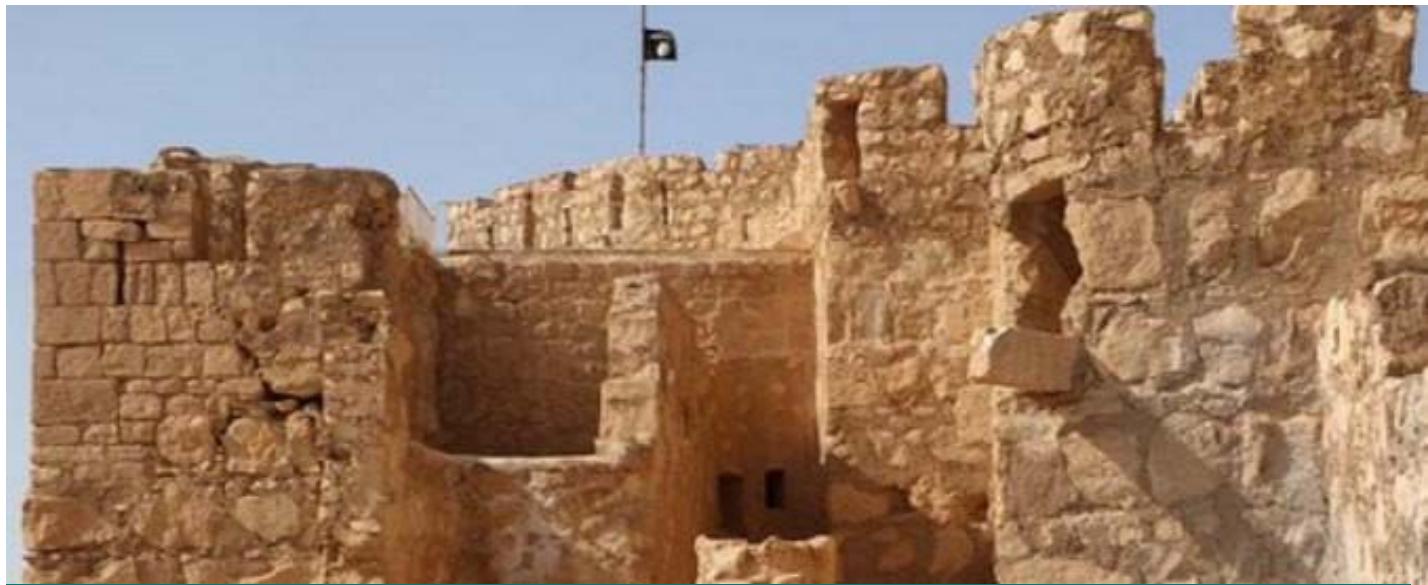


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L'Isis avanza. Parole, parole, parole da Usa e Europa



di Franco Rizzi | 9 giugno 2015

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Il 2 giugno si sono riuniti a **Parigi** i rappresentanti degli Stati che fanno parte della coalizione guidata dagli Stati Uniti che combatte contro il primo califfato dell'epoca moderna. In quella occasione, l'attuale Premier iracheno **Al Abadi** che, nel 2014 ha preso il posto di **Nouri al-Maliki** – il Primo Ministro che si è contraddistinto, fra le altre cose, per la sua politica di repressione nei confronti degli iracheni sunniti – ha sostenuto che la **coalizione anti-Isis**, non avrebbe fatto quello che doveva fare, permettendo al califfato di continuare ad espandersi e radicarsi nei territori conquistati. Queste vittorie ottenute con le armi sono accompagnate da una politica che mira essenzialmente a conquistare la fiducia delle popolazione, attraverso una ridistribuzione della ricchezza e la propaganda ideologica: la costruzione di uno Stato islamico con le sue regole ed i suoi valori diversi e contrapposti a quelli occidentali. Questa missione attrae non pochi giovani dall'Europa alla ricerca di

