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SYRIA: ANOTHER DIRTY PIPELINE WAR

ABSTRACT: *The war in Syria is motivated by intentions mostly excluded from official policies. It is all about great power rivalry, mainly between the US and Russia, but countries around Syria are also deeply involved. The main goal of the US is to replace Russian allies with that of the US: the war in Syria is an example of that. Replacing Assad's power with no matter how radical jihadists aligned mainly with Saudi Arabia, and ultimately with the US could have allowed building a pipeline through Syria to Europe, supplying gas from US allies in the Middle East, when – as a result – Russia could be kicked out of the European gas market to the maximum extent possible. A Syrian government, firmly aligned with Russia, makes such plans impossible. Unlike the US, Russia is not interested in installing a gas pipeline from the Middle East through Syria to Europe since the project would lower European dependency on Russian gas. However, if such a project strengthens Russia's allies in the Middle East, Russia will be most likely to support it, as she did before the civil war in Syria.*

These pipelines are multibillion-dollar projects and they provide far more than enough reasons to wage wars and destroy countries, causing enormous human suffering. Since an entire country – that is Syria in our case – was destroyed because various parties of the conflict attempted to pursue their own interests in order to build their own preferred pipelines, most parties of the conflict lied to their public and even the risk of a new world war was raised, I consider pipeline wars dirty in nature.

KEYWORDS: *energy policy, natural gas, pipelines, military intervention, Al-Qaeda, Al Nusra, ISIS, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Soviet Union, US, West, Europe, Middle East*

“The evidence is clear and convincing: U.S. President Barack Obama, against advice and warnings from his top military officers, pursued a policy to protect the fundamentalist-Sunni organization, Al Qaeda in Syria (called «Al-Nusra» there), and to arm them, so as to overthrow Bashar al-Assad and replace Assad's secular government with a Sharia-law, fundamentalist-Sunni, government, which would be allied with the fundamentalist-Sunni Saud family – the deadly enemies of Iran, Assad's Syria, and Russia. (Both Iran and Assad's Syria are allied with Russia.) Obama and the Saudis wanted the replacement of Assad with jihadists for different reasons: Obama's goal was to terminate and replace yet another ruler who is allied with Russia; but the Saudis' goal was to terminate and replace Shia-Islam by the Saudis' own fundamentalist Sunni form of Islam.”¹

¹ Zuesse, E. “Officials: Obama Prioritized Defeating Assad Above Defeating Jihadists”. Strategic Culture. 8 December 2016. <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/12/08/officials-obama-prioritized-defeating-assad-above-defeating-jihadists.html>, Accessed on 7 January 2016.

INTRODUCTION

The war in Syria is motivated by intentions mostly excluded from official policies. It is all about great power rivalry, mainly between the US and Russia, but countries around Syria are also deeply involved.

The main goal of the US is to replace Russian allies with that of the US: Syria is an example of that. Replacing the Assad regime with no matter how radical jihadists aligned with Saudi Arabia, and ultimately with the US could have allowed building a pipeline through Syria to Europe, supplying gas from US allies in the Middle East, when – as a result – Russia could be kicked out of the European gas market to the maximum extent possible. A Syrian government, firmly aligned with Russia, makes such plans impossible. Unlike the US, Russia is not interested in installing a gas pipeline from the Middle East through Syria to Europe since the project would lower European dependency on Russian gas. However, if such a project strengthens Russia's allies in the Middle East, Russia will most likely support it, as she did before the civil war in Syria. These pipelines are multi-billion dollar projects and they provide far more than enough reasons to wage wars and destroy countries, causing enormous human suffering.

THE THREE “LAYERS” OF EXPLANATIONS OF THE SYRIA WAR

There are at least three “layers” of explanations of the war in Syria. “Layers” are not scientifically strict categories. There can be more or less layers in conflicts to aid analysis and label conflicting interests of different magnitude. Finding further layers might complicate the analysis so there is a degree of generalisation and simplification when we refer to “layers”.

We start the analysis from the “surface” when arguments are provided by mainstream politicians and mass media for “public consumption”. This “layer” is not necessarily a compilation of lies and half-truths, but it is mostly silent about the real reasons of the war in Syria. On its own this layer does not allow understanding why great powers interfere in the case of one conflict and why they do not interfere in another, when the very same arguments would support intervention, i.e. human rights violations, actions of dictatorships etc.

There is a second, “deeper layer” which refers to various interests of alliances that reveal a lot of the significant reasons of war. However, when analysing this “layer” we are still not at the “core” reasons of military interference.

The third “layer” is the “deepest layer”: it reveals the real nature and extent of the conflicts leading to wars. In the case of Syria it is a conflict around the variants of a multi-billion dollar natural gas pipeline project.

