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A PALAZZO CUSANI DI MILANO SI E' SVOLTA LA GIORNATA DI APPROFONDIMENTO SU "LA GUERRA DELLE DONNE"

Quando scoppiò la Grande Guerra le donne intuirono che il conflitto, pur nella sua drammaticità, poteva rappresentare un'occasione d'emancipazione

di Principia Bruna Rosco



(mi-lorenteggio.com) Milano, 24 marzo 2015 - Il 6 marzo 2015, il Generale di Brigata Antonio Pennino, Comandante Militare Esercito Lombardia ha invitato i cittadini presso Palazzo Cusani di Milano ad una giornata di approfondimento sul tema riguardante "La Guerra delle Donne".

La conferenza si è tenuta nello stupendo Salone Radetzky del suddetto Palazzo ed ha avuto relatori d'eccezione come la Prof.ssa Maria Canella, la Dott.ssa Paola Casoli, il Maestro Giancarla Moscatelli. Naturalmente, anche il Dott. Alessandro Gualtieri, autore del libro "La Guerra delle Donne" e con l'importante presenza del Generale di C.A. Riccardo Marchiò, Comandante del Corpo d'Armata di Reazione Rapida della NATO in Italia e il Generale di Brigata Antonio Pennino, Comandante Militare Esercito Lombardia.



Il Generale Pennino, in qualità di padrone di casa, ha dato il benvenuto al numeroso pubblico in sala, dando alcune notizie su Palazzo Cusani che da oltre 200 anni è Sede di Comandi Militari: Comando della NATO a Milano e del Comando Militare Esercito Lombardia. "Quest'anno è particolarmente importante parlare di questo argomento – afferma il Generale – per la concomitanza della commemorazione del centenario della Grande Guerra, testimonianza di come le Donne hanno offerto il loro grande contributo e sacrificio DOVUNQUE".

Con grande soddisfazione, il Generale ha fatto presente che nel 2.000 la Foza Armata ha aperto alle donne e che ad oggi le arruolate sono 6.500, che le stesse stanno svolgendo il loro ruolo perfettamente uguale a quello degli uomini, compreso le funzione nell'ambito dello sport agonistico e lo stipendio.



Il Generale Pennino, ha messo in grande risalto la presenza delle donne nell'Esercito, le quali hanno contribuito sensibilmente a completare al meglio l'impiego nei contesti internazionali di supporto alla pace, soprattutto quando è stato necessario dare aiuto alle donne in aree culturali con tradizioni diverse dalle nostre e delle Donne che si sono distinte si è anche parlato nella pagina di luglio del Calendario dell'Esercito 2015:

Le donne

Women

17 FEBBRAIO 1914

Maria Plozner muore nell'adempimento del dovere Colpita al fianco da fuoco nemico

La portatrice carica Maria Plozner, colpita al fianco da una pallottola nemica sulla strada del ritorno, è stata soccorsa da una sua compagna e da alcuni alpini e portata all'ospedale militare di Faluzza dove è morta durante la notte. È stata sepolta con gli onori militari. Lei è stata premiata con la Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare con la motivazione: "Madre di quattro figli in tenera età e sposa di combattente sul fronte carico, non esitava ad andare, con encomiabile spirito patriottico, alla drammatica richiesta rivolta alla popolazione civile per assicurare i rifornimenti ai combattenti in prima linea. Conoscia degli immani e gravi pericoli del fuoco nemico; Maria PLOZNER FENTIL, svolgeva il suo servizio con ferme determinazione e grande spirito di sacrificio ponendosi subito quale sicuro punto di riferimento ed esempio per tutte le "portatrici cariche", incoraggiate e sostenute dal suo eroico comportamento. Corse sotto il peso della "gerla", veniva colpita mortalmente da un cecchino austriaco il 15 febbraio 1914, a quota 1400 di Casera l'Alpasso, nel settore di TO 291 ed immolava la sua vita per la Patria. Ideale rappresentante delle "portatrici cariche", tutte esempio di abnegazione, di forza morale, di eroismo, testimoni umili e silenziose di amore di Patria. Il popolo italiano, la ricorda con profonda ammirata riconoscenza."



Maria Plozner Fentil,
Portatrice Carica Medaglia
d'Oro al V.M. 1914

1915 2015

Calend. Esercito



Donne impiegate nell'industria bellica (14)



Prestare di preghiera sulla tomba di un caduto (13)



Operare al lavoro in fabbrica (11)

Prestare di un'impiegata di Pirelli arruolata come crocerossina.

"Madre, rispettata, premiata, con quattro bambini piccoli e un unico fratello, si è offerta, con spirito di sacrificio e con abnegazione, per il servizio di portatrice carica, non esitando a rischiare la vita per portare ai combattenti, in mezzo al fuoco nemico, munizioni e viveri. Ha accettato la morte, con un colpo di fucile, che le ha perforato il petto. Ha dato il suo sangue per la Patria, e la sua vita per un servizio di guerra. Il suo sacrificio è stato un esempio per tutte le portatrici cariche. Maria Plozner Fentil, con la sua morte, ha dato un contributo prezioso alla causa della Patria. Il popolo italiano, la ricorda con profonda ammirata riconoscenza."

Maria Plozner muore nell'adempimento del dovere - Colpita al fianco da fuoco nemico - Esempi

Grande è stato il contributo delle donne alla Prima Guerra Mondiale sia in termini di supporto logistico che morale. Il racconto della morte della portatrice carica Maria Plozner Fentil è la lettera dell'impiegata che aiutava i soldati feriti a leggere e scrivere ne sono alcuni esempi.

Maria Plozner died in fulfilling her duty - Wounded at her hip by enemy fire in the First World War women gave a very significant contribution with both a logistical and moral support. Examples are the story of the death of Maria Plozner Fentil, Carica woman porter, and the letter of the teacher helping wounded soldiers to write and read.

(11) Maria Plozner Fentil, Carica woman porter, who was awarded with a Gold Medal of Military Valour.
(12) Carica woman porters.
(13) Prayer at a killed in action soldier's tomb.
(14) Women working in war industry.
(15) Factory women workers.