un ideale. La stessa strategia del terrore che l'Isis aveva adottato nella prima fase dell'espansione, si va ridelineando per una **convenienza politica** poiché il califfato non può continuare a mozzare teste. Vediamo ora a che punto siamo riguardo alle conquiste territoriali. Un punto è certo: nonostante la politica adottata sinora, almeno da sei mesi a questa parte, di condurre dei raid aerei, l'Isis ha continuato a guadagnare terreno, raggiungendo l'obiettivo simbolico di mettere in discussione gli **accordi Sykes-Picot del 1916**, conquistando Ramadi e **Palmira** avendo ormai la capacità di spostare liberamente le truppe tra la Siria e l'Iraq. Non solo, ma questo vasto territorio è ricco di petrolio: questo significa la possibilità di avere accesso ad enormi quantità di denaro da dedicare alla causa.

Mondo

Pubblicità

Nonostante il fiume di parole spese nell'incontro di Parigi, in cui si è più volte ribadito che la lotta contro l'Isis sarà molto lunga, è naturale chiedersi cosa non abbia funzionato. I fattori sono diversi e convergono intorno ad un unico problema: che fare una

volta escluso ogni intervento di terra? E' sufficiente immaginare che sia possibile contrastare l'Isis solo con raid aerei di appoggio? Intanto va detto che l'addestramento americano dei soldati dell'esercito siriano che combatte contro Asad non è stato molto performante. Inoltre **icurdi**, nonostante il loro coraggio, non possiedono armi pesanti. E per finire va sottolineato che per il momento la popolazione sunnita subisce il fascino dell'Isis ben contenti di rendere la pariglia agli sciiti che, con Al- Maliki, sono stati estromessi dal potere e sottoposti a incredibili soprusi.

E' evidente che la partita dell'Isis non si gioca solo relativamente a questo territorio, ma in prospettiva anche in relazione alla caduta

di Asad e alla situazione della **Libia**, dove nuovi focolai di adesione alla ideologia del califfato si affermano progressivamente.

Ci troviamo di fronte alla dimostrazione plateale degli **errori della politica americana e di quella europea**: non solo di quella coloniale, i cui effetti si fanno sentire ancora oggi, ma anche di quella più recente che ha avuto inizio con la guerra a Saddam Hussein e a Gheddafi. Tutti atti di guerra compiuti senza sapere cosa sarebbe accaduto in futuro.

Russian-Backed Rebels Are Restarting the War in Ukraine

The "pincer" tank strategy has returned to the battlefields of eastern Europe.

BY JAMES MILLER

JUNE 8, 2015

Last week, Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine launched a significant offensive against Marinka, a town less than 10 miles west-southwest of Donetsk, the separatists' capital. While the Ukrainian military repulsed the attack, there is now renewed fighting across eastern Ukraine. Not only has this fighting shattered February's "Minsk II" cease-fire, which was already frayed, it may also have permanently destroyed the peace process with which the international community was seeking to end this war. And the rebels' latest moves give a sense of what the Kremlin and its proxies could have planned next.

On June 3, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk [warned](#) that Russia's "terrorists" had launched a major military offensive in eastern Ukraine just hours after Moscow canceled a meeting of the trilateral contact group — which includes representatives of Ukraine, Russia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and is tasked with negotiating a settlement to the crisis.

As the fighting began, citizens in Donetsk took [video](#) of outgoing artillery fire from positions right next to [residential high-rises](#), seemingly another example of a [pledge](#) made by a separatist military commander nearly a year ago to [burrow](#) into the city of Donetsk and use its residents as human shields.

Within hours, it was clear that hundreds of rebel fighters were leading a direct ground assault on Marinka. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine [witnessed](#) around 100 separatist artillery attacks, but they also saw dozens of separatist armored vehicles, trucks, artillery pieces, and Grad rocket launchers deploying to the battle, including T-72 Main Battle Tanks. Other accounts of the June 3 [battle](#) corroborate the OSCE report.

The OSCE report and other testimony make clear that the separatists, not the Ukrainian military, were the aggressors. According to the OSCE, their attempts to contact separatist leaders and calls for a renewed cease-fire were ignored. Moreover, many of the separatist tanks observed by the OSCE were T-72s, tanks that Ukraine **has not used** in this conflict — indicating that they were almost certainly supplied or perhaps even directly operated by the Russian military.

