

## **Yemen: a precarious balance**

This thesis has the aim to illustrate the complex situation in the Yemeni country focusing on the most relevant areas of that reality. The script start with the historical background from the nineties to nowadays that lead to a socio-economic analysis with a widening about the critical factors that worsen Yemen's instability. The last part is centered on the terrorism widespread in the territory and on the debate about the American intervention to fight against it.

To understand the today Yemen's internal dynamics is required a view of the conditions of the Country after the unification of the North and the South in 1990, considering the figure of the former president 'Ali 'Abd Allah Saleh, that remained in office for more than twenty years.

At the moment of the unification on the 22 of May 1990, the internal situation was influenced by the economical crisis, the disparities between social classes and the tribalism of the North.

An exogenous factor that upset the precarious balance found and that affected the international was the invasion of Kuwait led by Saddam Hussein on the 2 of August 1990. The lack of a clear position of the Yemen, member of the ONU Security Council, irritated Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf's States that expelled all the Yemeni from their territories causing the fall of remittances and of foreign aids worsening the economic situation. In a state of total isolation only the development of oil wells, started in the eighties ,saved the Country from the collapse.

For what concern the internal front, the rising instability caused a civil war in May 1994 that ended in July with the defeat of south separatists and with the launching of a new constitutional system.

Over the influence of the recent past, nowadays the two mains factors of increasing conflict are the tribal Houthis movement in the North and the motions of secession in the South.

Houthis are a group of Shiites rebels whose name derived from the homonymous family native to the Sa'da's governorship that claim a direct offspring from Mohammed.

The clashes with the army started in the summer of 2004 and followed one another until the last one with a big protest in the capital on the 27 of January 2011. The confessional and tribal traits that the conflict acquired during that time destroyed the mechanisms that traditionally permitted to find a precarious compromise between the two sides and made Houthis the maximum exponents of the opposition to the internal and economical policy of the government.

The separatist movement instead has a peaceful nature but refuses the unification claiming the secession from the North.

Regarding the international, to understand the mechanisms of power developed in time is important to deepen the gradual rapprochement of Yemeni and American government, allied to Saudi Arabia in the Kwait case, that was possible mainly for two events linked to terrorism.

The first one was the USS Cole (American ship) attack on October 2000 in the port of Aden, that caused the death of 17 marines and damages for 150-170 million dollars. The attack, claimed by al-Qaida, triggered the reaction of United States that started to make pressure on the Yemeni government to curb the most radical Islamic groups. The inefficacy of the action to fight terrorism didn't solve the problem that recurred with the attack on 11 September 2001. The consciousness of American officers that many hijacker had Yemeni origins and the interest of Saleh to obtain the benefits from the US support were the basis for the cooperation against terrorism.

The breaking point in the precarious balance, that triggered the Yemeni revolution (2011-2012), was on January 2011 when the protest in the capital rose and spread everywhere in the territory. Not only the population took to the streets, but also soldiers and government' members weakening the control of the central power in the peripheral areas. The mediation attempt done by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was useless and it was impossible to solve the standing-off until the intervention, on May 2011, of Sadiq al-Ahmar, one of the most powerful tribal chief and commander of the first armored division that declared his support to the opposition. In one of the clashes that followed that stance Saleh was injured and forced for that reason to leave the power to the vice-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi, to receive adequate care. When he returned in the Country the clashes weren't finished and they continued until November 2011 when he signed the political transition plan that provide the definitive transfer of power to his vice-president in the following thirty days. In January 2012 al-Hadi was appointed as the only eligible candidate and the law to give the immunity to Saleh and his family was approved.

It would have been a passage of rupture with the former regime but in the reality of facts it wasn't, in fact to do that it's necessary an army reform to eliminate the members of Saleh's family from the major posts in the military.

With that first part we highlight the main hubs of Yemeni history, an history that to be understand necessitate of further studies, particularly for what concern the territory and the population.