Luglio/July

Lun/Non	Mar/Tue	Mer/Wed	Gio/Thu	Ven/Fri	Sab/Sat	Dom/Sun
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

"Le donne - continua il Generale - intuirono che il conflitto, pur nella sua drammaticità, poteva rappresentare un'occasione d'emancipazione assumendo incarichi prima a loro preclusi".

E' intervenuto il Generale di C.A. Riccardo Marchiò, Comandante del Corpo d'Armata di Reazione Rapida della NATO in Italia, il quale ha fatto presente che dopo secoli di storia la donna arriva all'emancipazione iniziata con la I^ Guerra Mondiale del 1914/18. Da quel momento iniziò a mutare il loro ruolo nella vita economica e sociale della comunità. Ma, terminato quel periodo di guerra venne la pace e l'emancipazione femminile si bloccò perché i reduci tornarono e molte donne persero il posto di lavoro. Ci volle la 2^ Guerra Mondiale per riequilibrare i ruoli femminili e maschili e per vedere la donna con mansioni di docente, medico e tanto altro. Per ricordare i soldati che morirono nelle battaglie, le donne si trovarono davanti ad una bara simbolica dedicata al Milite Ignoto. Maria Bergamas, fu la donna prescelta per patire pubblicamente davanti al feretro del caduto senza nome. Ancora una volta una donna è stata chiamata a chiudere il capitolo drammatico della guerra. L'orrore della violenza gratuita, della sofferenza e della tragedia, la sofferenza e l'ansia sono state il prezzo pagato dalle donne. Dimenticare sarebbe sbagliato. Il libro "La Guerra delle donne" di Alessandro Gualtieri tratta di quel grande campo di battaglia e dolore che fu il "fronte interno" di madri, mogli, fidanzate e figlie da tramandare ai posteri affinché venga mantenuta la memoria delle donne italiane che hanno dato un esempio meraviglioso di patriottismo.

Molto appassionante e appassionato è stato l'intervento di Alessandro Gualtieri, autore del libro "La Guerra delle Donne", noto ricercatore milanese il quale ha affermato che le donne sono state le vere protagoniste della I^ Guerra Mondiale, in quanto impiegate nei campi di battaglia come infermiere fino ai diversi ruoli lavorativi assunti in sostituzione degli uomini partiti per il fronte. Il loro ingresso nel mondo del lavoro permise il decollo industriale italiano, rendendolo competitivo sui mercati europei. Alcune donne-coraggio si arruolarono segretamente nelle retrovie del fronte, mentre altre si arruolarono come Crocerossine, dando l'immagine più significativa della guerra sostenuta dalle donne. Le Crocerossine, con abnegazione e coraggio, cercarono di lenire il dolore dei soldati; fra queste si distinse Vera Brittain che si adoperò anche per la difesa dei più deboli, mentre Edith Louisa Cavell fondò la rivista specializzata "L'infermiere". Le donne che restarono a casa non erano affatto inattive nei confronti della guerra, esse svolgevano attività di supporto per i soldati, accudivano gli orfani di guerra e tennero vivi i collegamenti tra familiari e combattenti. Ma anche il mondo contadino aveva bisogno di manodopera, perciò le donne impararono ad usare le macchine agricole. Purtroppo, le donne che avevano cominciato a lavorare in fabbrica, spesso morivano per incidenti causati dalle loro lunghe gonne, altre morivano perché intossicate dai gas e materiali dannosi che respiravano nelle fabbriche. Sono state donne coraggio, spesso mercificate e spesso poste a

fare da scudo umano.



Il Comandante Militare Esercito Lombardia
Generale di Brigata Antonio PENNINO
ha l'onore di invitare ls S.V. ad
una giornata di approfondimento
sul tema

"LA GUERRA DELLE DONNE"

Intervengono :
Dott. Alessandro GUALTIERI;
Prof.ssa Maria CANELLA;
Dott.ssa Paola CASOLI;
Maestro Giancarla MOSCATELLI.

Venerdì, 6 marzo 2015 ore 15.30
Palazzo Cusani - Salone Radetzky
Ingresso via del Carmine, 8 - Milano

R.S.V.P. entro il 4.03.2015 via fax allo 0246365
oppure via email: rsvpcnemi@cnemilesercito.difesa.it

Cosa positiva è stata che in quel periodo le donne poterono protestare e scioperare per il rispetto dei propri diritti. Inoltre, per essere più libere di muoversi nei luoghi di lavoro, le signore cominciarono a semplificare la moda e Coco Chanel contribuì a rivoluzionare l'immagine femminile: accorciò le gonne e tolse gli inutili fronzoli, una moda ancor oggi all'avanguardia. Alcune donne da ricordare sono state Margaretha Gertruda Zelle, alias Matha Hari, che imparò a comunicare in codice, diventando una spia; Edina Clam Gallas, crocerossina, usò le macchine fotografiche a Forgaria dove documentò la vita e l'architettura di Villa Pasquali, adibita dal 1915 ad ospedale militare del Sovrano Ordine di Malta; Alice Shalek che ha scritto l'interessante reportage di guerra "Isonzofront" riguardante il fronte del Tirolo e dell'Isonzo.

In quel periodo, dunque, le donne tagliarono i loro lunghi capelli, cambiarono il modo di vestire, ci fu una lieve libertà sessuale e arrivarono al voto concesso nel 1945. E' stato un mondo in guerra al femminile, donne coinvolte nel conflitto sociale generatosi lontano dalle trincee vere e proprie, ma pur sempre in prima linea.

