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Migrants camps become Paris backdrop amid EU quota wrangling

17 GIUGNO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



Tents and mattresses, open-air kitchens, cries for help, shows of exasperation: at the heart of the City of Lights, makeshift migrant camps are mushrooming, one of the latest consequences of the raging conflicts in Africa and the Middle-East.

Since the start of the year, European cities have been struck by an [unprecedented](#) influx of refugees, overwhelming local authorities while the burden of sharing asylum seekers fleeing [war](#), human rights [violations](#) and [starvation](#) is fueling tension among European Union members.

The French government was to announce Wednesday steps to increase capacity to deal with arrivals that have swamped Paris authorities in recent months.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo's staff has been struggling to contain unauthorized camps as about 350 undocumented migrants have settled in a park in the 18th district, in northeast Paris, and close by Austerlitz train station, closer to the Seine river, in recent days.

Migrants are seeking new homes after an initial group of 470 were dislodged by police forces from a bridge behind Gare du Nord station earlier this month, getting [worldwide press coverage](#). Most are from Eritrea and Sudan, according to the city of Paris. Some crossed the Mediterranean on rafts to reach European shores.

Hidalgo has called for a facility to be set up in Paris. 'They can't stay out on the streets at night,' she said [on June 9](#).

Yet the French administration fears this could fuel political tensions and encourage more illegal immigration into the French capital, after an official camp near the northern town of Calais did just that and had to be shut down following riots in 2002. Now, thousands of migrants attempting to reach the U.K. sleep in forests and wasteland around the northern city, waiting for an opportunity to cross the Channel.

Instead, the government plans to offer more temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, improve information on procedures and crack down on illegal immigration rings, AFP reported on Tuesday. The steps are aimed at preventing refugee camps and the safety and hygiene issues that they raise, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said.

Parisian protests

Italy, where most migrants first arrive in Europe, this week threatened to issue travel permits to let them move on to neighboring European Union countries. So far, the French police has been stopping them at the border, close to the town of Ventimiglia.

In the meantime in Paris, locals have been shocked by the migrants' dire situation. Protests erupted last week to demand more accommodation for refugees after the police tried to [dismantle new settlements](#).

Over the last weekend, about 150 people, a majority of adult men and a handful of women and young teenagers, moved with makeshift tents and mattresses into the Eole gardens close to Montmartre hill and its famous Sacre-Coeur Church.

The new location is a clear improvement on Gare du Nord: the square has two toilets and a fountain. Neighbors and activists have put up signs requesting sheets, old mobile phones, shoes, clothes and rough sacks. An open-air kitchen has been set up to serve coffee and hand out food as locals turn up with dishes, pizzas and sandwiches.

Hollande will meet with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi Sunday in Milan.

Meanwhile, Hidalgo remains under pressure. Activists staged [another demonstration](#) on Tuesday evening – this time in Eole gardens.

Italy, France and Germany discusses plan to relocate, repatriate migrants

17 GIUGNO 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA



France, Italy and Germany agreed on Tuesday to join forces to identify migrants arriving by sea and to swiftly relocate them across the European Union or send them back to their home countries if their claims for asylum in Europe are rejected.

Ministers from the three countries put on a show of unity after the arrival in Europe of thousands of migrants, who make perilous Mediterranean crossings from Libya, strained the resources of Italy and Greece and raised tensions with northern European states that are the destinations of many migrants.

“You have three friends in front of you,” French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said at a joint press conference with his Italian and German counterparts in an attempt to defuse the simmering spat.

“France, together with Germany and Italy support a relocation and readmission mechanism,” Cazeneuve said during a break from a meeting of EU interior ministers in Luxembourg to discuss a plan to tackle the migrant emergency.

As they deliberated, police began removing mainly African migrants from makeshift seaside camps on the Italian-French border. Around 300 had collected on the Italian side in hopes of proceeding into France and onwards to northern Europe where relatives live and job chances might be better.

France and Austria have stepped up border controls on migrants coming from Italy, turning back hundreds and leaving growing numbers camped out in railway stations in Rome and Milan.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said in a newspaper interview on Sunday that if EU leaders did not show solidarity with Italy, Rome had a Plan B “that would be a wound inflicted on Europe”.

To ease the strain on southern countries bearing the brunt of the migrant influx, the European Commission

has proposed that EU governments relocate 24,000 asylum-seekers from Italy and 16,000 from Greece over the next two years.