Yemen is located in the Middle East, in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, to the East with Oman and to the North with Saudi Arabia.

The Yemeni islands are the Hanish, Zuqar, Kamaran, Perim and Socotra.

Talking about demography Yemen is the second most populous country of the Arabian Peninsula with a population of 24,771,809 and a growth rate of 2.58%. The rapid increase of that rate has raised concerns about the possibility of absorption by the economy of new entrants in the labor market, compared to an unemployment rate of 35%. With an average age of 18 years the level of human development remains low, taking into account that 45.2% of the population lives below the poverty line of \$ 2 a day and that the level of literacy is 50.2% (for women is 30%).

Of relevance to everyday life and therefore important to complete our analysis is a nod to the infrastructure.

Yemen has four principal harbors, Aden, Hodeida, Mukalla and Moka, the first two cities have also an airport, instead the other three are in Sana'a, Ta'izz and Rayyan. Those structures are fundamental for the economic exchanges and the government allocated funds for their maintenance, instead the condition of the internal road network is terrible, in fact for the lack of railways people are forced to transport goods in bumpy roads.

But the worst situation is for the electrical network, accessible only to the 40% of the population leaving isolated rural areas and forcing industrial companies, hospitals and hotels to provide itself with its own generator.

Entering into the specifics of economic, according to data taken from "The Economist Intelligence Unit", we can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the country, allowing the comparison with the other Gulf States.

Oil and agriculture are the two pillars of the economy of Yemen. Although the first domain the entire sector, the estimates imply that the reserves of Yemen, already limited by the standards of neighboring countries, will be depleted by 2020, which prompted the government to launch plans for the development of alternative resources already present in the area as natural gas, fisheries, tourism and agriculture. With regard to the latter there is to say that remains central to the domestic economy by employing the majority of employees and representing the main source of income for about three quarters of the population. The problem is the precariousness of its profits due to several factors such as soil erosion, deforestation and the decline of groundwater.

A peculiarity of the Yemeni economy is that it's based on the exchange in cash which makes ineffective the instrument of interest rates, forcing the government to rely on the issuance of Treasury bills and certificates of deposit to manage the money supply . In addition, the exchange rate is adjusted so as to fight inflation imported from abroad with oil's exchange, that leaves public accounts largely influenced by fluctuations in global prices. It's one of the reason why in last year

there were large investments in the gas sector whose reserves, even if exiguous, are sufficient for commercial development.

As for other sectors, is surely to be taken into account fisheries. With its 2,500 km coastline, Yemen has a significant marine heritage whose potential is not exploited because of underdevelopment.

Tourism is one of the levers in which government tried to invest to ensure a constant source of foreign currency to the country but whose potential is severely limited by lack of adequate facilities and the security problem. Given this economic scenario, the new cabinet headed by Prime Minister Mohammed Salem Basindwa has developed a program to address the urgent economic crisis. The details of the plan, announced in January 2012, underline the priority given to the restoration of public services, in particular the provision of water and electricity.

The humanitarian crisis is another emergency that the country was facing and for whose solution it intends to expand the social welfare programs already active and implement others for food safety.

To define more precisely the picture that we face is necessary to investigate other four major themes: refugees (internal and external), trafficking in persons, drugs and weapons.

Following the statistics of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in the current year is introducing new record for the number of African refugees and migrants. Compared to the 30 000 people who had reached the Yemeni coast in the Gulf of Aden and in the Red Sea in the first quarter of 2011, data for 2012 totaled about 43 000. If this trend were to persist, that promises to end the current year is a new record. An increase so relevant is justified by the fact that more and more Ethiopians are fleeing their homeland because of the widespread humanitarian crisis outnumbering Somali that emigrate for the same reason.

If this is the situation for those who come, who is already within the boundaries do not live a better course. Because of tribal clashes and conflicts between the army and militia, there was a new wave of internal displacement from the north and the south.

