

10.04.2015 The Iranian nuclear programme. A vital agreement

For thirty years Iranian rhetoric has had it that the “Great Satan” to be destroyed was the United States and its allies.

Meanwhile, for the American administration the first enemies to be defeated were the “axis of evil”, with Iran at its head. A historic agreement has just put an end to more than thirty years of conflict. In this part of the world reshuffling the cards has become a matter of urgency.

The agreement reached in Lausanne has not been universally well received. By opening negotiations, Barack Obama was going against the line taken by his own supporters. The Israeli president Benyamin Netanyahu tried everything to prevent this diplomatic initiative, finding backing in the Republican-dominated US congress, and even the discreet support by certain negotiators, among them Laurent Fabius, clearly showed a foot on the brake. And you can bet that there was no shortage of braking on the Iranian side either, given the anti-American discourse around which political life in Teheran has been structured for thirty-five years.

But despite everything an agreement was reached, the negotiations went beyond ultimatums and final dates. Because, with the chaos which is engulfing the region, a successful outcome was vital.

We must face up to the global threat that has taken shape in Syria and Iraq with the emergence of the Islamic State, which will not be resolved by divine intervention. The destruction of museums and archaeological relics of ancient Babylon and the civilisations buried beneath the banks of the Euphrates which three millennia ago were the cradle of civilisation, force one to think of the burnings that were the start of the Nazi horrors. The pogroms launched against non-Muslim religious communities, particularly the eastern Christians, have the stench of what was happening to Europe’s Jews at the end of the 1930s. And we are astounded by the blinkered attitudes of those who refuse to back the movements supporting this Christian community in the name of “secularism”!

The war against Daesh is a conflict which has every chance of becoming worse in the long term. The international community will have to take its responsibilities to put an end to it before this Islamist fascism becomes entrenched, with the risk that it will spread to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya and among all the peoples who follow the Sunni religion. And to win this war, military resources will be required which go far beyond the current bombardments which the armies of the Islamist jihad are finding easy to dodge.

Moving a peace process with Iran forward is the Obama administration’s first step to setting up a barrier to the progress of the Islamist State. Let us imagine for a moment that the Israeli plans for aggression against Iran, like those which Netanyahu had prepared for bombing Iran’s nuclear power plants, had become reality! It is beyond discussion: it was vital to avoid that risk.

What will the consequences of this agreement be? We can imagine that the approach to the case of Bashar al-Assad, who the Iranians support, will be different, but, in practice, “friendly pressure” to retire from his leading international supporter may be more effective than all François Hollande’s sabre-rattling. The road would then be open for a convergence of anti-Daesh forces to retake the territory that had been abandoned to tyranny. Since, as the Kurds showed at Kobani, without reliable ground forces determined to fight, no battle can be won.

In the Middle East, a war is starting against a major danger to peace and democracy all over the world. The first priority is to provide the diplomatic resources required. Because without a well-understood international strategy, the military resources would be badly handicapped.

In Geneva, the negotiators of the agreement with Iran have shown themselves to be up to the challenges of their time.