Frontiere: La lezione francese e lo schiaffo di Hollande



17/06/2015 - Il sistema elettorale francese, basato sul maggioritario uninominale a doppio turno, ha spesso consentito al partito socialista di sopravvivere nonostante le frequenti emorragie di consensi.

Non di rado gli accordi al secondo turno hanno salvato in corner i candidati del centrosinistra non solo per la convergenza dei voti della *gauche* radicale, ma perfino con l'appoggio del centrodestra, così da isolare gli scomodi candidati del Front National, spesso primo partito nei singoli collegi.

Il principio ha avuto senso anche al contrario. La dimostrazione più grande fu il ballottaggio per le presidenziali del 2002 quando i voti

della sinistra permisero a Chirac di battere Jean Marie Le Pen e prepararsi al secondo mandato.

Il sistema francese garantisce stabilità ma crea un certo imbarazzo nelle istituzioni, tenute in piedi dalla paura dell'estremismo nazionalista ma nei fatti sempre meno rappresentative dei sentimenti popolari.

Da almeno vent'anni questo processo si è consolidato. Più o meno da quando l'Europa si è trasformata da una dichiarazione d'intenti a un corda intorno al collo di molti, francesi compresi. L'ascesa costante del Front National è evidentemente legata all'intero processo.

L'europesismo francese si è sempre diviso fra gli internazionalisti di sinistra che al pari dei loro omologhi in giro per il mondo si battono per un mondo idealmente senza frontiere e i fautori di un ritorno della Francia a una non meglio definita *grandeur*.

Se i primi sembrano usciti da un film di Michel Leclerc e finiscono per diventare testimoni di principi apprezzati solo nei circoli intellettuali delle grandi città, i secondi devono fare i conti con due grandi contraddizioni:

- a Bruxelles si parla più tedesco che francese e la *grandeur*, già compromessa su scala mondiale, appare difficile da riesumare anche su scala continentale;
- il ritorno della Francia al comando integrato NATO avvenuta nel 2009 dopo 43 anni di indipendenza, nei fatti è una sottomissione alla geopolitica americana, non sempre allineata storicamente alle velleità di Parigi.

Sia per gli uni che per gli altri appare sempre più difficile appagare quel sentimento popolare radicato nelle aree rurali, ossatura millenaria di una nazione a grande trazione agricola e serbatoio di consensi per Marine Le Pen.

Se la Francia profonda scalpita sulle ali di un revanscismo sempre più antieuropeista, con tutta evidenza il dramma potrebbe sembrare più socialista che gollista. Ma *pour la France* all'Eliseo tutto è possibile: anche accarezzare tematiche care al FN come il ripristino dei controlli alle frontiere con l'Italia. Ovviamente alla salute della *gauche* europeista parigina e soprattutto di quella a sud della Alpi.

Quanto questo dipenda dal sentimento nazionale dei francesi che spesso travalica le differenze ideologiche o da calcoli elettorali, è difficile da dire.

I socialisti hanno perso 150 municipi alle amministrative del 2014 e sono dati per dispersi alle presidenziali del 2017, dove con ogni probabilità trionferà il FN e Sarkozy tornerà in carica.

Il Presidente Hollande e il ministro degli Interni Cazeneuve lo sanno bene.

Che le frontiere vengano chiuse *pour la France* o *pour la chaise* non possiamo saperlo. La politica affianca i propri interessi a quelli pubblici in tutto il mondo, si sa.

Quale dei due fattori pesi di più non è però così importante. Quel che conta è che le istituzioni francesi rispondano ad una fortissima domanda proveniente dal basso.

Sistemi elettorali e partiti a volte possono meno della *vox populi*. Quella voce che i francesi esprimono con un senso di comunità straordinario, da cui noi italiani possiamo soltanto imparare.



Syrians recount horror of chemical attacks on civilians

Medical personnel tell US Congress that government forces using chlorine gas on civilians and urge for no-fly zone.

18 Jun 2015 02:38 GMT | [War & Conflict](#), [Middle East](#), [Syria](#)

Aid workers and medical personnel have called on the US to take action against use of weaponised chlorine gas on civilians in Syria and to impose a no-fly zone in the wake of a series of gas attacks since March.

Testifying before the US Congress on Wednesday, the doctors who have worked in Syria called on the administration of US President Barack Obama to make good on its word to punish the government for the use of chemical weapons and put in place a no-fly zone to protect civilians.