Although Yemen is the only Gulf state to have signed and ratified the Geneva Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees and the subsequent Protocol of 1967 and despite the social programs implemented with financial support from other countries, the UN agency notes that it is increasingly difficult to operate in an atmosphere of constant tension and how there are increasingly frequent cases of violation of human rights.

It is therefore necessary first to implement a strategy to ensure international protection to operators and secondly to verify the effectiveness of aid programs carried out.

As we have just seen the Yemeni coast, for its proximity to the Horn of Africa, is a point of passage for thousands of people. It's no different for criminal gangs involved in illegal trafficking of human beings who work in East Africa or in Central Asia. In fact, according to the U.S. State Department, one of the countries of origin in the sale of children in the Middle East is precisely Yemen.

For the same reasons, other two markets that are increasing their business are the one of drug and of army. The situation of political instability and unrest that have followed for years in the Country made it the perfect centre of drug dealing of the Gulf States and have led young people to consider drug trafficking one of the best prospects for the future. Instead is different for the traffic of weapons whose illegal sector has paradoxically less relevance than the legal one. As an article published on "Altreconomia"<sup>1</sup> stresses, the real problems and negative impacts are due to the official business particularly with the countries of Eastern Europe.

After the historical, political and socio-economical analysis of the Country, emerge the complexity of a territory whose unity is an imposed condition.

The tribal divisions present in Yemen do not allow the central government to have full control over remote areas and require a continuous bargaining to reconcile the various interests involved. Against the backdrop of growing instability that lies ahead, President Al-Hadi cannot be separated by the aid of the tribes strongly rooted in the territory, and this feature is configured as the most effective weapon to fight terrorism. The political games in place, both locally and internationally, have created power vacuums that were immediately exploited by terrorist infiltration to reach the command center.

The increase of bombings by AQAP (Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula) is a symptom of a growing reality that triggered the alarm at the international level, especially as regards the United States, whose intervention in the area is becoming more pressing. In fact the attack on the USS Cole (October 2000) and on the Twin Towers (September 2001), the assassination attempt of Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (August 2009) and the attempt by the twenty-three Nigerian Umar Farouk 'Abdul Matullab to blow himself up in the flight Amsterdam-Detroit (December 2009), have led to closer cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the US in combating terrorism and forced former President Saleh to intervene more vigorously in this area.

But the aggressiveness of the American interventions summed to the increase in poverty and the continuing unrest citizen increase the already widespread hostility towards the "invaders", thus allowing jihadis to act undisturbed.

One last thing to emphasize is the role that tribes play in the mechanisms of power.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Vignarca, "Armi allo Yemen: gli Usa preoccupati, per l'Italia è un "dato statistico"", Altreconomia, 16/12/2010

The lack of a strong central authority that allows law enforcement, makes necessary for the government to search for cooperation with tribal organs whose double gaming has become a fact. Indeed, when given ,the support to al-Qaida does not sink in a certain ideological belief structure, it is simply functional to exert pressure on the government, prodded it to enact policies to meet the particular interests of the tribes.

In that context is clear how the action of the new President is limited, adding the fact that his legitimacy, differently than its predecessor ,depends almost exclusively on the American support.

On 2009 US have conducted a review of the strategy implemented so far, that led to the definition of three main objectives: to combat AQAP in the short term, to increase aid and to develop an international plan to stabilize the country.

One of the latest strategies used by the Americans, who sparked an international debate has been the use of drones to carry out targeted assassinations. That one, more of the preceding, allowed people to perceive the United States as a threat and increased the hostility of the population.

In the face of all that situation and seen the disastrous results of the action in Afghanistan, much like the one carried out in Yemen, one wonders whether the real intention of the United States is to achieve peace, or whether the strategy implementation is aimed at maintaining a constant tension to justify an intervention by NATO and the building of American bases on the Yemeni territory. In fact as we have seen Yemen serves as the fundamental marker of the Middle East and African Exchequer. The risk is that a possible pro-Western strategic position moves, for the growing anti-Americanism, in the Iranian influence or at least anti-Western.