By the end of the day, at least five Ukrainian soldiers were killed, **according to** Ukrainian authorities, and another 39 were wounded. Both the Ukrainian government and the separatists **report** that 10 to 14 separatist fighters were killed and more than 80 were injured. Though the reports are disputed, a number of civilians were also killed or injured. **According** to one United Nations official, nine civilians were killed in Marinka alone.

In order to fend off the rebel attack, Kiev had to mobilize a significant number of troops and equipment; the government is warning that the real fight is just over the horizon. President Petro Poroshenko **told** parliament on June 4 that the assault on Marinka represented a “colossal threat,” and his government is preparing for the prospect of a “full-scale invasion” of Russian troops.

Indeed, Russia and its eastern Ukrainian proxies appear to be gearing up for a renewed fight. Throughout the end of April and the beginning of May, significant numbers of military convoys in separatist-held Ukraine were **spotted** by citizen observers, journalists, and OSCE international monitors. Those convoys included T-72 tanks, as well as Strela-10 anti-aircraft weapons, designed to guard against fast-moving strike craft on the front lines.

In recent months, both NATO nations and the Ukrainian government warned that the Russian military was once again escalating its support for the separatists by supplying new weapons. In April, Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, **warned** that Russia was preparing for a new offensive and was taking advantage of the nominal cease-fire to reposition its troops and equipment and to train and supply the separatists. The separatists don’t seem to disagree: In late April, Alexander Zakharchenko, the head of the self-declared Donetsk People’s Republic, **told Vice News** that he did not want the Minsk cease-fire to hold.

In the days since the attack on Marinka, Russian-backed forces have launched smaller offensives north and northwest of Donetsk and from positions east of Mariupol. On June 8, the Ukrainian military **reported** that heavy fighting is once again raging in Marinka, and the Ukrainian military also seems increasingly **concerned** about attacks on the towns of Artyomovsk and Gorlovka, both north-northeast of Donetsk. Clearly, the June 3 attack on Marinka was part of a wider pattern and, presumably, a wider strategy of the separatists.

The target of this new offensive is not necessarily Marinka or Donetsk, the area of this newest wave of fighting, but the areas north and northwest of Luhansk, north and west of Gorlovka, and north and east of Mariupol. By conducting surprise attacks along the narrow corridors of the front lines, the rebels have been able to secure **finger-like strips of land** which, once expanded, could threaten to trap pockets of Ukrainian troops and the towns they defend in “pincers,” grinding Kiev’s forces like dough between fingers as they close into a fist. The separatists employed this same strategy to great effect last August in the **battle for Ilovaisk** and in the **capture of Debaltseve** in February.

Each of these recent attacks has begun with little warning, much like the assault on Marinka. Each attack seems to benefit the Russian-backed fighters in several ways: They test the Ukrainian force’s front lines and force leadership to constantly second guess where the next attack will come from. Meanwhile, each attack threatens the possibility of driving these “fingers” deeper into Ukrainian-held territory. This strategy has been successful in retaking territory without the benefit of requiring a headline-making major offensive. In fact, the Ukrainian government **released a report** on May 6 saying that since the signing of the second Minsk cease-fire deal on Feb. 18, the separatist fighters have **captured 28** towns or villages — a significant number considering that this occurred during what was supposed to be a cessation of hostilities.

The battle for Marinka may have ended in defeat for the rebels, but Ukraine could still be losing the war. From their positions around Donetsk, the rebels have the ability to strike at any number of important towns and key highways, further encroaching on territory held by Kiev’s forces. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military has been forced to mobilize a significant amount of soldiers just to defend Marinka.

It's not clear if the government in Kiev can sustain this strategy, since a large amount of its forces and heavy equipment are **stationed** near Mariupol, the key coastal city south of Donetsk, near the Russian border and on the road between Russian territory and Crimea. It's not clear if the Russian-backed separatists have enough firepower to ever capture Mariupol, but it is clear the Ukrainian military cannot risk losing the city, which is both the most important economic prize on the coast and a crucial bulwark against Russia establishing a land bridge to Crimea.