"I live in Syria and I never see these helicopters and airplanes against extremists or training camps and so on. All we see is these planes and helicopters being used against hospitals, against schools," Dr Mohamed Tennari from the Syrian-American Medical Society said.

Dr Tennari, who runs a field hospital in Idlib, one of the areas locals say has been most heavily hit with chlorine, told lawmakers that President Bashar al-Assad has concentrated his resources on civilians.

He described the night of March 16, when a wave of explosive barrel bombs were dropped from helicopters over his home town of Sarmin, filling the air with "a bleach-like odour".

"Dozens of people experienced difficulty breathing, with their eyes and throats burning, and many began secreting from the mouth," he said, speaking through a translator.

The doctors admit there is no way to 100 percent verify that the Syrian government is behind the attacks. But, they say, only the Syrian government has access to helicopters, responsible for dropping the chlorine filled barrels onto civilian areas it believes are supportive of the Syrian opposition.

"I am a doctor and I am very familiar with death but I have never seen a more obscene way to kill children. I have never watched so many suffer in such an obscene manner," Dr Annie Sparrow, deputy director for Human Rights programme said.

Government forces have consistently targeted opposition areas with the goal of both prolonging suffering and driving them out of the area, Farouq Habib, the Syria programme manager for Mayday Rescue told the Congress.

On Tuesday, the Syrian government used so-called [elephant rockets](#) in an attack on the Damascus suburb of Douma, killing at least 36 people, including children, according to activists.

While the Syrian government has handed over its stocks of chemical weapons for destruction by the international community, chlorine does not count as a banned material because it has many uses, such as purifying water.

"The Syrian government is using chlorine gas with impunity," the former US ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, told the House foreign affairs committee.

President Assad has denied being behind the chlorine gas attacks even as up to 45 attacks have been reported since March.

Despite a UN resolution outlawing chlorine gas attacks, Ford said that Assad, fighting a four-year civil war to oust him, is not deterred.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has been investigating allegations of dozens of recent gas attacks, but it is being refused access to the sites by Assad's government, diplomatic sources have said.

Some Western powers have expressed concern that enforcing a no-fly zone in the area could empower ISIL fighters.

[OPINION: Chlorine - Weapon of the desperate](#)

In 2013, the US threatened military intervention against Syria's government after sarin gas attacks killed hundreds of people in a Damascus suburb.

Assad's government last year handed over 1,300 tonnes of chemical arms to a joint UN-OPCW mission for destruction. But Damascus has denied using sarin or any chemical weapons in battle during Syria's continuing civil war.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, with a network of sources on the ground, says it has documented 230,000 deaths in Syria's war, almost 70,000 of them civilians.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies

CONFLICT

Rebels announce major offensive in southern Syria

By **Reuters** 6/17/15 at 11:26 AM



Fighters from the Free Syrian Army's Al-Tahrir Brigade and Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) fighters gesture while posing on the Syrian-Turkish border Tel Abyad of Raqqa governorate after they said they took control of the area 15 June, 2015. Rodi Said/REUTERS



FILED UNDER: **Conflict**

Rebels in southern Syria announced a major offensive on Wednesday to capture remaining positions held by the Syrian military in Quneitra province, near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, where bombardments could be seen a short distance away.

Quneitra sits in a sensitive region around 70 kilometers (40 miles) southwest of the capital Damascus and has been the scene of frequent fighting between various insurgent groups and the Syrian military backed by allied militia.

Rebel spokesman Issam al-Rayes wrote on Twitter that an alliance of insurgent groups fighting in the operation had signed a pact, which did not involve al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front.

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The groups in the offensive are fighting under the banner of the rebel Free Syrian Army, he said. Nusra has fought in southern Syria but is not thought to be the main insurgent force there, unlike in other parts of the country.

A Reuters photographer watching from the Israeli-occupied Golan said there had been heavy shelling since early Wednesday in the Quneitra area, with scores of bombardments.

At one point he could see smoke rising from around 13 bombardments and the sound of small arms being fired could also be heard in the distance.

The shelling appeared to be focused between Quneitra's water reservoir and the town itself, with some buildings on the outskirts appearing to have suffered damage, the photographer said. It was not clear which groups were taking part.

Later, rocket alarms sounded in the Golan Heights, a Reuters photographer said. Tanks on the Syrian side could be seen firing their cannons in the reservoir area and there was the sound of Syrian helicopters overhead.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported violent clashes between the Syrian military and insurgent groups including Islamist factions in northern Quneitra.

The Observatory's head Rami Abdulrahman said a handful of combatants were killed on both sides since Tuesday in the area.