Il ruolo delle Donne nella Guerra non si ferma qui, non tutti sanno che i vari codici rosso, giallo, bianco oggi adottati negli ospedali, fu Napoleone ad istituirli e portati avanti dalle donne della Società Bene, dalle Crocerossine che selezionarono i vari feriti di guerra. Le Crocerossine diventarono parte importante e integrante di Guerra e di Pace unitamente alle Madrine di Guerra che pensarono all'assistenzialismo. Ma ci sono state anche donne internate e ripudiate, donne che hanno affrontato la peggiore guerra che l'Umanità abbia sostenuto. Dopo le violenze che esse subirono a seguito dello sfondamento del fronte di Caporetto da un milione di uomini nostri nemici, nacquero vari piccoli tedeschi, austriaci ecc. che non vennero accettati dai mariti o dalla famiglia, pertanto, fu aperto l'orfanotrofio dei vivi: l'Istituto "San Filippo Neri". Questo Istituto si prese cura di quei piccoli innocenti, ma molti di loro morirono per mancanza di latte materno. Alcune donne di nascosto dai mariti si recavano ad allattarli per non farli morire e alcune altre convinsero i loro mariti a ritirare quel bambino e ad allevarlo come se fosse proprio. Questo è stato il grande dramma che le donne hanno dovuto subire.

Era una guerra da non farsi, ma è proprio in questi anni che iniziò a mutare il ruolo delle donne nella vita economica e sociale della comunità, andando verso un sempre maggiore affrancamento dall'idea che vede la donna solo impegnata nella sfera familiare e domestica.

Principia Bruna Rosco

NOTIZIE SU PALAZZO CUSANI:

"Il Palazzo è della fine del 1.600 ed era di proprietà della famiglia Cusani. Gerolamo Cusani fece modificare la facciata esterna dall'Architetto Giovanni Ruggeri, pertanto, dal punto di vista architettonico si nota l'influenza romana. Infatti, la facciata ricorda il tardo barocco romano, in cui risaltano le finestre dalle cornici mistilinee e i balconi rigonfi. Sulla facciata sono inoltre presenti due portali gemelli, che si dice voluti dai due fratelli della famiglia per il reciproco desiderio di non incontrarsi. Successivamente, Ferdinando Cusani fece operare una seconda modifica relativa alla facciata interna che venne affidata al Piermarini che la realizzò in forme neoclassiche. Il Palazzo venne venduto nel 1808 da suo figlio Luigi al demanio del Regno

d'Italia che vi insediò il Ministero della Guerra. Una particolarità del palazzo è che nella facciata posteriore del palazzo sono incastonate tre palle di cannone sparate dalle artiglierie di Radetzky durante le Cinque giornate di Milano".

Sustainable Peace Remains our Key Goal: Ghani

March 25, 2015



CAMP

DAVID - President Ashraf Ghani on Monday refrained from making any commitment on peace talks with the Taliban, as the United States extended its full support for an Afghan-led process.

“Sustainable peace is our goal. I’m not committing to any announcements and you will be pleased when it’s made,” Ghani told reporters at a news conference at the end of day-long of talks with top American leadership.

Secretary of State John Kerry, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, Treasury Secretary Jack Lew and other senior US officials met the visiting Afghan delegation at this presidential retreat.

On peace efforts, Kerry said the US believed the surest way to stability in Afghanistan and the region was for reconciliation to take place. “We believe that reconciliation should be Afghan-led, Afghan-structured, and we support the president’s very important, courageous effort to try to see if that reconciliation can take place. The United States will support that in every way that we possibly can.”

Kerry said there were three conditions for peace talks with the Taliban, who need to give up violence, sever any ties to the Al Qaeda terrorist network and to support the constitution of Afghanistan.

“Within that framework, the president and the government of Afghanistan have enormous latitude to work with the Taliban on defining that future. And as I said, President Obama is committed to doing everything possible to help support President Ghani, CEO Abdullah and the people of Afghanistan.”

Convinced that the passage of the Bilateral Security Agreement has created the flexibility for Obama to continue supporting the training and equipping of Afghan forces, he also referred to engagement with Pakistan and its reciprocity.

The announcement of support for keeping Afghan security forces at their peak strength of 352,000 through 2017 was a strong message to the Taliban and other violent groups that the US was prepared for long-term to support to Afghanistan, he said.

Ghani said enduring peace from strength would bring regional cooperation, and it was important that all regional actors translated their words of the need for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan into deeds. "We hope very much that the past will be overcome and the future will be different and would correspond to our vision," (Pajhwok)



Obama reportedly snubs NATO chief as Russia makes new threats against allies

Published March 25, 2015 | FoxNews.com

President Barack Obama reportedly will not meet with NATO's new secretary general when he is in Washington this week, despite requests from the alliance chief's staff for a get-together.

Bloomberg View reported Tuesday that Jens Stoltenberg's office requested a meeting with Obama in advance of his scheduled visit, but did not receive any response from the White House. Instead, Bloomberg View reported that Stoltenberg had to settle for a last-minute meeting with Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

Stoltenberg is scheduled to be in Washington through Thursday, primarily so he can attend a strategic brainstorming session involving military officials and experts from the U.S and NATO.

Stoltenberg, who replaced Anders Fogh Rasmussen as head of the world's largest military alliance in October, was able to meet with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper Monday, the day before Harper announced that Canada would expand its participation in the U.S.-led military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The report of Obama's snub comes amid Russia's growing willingness to test NATO's military readiness. On Tuesday, NATO jets were scrambled after four Russian military planes were spotted flying over the Baltic Sea with their transponders turned off. Over the weekend, a Danish newspaper published remarks by the Russian ambassador to Denmark in which he hinted that Russian missiles could target Danish warships if Copenhagen joins NATO's missile defense system.

But the most far-reaching example of Russian belligerence came Tuesday, when Britain's Daily Telegraph reported that Moscow was preparing to lease 12 long-range bombers to Argentina in exchange for shipments of beef and wheat. The report comes after a round of rhetoric from Russian officials questioning Britain's claim to the Falkland Islands.

The Telegraph reports that Russia's ambassador to Britain, Alexander Yakovenko, compared a 2013 referendum in which 99.8 percent of Falklands inhabitants voted to remain part of the U.K. to last year's vote which formalized Crimea's annexation by Russia. Britain, along with the U.S. and NATO, denounced the Crimea referendum as a sham orchestrated by Moscow.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond repeated those claims earlier this week, prompting the Russian embassy to respond, "In its rhetoric [the] Foreign Office applies one logic to the referendum in the Malvinas/Falklands, and a different one to the case of Crimea."

