



Weekly Analyses- 1/2008

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Africa: drug trafficking increases on the African continent- United States: Obama and Huckabee win in Iowa, but the battle for presidency is still open- North Korea: ever more difficulties in the disarmament process- Georgia: Saakashvili confirmed for presidency in the primary round- Iraq: al-Hakim's openness

Africa: drug trafficking increases on the African continent

On Friday January 4th, after a drawn-out armed conflict, the authorities of the State of Mali confiscated another 750kg of cocaine, to a value of about \$45million. The batch of drugs was found in the settlement of Tin-Zaouatene, about 1300km from the capital, Bamako. According to what was reported by local authorities, the traffickers were armed with military equipment. The territory on which the clash with the police took place is situated in an area traditionally populated by the Tuareg population and is the seat of conflicts between rebel groups and local authorities. The traffickers who escaped capture fled to Algeria (in which it is presumed they have connections), profiting from the porosity of the border with the North African State.

Drug trafficking in Africa is a relatively new phenomenon: up until the 1990's, Africa didn't play more than a marginal role and still now, it is only managed by local organisations in a minor way. Production, refinery and something as simple as transportation in fact require well organised resources and installations. However in recent years, huge quantities of cocaine have been smuggled in various West African countries, among which are Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone. Recent data shows how Africa's importance is growing, as a crossroads in the route for drugs coming from Asia, as regards opium and heroin and from Latin America, as regards cocaine. The meeting points used for the trafficking of drugs coming from Latin America are multiple and are diversifying. Among those best known are Cape Green, South Africa, Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria, but also Mauritius, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Benin.

The main recipient market of this trafficking is Europe. European countries are in fact replacing the United States as the main area for the commerce of drugs, particularly cocaine, whose price has doubled on the continent in comparison to the North American area. Last June the United Nations Office against Crime and Drugs (UNODC) published its Annual Report 2007 in which it denounces the fact that about a quarter of all drugs consumed in the world enter Europe through Western Africa.

Desk Africa

United States: Obama and Huckabee win in Iowa, but the battle for presidency is still open

Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee have won over the caucuses of the respective parties in Iowa and won the first turn in the primary elections of 2008. Obama, with 38% of votes and Huckabee, with 34%, overtook much more famous and often-quoted candidates such as Hillary Clinton and Mitt Romney. However, the victories of the two candidates have very different meanings. Obama's victory in the democratic caucuses is mainly due to the characteristics of the State and to the electorate called to make the decision while Huckabee's victory in the Republican caucuses could be of great importance in coming months, especially if it is supported by good results in the next electoral turn in New Hampshire.

The voting perspectives for the State of New Hampshire are as ever uncertain. Senator Obama's victory in Iowa seems to be re-directing the voting tendencies of much of the State's electorate, which until a few months ago seemed to side in favour of Hillary Clinton. Recent opinion polls instead suggest that two democratic candidates are emerging who seem to be on largely equal footing as regards voting preferences. The importance of New Hampshire seems to be more linked to tradition than it is to numerical factors. Its delegates to the State number 30 but the electoral consultation as opposed to meeting between the party's activists is a more precise indicator of the electorate's choice. Barack Obama's victory isn't to be excluded, given the emotive push and enthusiasm following his success in Iowa, but it seems that Senator Clinton remains the favourite for nomination as candidate to the Democratic Party in the presidential elections.

On January 5th, it was Matt Romney who won over the Republican caucuses but this success is of little importance given the meagre number of candidates the State of Wyoming will contribute to the Republican convention where the candidate to presidency will be decided. The result of the voting in New Hampshire will also be of much importance for candidates of the Republican Party due to the fact that Huckabee's unexpected victory in Iowa may have repercussions over the voting preferences on January 8th. The favourite for victory in New Hampshire seems to be John McCain, who according to many analysts, is also the favourite for nomination as Republican candidate to presidency, but Mike Huckabee's opportune placement could mean that there is a new favourite for the leadership of the Republican ticket in the elections of November 2008.

Simone Comi

North Korea: ever more difficulties in the disarmament process

On Friday 4th January, the Government of North Korea declared itself to have respected the terms of the multi-lateral agreement on disarmament, according to which Pyongyang should have provided a complete list of its nuclear activities before December 31st. The Korean declaration was however rejected by Washington and Seoul which sustain that the list set out in China, the country which hosts the Six-Party Talks, wasn't presented.

Pyongyang however, retains that it has respected the agreements within the document delivered to the United States in November, which Washington considers to be insufficient.

The North Korean Government should have also presented a inventory of available nuclear fuel, equipment for the enrichment of Uranium and of already fabricated bombs. As well as this, the fact remains that, on the basis of the agreement on disarmament, North Korea was due to dismantle the nuclear reactor at Yongbyon before December.

