



Tecnologia - Ten years of war in Syria and the current situation (1)

Roma - 20 nov 2021 (Prima Notizia 24) I will focus on Syria in several articles, considering the importance the country has had in international relations for centuries.

Ten years ago, a civil war broke out in Syria. What is special about this conflict? What is currently happening in the country? How are Syrians living and what are they experiencing? Is there any prospect of achieving peace? On March 15, 2011, one of the first major protests against Bashar al-Assad's regime took place in Damascus. At that juncture, the strength of the remotely controlled "Arab Spring" put on the table the probability that a relatively young Bashar al-Assad (at the beginning of the crisis he was 45 years old, eleven of them spent as President of the country) would not remain in power. However, the reality turned out differently, given the traditional strength of Syrian Arab secularism, an opponent of Islamist terrorism from time immemorial - along with Algeria, Egypt, the Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq and Libya at the time. As a result, the war in Syria has become the deadliest conflict of the 21st century. In 2021 the death toll has reached an estimated 600,000 people and several million Syrians have become refugees. Considering the conflicts of the second half of the last century in terms of casualties, the Syrian war is still surpassed by the first Iranian-Iraqi Gulf War, which caused some 700,000 deaths from 1980 to 1988. The migration of refugees has significantly changed the internal political situation in the countries where they have been forced to seek refuge: mainly Turkey, the Lebanon and Jordan, as well as the European Union's Member States, including Germany which has shrewdly grabbed the intellectual elite of refugees while, as usual, Italy is lagging behind like a third wheel. Syria has become a territory of open rivalry between world and regional powers: Russia, Iran, Turkey and the United States of America openly keep their troops on its territory. Dozens of countries are involved in the war through various paramilitary and political groups supporting the various factions. For ten years the conflict has gone through several phases. From 2013 to 2017 Syria became the territory in which the first "Caliphate" was created since March 3, 1924. The civil war, with other countries' participation, was complemented by a war with terrorists - in the beginning supported by the usual suspects - whose permanence in Syria caused not only thousands of new victims, but also the destruction of cultural monuments of world value. Once one of the most successful countries in the region and a beacon of Islamic secularism, Syria has become a centre of gravity for political extremists and international terrorists - a test case in relations between Iranians and Israelis, Turks and Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis, as well as Russia and the USA. This war has described a mixed picture of conflict. The duration of the war is not accidental but entirely natural. From the beginning, there was a strong presence of external forces and players in the country, which predetermined everything. On July 15, 2011, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that it considered the internal political situation in Syria a civil war and demanded