Alexei Pushkov, the head of the Duma's committee of international affairs, was even more blunt in a Twitter message that read, in part, "Crimea has immeasurably more reason to be a part of Russia than the Falkland Islands to be part of the U.K."

The Russian position echoed remarks made last year by Argentina president Cristina de Kirchner, who said, "The Malvinas [Argentina's name for the archipelago] has always belonged to Argentina, the same way that Crimea also belonged to the Soviet Union until it was given to Ukraine."

On Tuesday, British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon said that Britain would send two Chinook troop-carrying helicopters and a new surface-to-air missile system to the islands.

Click for more from the Daily Telegraph.

URL

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/03/25/obama-reportedly-snubs-nato-chief-as-russia-makes-new-threats-against-allies/>

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Invisible army: the story of a Russian soldier sent to fight in Ukraine

Moscow denies its soldiers are crossing the border but 20-year-old conscript Dorji Batomunkuev, who was seriously injured near Donetsk, tells a different story. He talks to Elena Kostyuchenko of

Elena Kostyuchenko for Novaya Gazeta

Wednesday 25 March 2015 05.00 GMT

Dorji Batomunkuev, military unit number 46108, is 20 years old and part of the Russian fifth tank brigade from Ulan-Ude, a city near the Mongolian border. He is a conscript and was called up 18 months ago. When we meet at the Central Regional hospital in Donetsk, his face and hands are burnt and bandaged, and his ears are singed and shrivelled. Beneath the dressings, he's still bleeding.

He says he was injured in the eastern Ukraine town of Lohvynove on 9 February, at the mouth of the Debaltseve pocket, while fighting alongside the separatist militia of the Donetsk People's Republic against Ukrainian forces.

Russia has denied that its forces are fighting in Ukraine, although a recent report by the Royal United Services Institute contests this, suggesting that several units have crossed the border since the conflict began. At their peak in December 2014, they numbered some 10,000 troops, the report says.

Speaking from the hospital burns unit in Donetsk, Batomunkuev tells the story of some of these troops and their involvement in what has become the most serious conflict in the post-Soviet world since 1991.

Training

How did you end up there?

"I was called up on 25 November 2013. As a conscript, I scored well in firing and fitness training. The following year, as autumn approached, they started to pull together contract soldiers from all the battalions in our sector to make up a separate tank battalion. We were all bundled together, got to know each other, lived together for four days and then set we off.

"They told us that we were going to train but we knew where we were really going. I was already prepared mentally and morally - we would have to go to Ukraine.

"Back in Ulan-Ude, the numbers and emblems on some of the tanks were painted over, and our patches and chevrons were removed when we arrived at the firing range. We took it all off in order to disguise ourselves. Passports were left with the military units and military IDs were left at the firing range.

“Training lasted for three months, as planned. They then gave the signal and we moved out.

“As soon as we left the firing range, they said: ‘hand over everything: phone, documents’. From the Kuzminsky training ground we moved out towards the Russian border and stopped in a strip of woodland. Then the signal came through. No notice was read out to us, we were only told to start the march. Even so, without any words, we all understood.”

So no one, neither the political officers nor the commanders, said anything to you about Ukraine?

“No, because everyone already understood. There was no need for them to chew it over for us. No one shoved any patriotic crap down our throats either.”

When did you find out that you were on your way to Donetsk?

“When we read ‘Donetsk’ on signs, when we stopped in the city and saw the inscription ‘DNR’. Oh, we are in Ukraine! I poked my head out of the hatch to see the city. It is was beautiful city, I liked it. Everything beautiful.

“When we arrived, we went to a shelter and parked. We were taken to a campus for a hot meal and then put into rooms. One of our guys had a phone, and we found Radio Sputnik. There was a discussion being broadcast about whether there are Russian troops in Ukraine, and all the guests were like: ‘No, no, no’. We all listened, and said to each other, ‘yeah, right’.

“Who is prepared to talk openly? Our government understands that we have to help but if they send troops officially, that would annoy Europe, and Nato. Although, you understand, don’t you, that Nato is also involved of course, that it is supplying weapons to the Ukrainians?”

Did they explain to you how long you would be here for?

“No. But we understood that the whole war depended on us. That’s why they’d beaten the training into us those previous three months. We were well prepared, both our snipers and other troops.”

War

“There were 31 tanks in the battalion. We went in companies, 10 tanks in each one. We were around 300 men, all from Ulan-Ude, mostly Buryats [the largest indigenous group in Siberia].”

From mid-January separatist forces were trying to recapture the city of Debaltseve which had fallen under Ukrainian control. Did they explain that this was part of your mission?

“No, they didn’t explain anything. But we understood: we don’t let anyone out. Whoever moves will be shot dead. Shoot to kill.

“We played carousel, a tactic of tank fire. Three or four tanks would go out to the edge [of the area] of open fire, shoot, and when they ran out of rounds three or four tanks would

take their place while they reloaded. That's how we rotated.

"But our battalion commander wasn't in luck. A tank is a very capricious machine - you try to shoot but not a God damn thing comes out. The stupid things wouldn't fire.

"The 'ukropi' ['dill people', a derogatory term for Ukrainians] pounded us. The battalion commander responded by jumping into his tank and was off, destroying first one tank, then another."

How were you injured?

"There was a tank battle. The sound was deafening. I opened my eyes and there was fire, a blinding glare. I heard the sound of gunpowder exploding. I tried to open the hatch but it wouldn't budge. The only thought that crossed my mind was 'that's it, I'm dead'. Then my defence mechanisms suddenly kicked in.

"I tried again to open the hatch. This time it worked. An infantry vehicle arrived and the driver jumped out: 'Mate, mate, come here'. My whole face was burning, my tank helmet was burning. I saw he had a red fire extinguisher, so I ran towards him and he sprayed me. 'Lie down, lie down' he shouted, and doused me again. Early the next morning, I was taken to Donetsk, and I regained consciousness."

Did some of the tank crew die?