The head of American delegation at the Six Party Talks, Christopher Hill, declared that a delay was foreseeable and that it is necessary to have "patience" and "perseverance". North Korean conduct however, casts a new shadow over the entire process. Pyongyang still seems to regard secrecy over its nuclear programme as a strategic element and therefore, the failure to present the list could simply be an attempt to return once again to the table of negotiation in order to obtain something more. The North Korean Government may secretly be trying to save at least one part of its nuclear programme in order retain a playing card for the future.

In any case, it is unlikely that the situation will be resolved by Pyongyang without additional heavy pressures from other countries which participated in the Six-Party Talks. In particular China and South Korea, the states which up until now have been more conciliating towards the regime of Kim Jong 11, should clearly demonstrate that they don't intend to grant waivers to the agreements established, therefore looking to prevent any attempt by Pyongyang to divide its own interlocutors, as has happened in the past.

Desk Asia

Georgia: Saakashvili confirmed for presidency in the primary round

In November, following a series of violent protests by the opposition, Saakashvili decided that in anticipation of the natural expiry of his mandate, he would induce the new presidential elections. The consultation seems to have become more of a referendum with which to ratify Saakashvili's presidency, which is confronted with growing opposition by Moscow's Government, due to the President's manifestly pro-Western policy, which is contested by various personalities with distinct ideas about Georgia's future. The strong affluence to the urns, in which according to official estimates, 70% of people voted directly, seems to demonstrate this hypothesis. It is still more affirmed if it is taken into consideration that many Georgians residing abroad had more than a little difficulty in expressing their own votes.

For example, in Russia, where a considerable number of Georgian immigrants are clearly present, only two polling stations were made available. The outgoing President had already obtained an absolute majority in the first round, with more than 52% of votes and he almost managed to avoid the second ballot which was eventually held two weeks ago. According to the international electoral observers of the OSCE, the elections, considered by many to be Georgia's first truly democratic elections were performed regularly, but the opposition have instead claimed the existence of much gerrymandering. The electoral appointment may have been used by Saakashvili to reinforce his own powers and therefore authoritarianism in the country. Already, several protests are therefore anticipated in the following days in the country's capital.

Suspensions of gerrymandering are also supported by sources close to Moscow which have accused international observers of having certified the absence of corruption in the electoral

turn too early. In reality, however, the huge affluence to the urns demonstrates how the Georgians are scarcely prepared to allow their own destinies to be dictated by others. This therefore shows how they are not prepared to allow the "Roses Revolution" after only a few years, to become a failure. Its failure would entail a return to the past, with Saakashvili becoming the new Shevardnadze. As well as this, if on internal politics, there has been conflict between the various rival factions, there is much common ground concerning views on foreign policy within the country. The same Saakashvili underlined in his first public act since the end of voting, how he will be the President to all the people and of a united Georgia, referring to the issue of Abkhazia and Ossetia and to the West. These issues seem more than anything adapted to cement the public opinion of the Republic. But if the country's conspicuous economic growth isn't followed by a series of re-distribution policies, this consensus could also be seriously threatened.

Felice di Leo

Iraq: al-Hakim's openness

In the debate held during the last prayer on Friday, the leader of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Abdul al-Hakim declared himself to be in favour of the role of the Sunnite Moderate Armed Forces, currently active on the side of the United States. The so-called Awakening Councils, formed by tribal groups and local Sunnites in 2006, count about 80,000 members and they are assisting US action aimed at vanquishing the presence of Al-Qaeda in the country. Al-Hakim recognised the relevance of these groups in the stabilization of the country when the same Petraeus declared that security seems to have made significant progress in the last six months.

Taking the position as leader of the largest Iraqi Shiite Party contrasts Prime Minister al-Maliki, preoccupied by the emergence of a movement which could become too autonomous and threaten the Shiite and Kurdish governing forces in the future. At the same time the meeting between al-Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr is worthy of note, in which the will for collaboration was expressed, both between themselves and with the Sunnite Awakening Councils, for the common good of the country.

The fact that Shiite forces, moderate Sunnite groups and US occupation forces are working together to combat the presence of al-Qaeda could lead to a momentary lack of involvement by Iran in the Iraqi theatre. The destabilizing influence of Teheran in Iraq, on the side of Shiite militants is in fact one of Washington's principal accusations in view of an eventual military attack against the Islamic Republic. The apparent alignments of the SCRI and al-Mahdi brigades (which in August battled in Karbala, causing 52 deaths) on the side of the United States could be seen as part of a secret agreement between Iran and the United States, with the scope of avoiding a possible head-on battle between the two countries. The recent attacks against local tribal leaders in the province of Diyala confirm the isolation of al-Qaeda.

Stefano Torelli