that international humanitarian law be respected in the country. On July 29, the rebels already had an army financed by the usual suspects: Syrian officers disloyal to the regime, led by Colonel Riyad Assad, announced the creation of the so-called Free Syrian Army. Almost from the very beginning, the interests of the countries in the region and of the world powers were manifested in the conflict. In 2014, fighters from the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS) began to infiltrate from neighbouring Iraq. In the autumn of 2015, the terrorists were at the gates of Damascus. In 2014 the United States, which was leading the counter-terrorism coalition, began targeting their positions in Syria. In October 2015, Russia began its own counter-terrorist operation. In late 2017 Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the defeat of the terrorists and the United States of America also acknowledged the ISIS defeat. At that juncture, the military forces of Assad's legitimate government began to restore control over the country's territory. The attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully have so far failed. The basis for the agreement are the principles adopted in Geneva in 2012: the creation of a transitional government with all stakeholders' participation; the holding of Presidential and Parliamentary elections; the creation of new authorities. One of the elements of the agreement should be the adoption of a new Constitution: on October 30, 2019, the Syrian Constitutional Committee began its work. However, its participants (gathered in Geneva) have not yet begun to directly draft the new text. Therefore, the Presidential elections (held on May 26, 2021) were held according to the current legislation, and saw the victory of Bashar al-Assad with 95.19% of the votes - i.e. 13,540,860 Syrians (including refugees abroad), with their vote, rejected the attempts of those from abroad who were trying to change the political system of their country. Ten years after the start of the war, most of the country is back under the control of traditional Syrian institutions. It should be noted that general elections were held in July 2020, which brought the following 250 representatives to the People's Assembly: 167 seats for the (transnational) Arab Baath Socialist Party; 50 seats for the Independents not aligned with the Syrian government; 17 seats for the Independents aligned with the Syrian government; 3 seats for the Syrian Arab Socialist Union Party (Nasserites); 3 seats for the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Grand Syrians); 2 seats for the National Covenant Party (Nationalists); 2 seats for the Syrian Socialist Unionist Party (leftist Nasserites); 2 seats for the (anti-revisionist) Syrian Communist Party-Bakdash; 2 seats for the Syrian Communist Party-Unified (Gorbachevians); 1 seat for the Syrian Democratic Union Party (Nasserites); 1 seat for the Arab Democratic Unionist Party (Nasserites); 1 seat for the Democratic Socialist Unionist Party (Nasserites). Nevertheless, large areas in the North along the border with Turkey are currently controlled by pro-Turkish forces: Turkey's three military operations have created a buffer zone on the border. Turkey is building hospitals and medical schools, as well as opening branches of universities and disconnecting power lines from its territory in order to supply the region with electricity (at a price of 0.09 dollars per kilowatt). Along the border closest to Iraq there is the area of responsibility of the Kurds, who historically live there but opposed Assad during the war. They are supported by the United States of America, which maintains bases in Syria, including the protection of oil fields. In fact, the areas controlled by Russia and the USA are larger because of their use of aviation. Two other areas remain under terrorist control: in Idlib, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) and ISIS. The areas in the south-west (Deraa and Quneitra

Provinces) are controlled by several armed opposition groups that have reconciled with Assad's government. Syria has been under US sanctions since December 1979. Currently, along with Syria, the US list of countries sponsoring terrorism includes Cuba, Iran and North Korea. These countries are not eligible to receive financial assistance from the United States of America and are also subject to a ban on the export of dual-use goods and to financial restrictions. Later the USA imposed further restrictions, which were tightened after the outbreak of the war in 2011. The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) threatened restrictions on individuals and organisations providing financial assistance to the Syrian government. Before the outbreak of the war, however, Syria was one of the richest countries in the region. In the period from 2011 to 2018, the country's annual GDP fell by almost two-thirds, from 55 billion to 20 billion US dollars. During the war years, the lives of 80% of Syrians fell below the poverty line and the average life expectancy was reduced by 20 years. The country suffers from a shortage of doctors and nurses, teachers, technicians and skilled civil servants. During the war years, centres of influence and shadow structures were created, which were not interested in the transition to peaceful development, although in the Syrian society, in the economic circles of the real economy sectors and among some civil servants, a demand for political reforms was emerging. In an atmosphere of constant fear, however, dialogue does not seem to be opening up. This year may be one of the most difficult for Syria: the budget is lower than in any year of the conflict. In Syrian lira, its volume has increased, but it is only 3.36 billion US dollars, 10% less than in the previous year. The main problems are the following: the depreciation of the Syrian lira (before the conflict, the exchange rate was 45 Syrian lira for a dollar, this year it has reached an all-time low - 1,257.86 lira for a dollar - and on the black market it can reach four thousand lira); the increase in food prices (for many products, prices have doubled); the lack of oil and gas. The UN World Food Programme estimates that 60% of Syrians (about 12.4 million people) are at risk of hunger. For example, a vegetable seller in Damascus with a family of nine children earns five dollars a day. Two of his children do not go to school because he cannot afford to pay for it. One of his children leaves for Germany and tries to support them. Another child spends three to five hours a day queuing for bread, the prices of which are subsidised by the State. Without the subsidy, six loaves cost 0.35 dollars: six times the price of State-subsidized bread. Due to a shortage of flour, however, many State-subsidised bakeries operate intermittently. (1. continued)

(Prima Notizia 24) Sabato 20 Novembre 2021