"No. There was a guy whose foot was torn off though. It was severed with its boot still attached. Our battalion commander was burnt, as was the gun layer Chip, and Spartak... It's all seared into my memory."

Did you fight alongside pro-Russian militias?

"No."

Did you kill civilians?

"There was an occasion when a pick-up went by and they all said 'Shoot, shoot'. 'Wait a minute, wait', I said. At the last moment, I looked out and saw a guy with a white bandage, a militiaman, one of ours. I thought, if I had blown him away I would have killed one of our guys.

"The [separatist] militiamen didn't tell us what their movements were. I shouted to our guys 'They're ours!' That was the first time I got scared that we'd end up killing our own."

So you didn't coordinate at all?

"No. The militia are strange types. They fire and fire and then stop and if they're going off to work - there's no organisation, no leaders, no battle command, it's all disjointed."

Which settlement was this in?

"I don't know where we were. All the villages looked the same - devastation everywhere, everything bombed out."

And how many villages did you pass through?

“Four maybe. There was one time when we recaptured some villages, and others we simply stopped off at... I am not proud of what I did, that I destroyed... killed people. But, on the other hand, I feel more at ease when I remember that it is all in the cause of peace, civilians... children, the elderly, old women, good guys.

“But I’m not proud of this, the fact that I fired and hit ...”

[Long silence]

“Subconsciously, you know you’re fighting the same sort of person as you, in the same sort of tank. Made of flesh and blood. But on the other hand, you understand that he is your enemy. The people I killed were far from innocent. They killed civilians and children. The scum sits there shaking all over, praying that he won’t be killed. He starts to ask forgiveness. God alone is your judge.

“We took a few Ukrainians prisoner. Everyone wants to live when you’ve got their back against the wall. But they are the same sort of people as you, they have mothers too.

“Each person has a destiny of his own, sometimes an unfortunate one. But nobody forced them to do this. With conscripts, it’s a different kettle of fish. Two- or three-thousand out of the 8,000 Ukrainians we were fighting were conscripted soldiers. I thought also about how I would have acted if it had been me in the place of those 18-year-old boys. I think I would have gone too. If you don’t kill, they say ‘we’ll kill you and your family’.

“But those mercenaries from Poland or Chechnya who are driven solely by ideas, who itch for war: it’s them we must wipe out.”

Did you see Polish mercenaries?

“No but we were told that they were there.”

Did you have contact with civilians?

“No. They came up to us many times but we tried hard not to talk to them. When we were in Makiivka [in the Donetsk Oblast province], they told us that 70% of the civilians there were supporting the ‘ukropi’. When we stopped in Makiivka, we hid in the town park, covered up our equipment and used camouflage, but literally within an hour mortars started raining down on us. I just climbed into the tank, I didn’t care. Mortars can’t damage a tank.”

And that didn’t make you tense, that 70% of locals in Makiivka were supporting Ukraine?

“Of course it made me tense! Mentally, you’re expecting everyone to trick you. They brought us things to eat and drink, tea or whatever. We took it but we didn’t drink it. It could have been poisoned. But as they say, ‘You can’t beat Russians, you can only bribe them’.”

But didn’t you have doubts? If it’s true that 70% were against you, then why did you go?

“I had doubts. But, for me, 70% of the population of one village doesn’t mean much. You have to respect the people’s choice. If Donetsk wants independence, it must be given independence. I talked to the nurses and doctors there. They said, ‘we want the sort of independence and government that you have, we want Putin’.”

Will there be any [injury] pay-outs to your family?

“I don’t know about that. In Russia, it’s like this - when it comes to money, you can never be sure. On 27 November last year my time as a conscript expired, so I might be made out to look like someone who went on my own to Ukraine. So, I’m a little concerned.”

The future

Do you have regrets?

“It is pointless to have regrets. I don’t bear any grievances because I know that I fought for a good cause. I went with a feeling not of duty, but of justice. I saw how they kill people. They do whatever the hell they like. When we were travelling in the tanks, the ‘ukropi’ would sometimes intercept our radios. I distinctly remember a man’s voice saying: ‘Listen carefully, you Moscow, Petersburg, Rostov degenerates. We are going to kill all of you. First we will kill you, then we’ll kill your wives and kids, we will even get at your parents. We’ll stop at nothing’.”

How do you plan to live from now on?

“I’ve had my fill of war. I served, fought for the DNR. It’s time to live the life of a civilian, to study and work. My body will recover, it will fight back.

“The only thing I still want to visit before I return home to Ulan-Ude is Sensation, a dance event which takes place each year in St Petersburg. The dress code is that everyone wears white. The best DJs come. My sister went...”

Do you have any questions to ask of Putin?

“I don’t have anything against him. He’s a very interesting person, of course, and crafty: he’s sending troops, but not sending them. ‘There are no troops there’, he tells the world. But then he says to us ‘Jump to it!’

“But if Ukraine enters the European Union and the United Nations, the UN in principle can deploy its rockets and weaponry there [Ukraine was one of the founding member nations of the UN]. Then we’ll be in their crosshairs. They would be closer to us, no longer separated by oceans but by land. That would suck, you know? We have to defend our position so that we are not affected. Like in the cold war, if you remember.

“Today, Russia is concerned. From what I’ve read and the history I’ve studied, Russia’s opinions have started to be reckoned with in recent years. Nowadays, we’re on the rise again, we are being treated with contempt again but we haven’t disintegrated yet.”

Aftermath

Batomunkuev and two other injured soldiers were transferred a couple of days later to the regional military hospital in Rostov-on-Don, where they were treated without being registered on any admissions list. Neither Batomunkuev nor his family were contacted

by anyone from his military unit or the Ministry of Defence.

After much persistence his mother got in touch with her son's military unit where she was told that he was registered on the list of soldiers sent to Ukraine, so the Ministry would fulfil its obligations and pay for his treatment.

"They said that they wouldn't turn their back on him," his mother said. For now, Batomunkuev keeps in touch with his family thanks to his neighbours on the ward, who lend him their mobile phones.