Insurgents fighting in Sweida province further east had failed during recent fighting to capture a main road to Damascus, and it was not clear whether they could secure a route to the capital in this latest offensive, he said.

Different groups, including the hardline Islamic State and Nusra Front, have been putting the Syrian military under heavy pressure in

various parts of the country in the past two months.

Another insurgent alliance including Nusra Front has taken hold of the northwestern Idlib province, edging closer to President Bashar al-Assad's coastal stronghold while Islamic State fighters overran the central city of Palmyra last month.

The government says it can defend important stretches of territory in Syria's populous west and the deputy foreign minister told Reuters last week that Damascus was safer than towards the start of the conflict, which grew out of protests against Assad in 2011.

Long-term Gaza truce mooted as Hamas and Israel grapple with jihadi challenge

By **Reuters** 6/17/15 at 4:06 PM



Members of Palestinian national security forces loyal to Hamas demonstrate their skills during a military graduation ceremony in the northern Gaza Strip, June 11, 2015. Suhaib Salem/Reuters



FILED UNDER: **Conflict**

It's not quite a case of the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but shared concern over Islamic State-inspired militant groups in Gaza could help redraw complex relationships between Hamas and a hostile Egypt and Israel.

Talk is rampant in the territory of 1.8 million of a prospective pullback from confrontation with Israel - a long-term ceasefire to cement further an Egyptian-brokered truce that brought an end to the Gaza war nearly a year ago.

That could allow Hamas to step up efforts to rein in radical Islamists, known as Salafis, who have claimed responsibility for recent rocket attacks against Israel, and open the way for more reconstruction aid to reach Gaza.

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There are also signs of change along Egypt's frontier with the Gaza Strip.

The military-run government in Cairo, which accuses Islamist Hamas of backing jihadi fighters in Egypt's Sinai desert, opened its border with Gaza this week for the first time in three months, permitting Palestinians to travel in both directions.

"The new easing of measures results from the presence of a common enemy," said Akram Attallah, a Gaza-based political commentator.

Hamas insists Islamic State has no foothold in Gaza, where the Palestinian group's forces are dominant. It has described what Salafi groups say have been the arrests of dozens of their supporters as no more than action against "criminal elements".

But by mounting such operations, some in the wake of Salafi-claimed rocket strikes, Hamas has also shown a commitment to a truce with Israel and demonstrated to Egypt that it is fighting the same jihadi enemy, Atallah said.

Over the past few months, envoys from Europe and the United Nations, as well as the Qatari ambassador overseeing the Gulf state's Gaza reconstruction projects, have visited more often, strengthening the belief a new truce channel is active.

Some analysts have raised the prospect of a five-year ceasefire deal that would address Hamas's call for the opening of a Gaza seaport and an end to Israel's naval blockade, a measure Israeli officials say is aimed at blocking weapons from reaching the group.

"It is not the first time that Hamas is sending the message that it would like to discuss a Hudna (long-term truce) with Israel," said Haim Tomer, former head of overseas operations at Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

"(Hamas) is a movement that has become a regime and when you are a regime you can suffer as a result of your grip on power. This is

what they are now learning. So they are looking for options," he said.

CEASEFIRE TALKS

An Israeli official, discussing the sensitive issue on condition that he not be identified, said he was aware of talks conducted by Qatari and Egyptian officials about a possible five-year ceasefire, but no agreement was imminent.

"The difficulty right now is in getting a commitment that there won't be any (Palestinian) shooting whatsoever. The demands of Israel are mainly to do with easing the blockade and (restrictions at) border crossings," the official said.

Another Israeli official, however, said that talks being held with Qatar were focused mainly on Gaza reconstruction.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri, asked about prospects of an expanded ceasefire with Israel, told Reuters the group had received "ideas" but no concrete proposal.

"We will deal with any effort that would lead to breaking the blockade and alleviate the suffering of Gaza people on condition it does not affect our national cause."

The recent rocket attacks from Gaza caused no casualties in Israel, which responded with retaliatory air strikes that seemed to be aimed at keeping a lid on hostilities by targeting facilities abandoned by Hamas.

In Gaza, where economic recovery and reconstruction have been slow after a conflict in which more than 2,200 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands of homes damaged, Atallah said Hamas and the enclave's residents did not want renewed fighting.

"Certainly there is a serious worry, especially when some Israeli leaders say it could cause a new war if a rocket hit a populated place or killed someone," said Atallah.