Not only are large parts of its military resources stuck defending Mariupol, the Ukrainian military also has to take any enemy advances north of the city very seriously in order to ensure that it does not become surrounded. The focus on the front lines between Donetsk and Mariupol, which include towns such as Marinka, could leave the Ukrainian lines between Donetsk and Luhansk more vulnerable to the creeping advances of the Russian-backed fighters, which have been progressing — despite multiple cease-fires — since August.

In many ways, the Minsk deals of August and February have been farces. Fighting has not stopped, and the rebels have continued to retake territory. The Russian military took advantage of the deals and continued to supply weapons and troops to the separatists, and this conflict is not any closer to resolution than it was before the deals were signed. On the other hand, each carried with it at least a temporary de-escalation in fighting, bringing needed reprieve for civilians who have been stuck in the crossfire.

On June 3, amid the heaviest fighting, the Ukrainian military general staff **announced** that it would have to redeploy its heavy armor and artillery to the front lines — equipment which had been withdrawn to comply with Minsk II — in order to confront this new threat. The Kremlin, predictably, has already **called** that development a provocation, again twisting the reality that it is Moscow, not Kiev, driving this fight. This serves as yet another piece of evidence, however, that Russia may escalate this conflict — with tanks and rhetoric — in the coming weeks and months.

But the battle for Marinka has also already had at least one tremendous consequence. Three days after the attack, Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, who was in charge of the OSCE mission, resigned. She had been overseeing not just the monitoring of fighting in eastern Ukraine but also the cease-fire negotiations between Kiev, the rebels, and Russia. Tagliavini's resignation is a sure sign that there is frustration within the OSCE about the deterioration of the situation in eastern Ukraine. But with Tagliavini out, it may not be possible to find a replacement who both Russia and the West can agree to support.

If such an agreement cannot be met, the peace process in eastern Ukraine is dead. The consequence could be open war between Ukraine and Russia, war that has been so carefully avoided and yet war which some have feared has always, thanks to Putin's aggressive intentions, been unavoidable. The Marinka attack does not augur well for the prospects of peace.

Photo credit: DOMINIQUE FAGET/AFP/Getty Images

Ukraine crews battle blaze after 'huge' explosion outside Kiev

2 hours ago | Europe

Video shows a huge tower of smoke and flames rising into the sky, as Tom Burridge reports

Emergency crews are battling a fire outside the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, following a huge blast at a fuel depot.

The blaze broke out on Monday evening, and one worker at the plant died.

The explosion on Tuesday morning left several firefighters reportedly injured or missing.

Three firefighters were unaccounted for and another six were taken to hospital, officials said, as the fire spread to at least 16 tanks, most of them storing petrol.

The fire at the depot, next to Hlevakha airbase and near the village of Vasylkiv, sent a huge pall of smoke over the

surrounding area.



The fire burned through the night

The army has been clearing a munitions storage facility, located about 50m (164ft) away, according to Oleksandr Turchynov, secretary of Ukraine's national security and defence council.

Fears it could spread

The blaze broke out on Monday evening in one tank and spread to neighbouring containers, Ukraine's emergencies ministry said (in Ukrainian).

An official from Ukraine's petrol industry told the BBC that the explosion had occurred at 08:30 local time (06:30 BST) on Tuesday.

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov tweeted: "There has been an explosion at the oil depot near Vasylkiv. A huge one."

The casualties were being treated in hospital for burns and poisoning.



Fire crews are trying to stop the blaze spreading to an adjacent depot



People in the surrounding area have been taken to safety

Of the 16 tanks on fire, eight were said to have a capacity of 900 cubic metres (32,000 cu ft) each.

Two hundred firefighters were trying to bring the fire under control amid fears it could spread to an adjacent depot.

People in a 2km (1.24 miles) zone around the petrol containers currently on fire have been evacuated, Mr Turchynov said.

It was not immediately clear what might have caused the blast.