A longer version of this interview first appeared in Russian on Novaya Gazeta. Translation by Cameron Johnston

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Official: Libya supports Egyptian initiative to form joint Arab unit against terrorism



The Libyan representative for the Arab League, Ashour Bu-Rashed, said the Libyan government supports the Egyptian initiative to form a joint counter-terrorism Arab unit, adding that these forces will help achieve stability in a region that has been facing unprecedented challenges. He also expressed appreciation toward the efforts made by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in this regard.

In remarks to *Al-Masry Al-Youm* on the sidelines of the preparatory meetings for the Arab summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Bu-Rashed expressed his reticence toward any international or Arab military intervention in his country, adding that the Libyan government seeks to lift the ban on importing weapons to the official army.

Bu-Rashed added that Libyans are able to fight the armed militias and that an insistence on banning weapons imports will cause confrontations and instability to last longer in Libya.

According to Bu-Rashed, Libya will be on top of the list of issues that will be tackled during the summit, referring to a consensus among Arab countries on supporting the Libyan army, other than Qatar, which has reservations about it.

The Libyan official also indicated that the preparatory meetings mainly focus on the dangers, especially terrorism, that face some Arab countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. He will nonetheless call on Arab countries to look for an urgent solution for the Libyan crisis.

When asked if the Libyan government would allow the Muslim Brotherhood to take part in the political process, Bu-Rashed said, "We do not exclude anyone. All groups are allowed to take part on condition of ceding weapons and violence."



More stick, less carrot needed in Libya

The UN should stop threatening Libyan war criminals with sanctions and actually implement it.

25 Mar 2015 08:52 GMT | [Middle East](#), [Libya](#), [Morocco](#), [Khalifa Haftar](#)



[Hafed Al-Ghwell](#)

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Libya's rivals are continuing their meetings in Morocco under United Nations sponsorship led by Bernardino Leon, UN special envoy to Libya, whose mandate is about to expire at the end of March.

According to multiple people involved with whom I have spoken over the weekend, the discussions revolve around three main sticking points: legitimacy, a unity government, and putting an end to the fighting.

The House of Representatives (HoR), which was elected several months ago and is headquartered in the city of Tobruk near the Libyan-Egyptian border, insists that it is the only government body that should be considered legitimate and that because it was elected, it should not be put in the same position as the other bodies or groups.

Never mind the fact that more than half of its members are boycotting it and that it was elected by only 16 percent of registered voters, who, in turn, make up only approximately 20 percent of the population. The rest didn't bother to vote, were unable to vote for security reasons, or were not allowed to vote because they live in exile outside the country.

The latter group represents approximately 20 percent of the population and is comprised mainly of supporters of the former regime living in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere since the killing of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Perceived superiority

The HoR's perceived position of superiority is reinforced by international recognition,

which is a legacy of circumstances that have long passed.

The issue of unity government involves the usual haggling over who gets what and who should head it. More important, having seen the documents being discussed myself, is the absence of any clear and detailed road map of who does what and when - and, who will guarantee the security of the government and protect it from the many armed militias and gangs controlling the country, which is precisely the same issue that afflicted its predecessors for four years.

The final issue that must be resolved in order to implement a truce between the warring parties is the same old revolving door as to who can ensure such disengagement, if even supposed allies of the "internationally recognised government" were bombing their enemies in Tripoli on the very day the talks in Morocco began.

If there is any real hope of hammering out an agreement that can last anytime soon, Leon needs to get serious and stop this nonsense of wanting everyone to play nice.

First, I think Leon needs to make it clear to the HoR that technical electoral "legitimacy" is not equivalent to representation nor does it give the HoR and General Khalifa Haftar, who was appointed in clear defiance of international advice, an open-ended check to play spoiler and engage in acts of war against the very people with whom they are sitting down to negotiate.

If the HoR is using this international fig leaf of recognition to be more intransigent, then maybe that fig leaf should be withdrawn so that everyone can be treated for what they really are; equal parties in the civil war.

Political process

Second, Leon needs to put forth very clear criteria as to who will have a seat at the table and be part of the political process, irrespective of who they are, where they are, or what politics they espouse.

Then, he needs to allow them to sort themselves out and either accept these conditions or be considered outside the process and placed on the UN sanctions list.

Third, Leon should no longer delay the UN process of showing the stick of sanctions against individuals who have committed war crimes by bombing civilian targets, airports, and the like, as he has been doing for months, despite having a clear UN mandate, passed in September of 2014.

There has also even been a list of candidates to be placed on the list, which includes such people as Haftar and [Salah Badi](#), both of whom have led military assaults on airports, which is an international war crime. Leon, who has been hoping to get these people to agree to a peace process, has delayed activating this sanctions list.

Fourth, Leon needs to offer guarantees, including a UN contingency of peacekeepers to secure the main urban centres, government facilities, oil terminals, etc. once the negotiating parties have agreed on a unity government and a clear mechanism to elect a new legislative body that can produce a real legitimate and representative body.

Finally, the UN needs to take control of the reserves and oil revenues to remove them from the grab of militias and rivals, and internationalise the financial dimension of Libya's conflict and put a stop to its ATM facilities to terrorists and militias from one side or the other.

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The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Source: Al Jazeera

Isis launches assault on pro-Assad forces in western Syria

Offensive near Homs and Hama follows recent setbacks for militant group and threatens fresh sectarian tensions between minority Ismailis and Sunnis

Civilians run after what activists said were airstrikes by forces loyal to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad in the north-western Homs district of Al Waer. Photograph: Stringer/Reuters

Kareem Shaheen in Beirut

Wednesday 25 March 2015 11.17 GMT

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Islamic State militants have killed dozens of pro-Assad regime fighters in a two-pronged offensive in western [Syria](#) that threatens the ancestral homes of the Ismailis, a minority Muslim sect, and which opposition activists fear Damascus will exploit to provoke fresh sectarian tensions.

The assault, which began over the weekend in the rural areas east of Homs and Hama, is one of the rare occasions when forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad and Isis have battled each other on a large scale.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said 70 pro-government soldiers had died so far in the attack on checkpoints and positions held by the regime.

Isis also attacked the Tadmor military airport near Homs, leading to fierce clashes with the regime, which responded on Tuesday with air strikes near Homs and Hama.

“Expansion and momentum – this is everything to Isis, and it will seek all avenues to secure it,” said Charles Lister, a visiting fellow at the [Brookings Doha Center](#).

The SOHR said the Isis offensive was aimed at “achieving victories over the regime forces, to raise the morale of its supporters after the organisation’s consecutive defeats against the Kurdish YPG in the provinces of Aleppo, Raqqa and Hassakeh”.

The latest Isis offensive comes at a time when the group finds itself on the defensive in Syria.



The group has lost hundreds of fighters in the battle for the Kurdish enclave of Kobane near the Turkish border, later beating a retreat before the advancing YPG militia. It has resorted to suicide bombings, the



Christian militia in Syria defends ancient settlements against Isis

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Lack of political process in Iraq 'risks further gains for Isis'

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latest of which struck in Hassakeh at a Kurdish Nowruz celebration, killing 45.

“Definitely, the targeting of civilians by Daesh especially in Hassakeh on the eve of Nowruz [Iranian new year] is a result of the strikes and defeats that it suffered,” a spokesman for the YPG told the Guardian, using the group’s Arabic acronym.

“Daesh’s danger today is greater than it has ever been and we cannot rule out that it will use all its terrorism, including against civilians, to show that it is still strong and to raise the morale of its fighters and supporters.”

The group has suffered from repeated coalition air strikes that have killed nearly 2,000 people since they were launched six months ago, with Isis fighters making up the vast majority of the casualties.

It has also been derided by other rebel groups, who accuse it of colluding with the Assad regime and cannibalising the opposition.

The regime and its allies have often preferred to go after other rebel groups, leaving Isis to the US-backed coalition’s air strikes and the Kurdish militias.

The latest assault shows how the militant group is still advancing in Syria, building up sympathy in areas it wants to co-opt and expand into, and subtly building up support bases throughout the country in areas not yet under its control.

“Isis has undoubtedly suffered losses from the coalition air campaign in Syria, but in the big picture it’s gone to ground and adopted a new strategy: more subtly infiltrating areas of Syria’s central regions and further south around Damascus,” Lister said.

“Ultimately, Isis is concerned with acquiring more influence and more territory and thus securing its own survival.”

Isis is likely to score victories in the eastern Homs countryside, which is not so well defended.



“The regime is very weak and does not have the



Isis: the inside story

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But the assault on the eastern countryside of Hama is more complicated. Activists on the ground say the regime has substantial forces in the area, which is also close to vital supply lines.

The city of Hama itself has been relatively quiet after the regime established control there in 2012, though the countryside has often been restive.

“Isis has tried to establish a presence for itself in that area because it can give it a strategic depth to consolidate its presence closer to big cities, like Aleppo and Hama,” said Hassan Hassan, a Syrian analyst who co-authored the book *Isis: Inside the Army of Terror*. “It’s one of a few fronts where Isis is quietly growing.”

Hassan said Hama and Homs also have symbolic value to Syrians who rebelled against the regime. Homs was long-regarded as a key capital of the revolution, surviving years of siege before being seized by the regime last year.



Homs: a tale of two cities

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massacred Shia in Iraq.

In the 1980s, the regime of Bashar’s father, Hafez al Assad, violently crushed a Muslim Brotherhood-led uprising in Hama.

Hassan said Isis has long sought to position itself as a defender of Sunnis in the area. But the eastern countryside of Hama is also home to many Ismailis, an offshoot of Shia Islam, raising the prospect of sectarian bloodletting if Isis advances in the area. Isis considers Shias as heretics and has destroyed their shrines in areas where it holds sway. It has also



‘They are pushing Syria into a religious war that

Eastern Hama’s countryside also offers a glimpse into how the regime allegedly uses sectarian tensions to advance its cause.

Salamiyah, which lies south-east of Hama city, is the burial grounds of Imam Ismail bin Jaafar, the Ismaili sect’s founding father, and is a historic, ancestral redoubt for the community, which makes up roughly half of the population in the town and its outlying

they will certainly get' villages like Tal al Dorra and Sa'an.

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Opposition activists say the regime has tried to provoke sectarian tensions in the area by recruiting Ismailis to its local pro-government militias, as well as setting up checkpoints in Ismaili areas that harass, rob or kill Sunnis travelling through the villages to Hama and Salamiyah.

“The regime always tries to play on the sectarian chord in such circumstances, and it may allow [Isis] to advance in order for many Ismailis to be killed before returning and playing its favourite game as a defender of minorities,” an opposition activist based in eastern Hama’s countryside said. “Time is blood.”

The activist said Isis was likely trying to engender sympathy with local Sunni communities who have suffered under regime rule as a result of these measures.

“There are no sensitivities between the Sunnis and Ismailis in this region but the regime is trying continuously to provoke sectarian tensions, but it hasn’t succeeded until now,” he said.



MIDDLE EAST

In Nuclear Talks, Iran Seeks to Avoid Specifics

By DAVID E. SANGER and MICHAEL R. GORDON MARCH 24, 2015

PARIS — If an agreement to limit Iran’s nuclear capability is reached by deadline in the next seven days, one thing may be missing: an actual written accord, signed by the Iranians.

Over the past few weeks, Iran has increasingly resisted any kind of formal “framework” agreement at this stage in the negotiations, preferring a more general statement of “understanding” followed by a final accord in June, according to Western diplomats involved in the talks.

Should that position hold — one of the many unknowns of the coming days — the United States and its five negotiating partners may find themselves in the uncomfortable position of describing the accord as they understand it while the Iranians go home to offer their own version.

That poses a weighty political challenge to the Obama administration, which is already under pressure to present Iran’s commitments to a suspicious Congress by early April, in an effort to hold off the passage of sanctions or a bill that would require Congress to sign off on any agreement.

Just last week, as the previous round of talks with Iran came to a close, a senior American official involved in the negotiations said that the framework accord with Iran would have to be more than a political declaration of intentions. Rather, it would have to contain a “quantifiable dimension.”

There is a lot to quantify, from the number of uranium-enriching centrifuges that would remain spinning to exactly how Iran would change the design of a reactor that is under construction to limit the production of plutonium, another pathway to a bomb. But Iran says it will not agree to such specifics, at least for now.

“This is one of the biggest challenges we face,” one European diplomat

involved in the talks said in recent days. “The politics in America demand specificity, and an Iranian commitment. And the politics in Iran demand vagueness” and no commitment until a possible final deal — with all its technical annexes — is reached in June.

The European official added, “All of us are in agreement that you don’t make oral deals with Iran.”

Secretary of State John Kerry met with President Obama at the White House on Tuesday, administration officials said, in part to give the president the latest details before departing for Lausanne, Switzerland, on Wednesday to continue talks.

At the core of the problem is this political reality: Republicans in Congress, along with a significant number of Democrats, took the March deadline for a political agreement announced by Mr. Kerry on Nov. 24 as a critical milestone for any accord. If the Iranians could not provide specifics by then, many in Congress told the White House, then it was a sign that Iran was deliberately dragging out the process and needed to be further pressured by new sanctions.

But Iran’s politics are running in the opposite direction. The country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has declared that he wants only one agreement, presumably the one in late June.

Iran’s top negotiator, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, has made it clear to his Western counterparts that keeping hard-liners in the country in check — including generals in the Revolutionary Guard Corps and powerful mullahs who dislike the idea of being limited by any accord — is a delicate art. His fear is that a deal that details Iranian compromises could give them an opening to scuttle a final deal.

“We forget that the Iranians have politics, too,” one German official who has dealt with the issue at length said recently. “And theirs are at least as complicated as Obama’s.”

Asked about the problem, an American official conceded that it was still unclear whether Iran would sign anything by next Tuesday. The official said that the United States and its allies would be “making clear with as much specificity as possible what’s been agreed to.” But the official said that “beyond that, we really have no idea,” and that much would be left to the

technical annexes.

A senior administration official who was in Lausanne for the talks last week told reporters there that the United States still hoped to agree on specific limits by the end of March that define the parameters of a more detailed, comprehensive agreement that is scheduled to be completed by the end of June.

That is essentially what Mr. Kerry had envisioned last November — a two-step process that would demonstrate concrete progress to Congress and keep the process with the Iranians moving. At the time, the Iranian negotiators seemed on board.

But in early February, Ayatollah Khamenei, who has taken his own negotiators by surprise several times, said there would be only one agreement. That left the United States and its allies — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China — in an uncomfortable place. What was the March deadline all about if it was no longer a deadline in the Ayatollah's eyes?

The American answer has been to plunge ahead. "I think if there is an agreement, I don't see how it could be meaningful without having some quantitative dimensions," said the official, who could not be identified under the protocol for briefing reporters. "Otherwise, it's not an executable program."

But to a degree that is unusual in such major international agreements, the dividing line in these talks between "political" and "technical" is often blurry. The core test, established by Mr. Kerry, is whether any agreement would give the West, Israel and Iran's wary Arab neighbors at least one year's warning time if Iran decided to race for a bomb — known as a "breakout."

That requires a complex calculation, dictated by the number of centrifuges that are spinning, the size of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium and, in the later years of the accord, the type and number of advanced centrifuges Iran is allowed to develop.

As one senior official said, "Even the French, British and Americans come up with different calculations."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel made it clear in his

speech to Congress this month that Israeli scientists were going to come to their own calculations — and their back-of-the-envelope assessment on a deal they have not yet seen already differs from that of the United States.

“Because Iran’s nuclear program would be left largely intact,” Mr. Netanyahu said, “Iran’s breakout time would be very short — about a year by U.S. assessment, even shorter by Israel’s.”

The French share Mr. Netanyahu’s concerns, though not his heated language. They worry that if Iran is allowed to conduct research and development on those far more advanced centrifuges, the breakout time will drop below a year in the latter days of the agreement.

American officials say that is still among the questions to be resolved. It is just not clear when or whether the American and Iranian accounting of events might match up.

David E. Sanger reported from Paris, and Michael R. Gordon from Washington.

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Reports: Yemen's Houthis advance towards Aden

Senior officials dispute claims that President Hadi has fled and his military leaders are under arrest in southern city.

25 Mar 2015 10:55 GMT | [War & Conflict](#), [Middle East](#)

Reports from Yemen say President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his top military commander are on the run while other military leaders, including the defence minister, are under arrest after Shia Houthi fighters entered the southern city of Aden.

However, two senior Yemeni officials including the head of national security have told Reuters news agency that Hadi remains in Aden and has no plans to leave.

Asked on Wednesday if Hadi was in Aden, Major-General Ali al-Ahmadi, chief of national security, told Reuters: "He's here, he's here, he's here. I am now with him in the palace. He is in Aden."

Al Jazeera could not independently verify the reports.

The developments came just hours after a television station said Houthi fighters and their allies had seized an airbase where US troops and Europeans helped the country in its fight against al-Qaeda.

The Al-Masirah TV station reported that the Houthis had "secured" the al-Annad airbase near the town of Lahij, and claimed the base had been looted by both al-Qaeda fighters and troops loyal to Hadi.

That airbase is only 60km away from Aden, the port city where President Abd- Rabbu Mansour Hadi had established a temporary capital.

Witnesses said they saw a convoy of presidential vehicles leaving Hadi's palace, located at the top of a hill in Aden overlooking the Arabian Sea, the Associated Press news agency reported.

The advance of the Houthis threatens to plunge the Arab world's poorest country into a civil war that could draw in its Gulf neighbours. Already, Hadi has asked the UN to authorise a foreign military intervention in the country.

Saud Al Faisal, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, had previously warned that his country would take "necessary measures" if the Houthis did not resolve the crisis peacefully, without elaborating further.

Diplomatic missions of Hadi's Arab Gulf allies, including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait, have evacuated their diplomatic staff from Aden over the past few days, officials said.

They earlier evacuated from Sanaa and relocated to Aden to support Hadi.