“Layer” No. 1. – Official explanations for public consumption: democracy vs. dictatorship, civilian liberties, human rights, war crimes, saving human lives, no-fly zone, terrorism, chemical weapons, barrel bombs etc.

An average Western or Russian citizen mostly finds official explanations of the Syria war. In the West it is commonplace for politicians or mainstream media to suggest, that the Assad regime is evil, it brutally oppresses its own people, and that is the reason why the civil war broke out in Syria. Western mainstream also suggests, that Assad barrel-bombed his

people,² and also used chemical weapons against the population. On the other hand, those who rose up against Assad are freedom-loving people, some sort of democratic forces, who might be called “moderate opposition”.

Other rebels might be called “opposition” hiding or masking the true nature of these forces concerning their beliefs and probable way of life in Syria if such “opposition” force gets to power. Of course, there is ISIS in Syria and denying that fact would have been foolish when shaping official Western explanations for the public. ISIS is obviously something negative in official Western policy explanations for the public, however in the Western mainstream it was omitted (at least until the rise of president-elect, later US president Trump, whose policies towards Russia and Syria and are yet to be tested)

In Russia the main official explanation for going to war in Syria is fight against terrorism,³ mainly against ISIS and all sorts of other terrorist groups, including Russian citizens fighting against the Assad regime, who can once return to Russia to commit terrorist acts. The official Russian explanations suggest that all forms of terrorism must be eliminated in Syria because this is the best way to prevent terrorist acts on Russian soil and it is also for the benefit of humankind. Russian leaders also stress that the Russian military intervention in Syria is based on the official request of the legitimate Syrian government; therefore, it is absolutely legitimate according to international law. It is also emphasised that Russia liberates Syrian people from oppression by jihadist groups, provides humanitarian aid that is a noble task etc.

Since the core of the Russian official public reasoning to go to war in Syria is fight against terrorism, Western policy makers made sure to challenge such reasoning. Russia has been accused countless time of fighting Syrian “opposition”, rather than “terrorists” who kill virtually all opponents they can, including Christians.⁴ This argument obscures the nature of the main character of Syrian opposition groups that is neither democratic, nor moderate. Not even in Middle Eastern terms. Even the sometimes relatively sober Western mainstream media – such as the BBC – acknowledges that the so-called “moderate opposition” has become a minority in Syria, since these people have either been killed or radicalised during the years of civil war: “*The armed rebellion has evolved significantly since its inception. Secular moderates are now outnumbered by Islamists and jihadists, whose brutal tactics have caused global outrage.*”⁵

The problem is aggravated by the fact that the Russians could not come to any agreement when attempting to separate jihadist terrorists and truly moderate opposition forces in Syria. The parties blamed each-other for this failure and analysts could interpret it in entirely different ways.

² Tawfic, A. “As long as Assad’s barrel bomb blitz continues, Syrians will flee in droves, US and coalition navies could enforce a no-bombing zone easily and without boots on the ground”. The Telegraph. 10 October 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11882038/As-long-as-Assads-barrel-bomb-blitz-continues-Syrians-will-flee-in-droves.html>, Accessed on 20 January 2016.

³ Orosz Z. „Helikopterek alkalmazása a terrorizmus elleni harcban”. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 1/3. 2008. 28–33. http://epa.oszk.hu/02400/02463/00003/pdf/EPA02463_hadtudomanyi_szemle_2008_3_028-033.pdf, Accessed on 14 March 2016.

⁴ Besenyő J. and Gömöri, R. “Christians in Syria and the civil war”. In *Panorama of global security environment 2014* CENAA, 2015. 219–230.

⁵ Rodgers, L. et al. “Syria: The story of the conflict”. BBC. 10 October 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>, Accessed on 10 January 2016.

Russian analysts suggest that the US itself is funding, training, supplying jihadist terrorists in Syria as reported by Russian media^{6,7,8} and other, including Western sources.^{9,10} ¹¹ Therefore pinpointing “their boys” on the battle map would go against US interests. Such logic puts the US policy makers in a very difficult position. They cannot say, that all or the overwhelming majority of the forces in Syria opposing Assad are surely not terrorists (with the exception of ISIS, Al-Qaeda and a few other terrorist groups) in which case US intelligence has no idea where they hide. The US can also not admit – without losing face – that the overwhelming majority of the “opposition” are jihadist terrorists, and therefore we should mark the entire territory of opposition on the map of Syria as enemy terrorist forces, awaiting Russian bombardment.

Former US president Jimmy Carter is a very good counter-example of the official US approach to Russia and the Syria war during the Obama administration. He promised to provide his accurate map of Syrian forces to the Russians and suggested, that if the Russians hit the wrong targets, that would be his fault (!)., *Former President Jimmy Carter said ... that he provided maps of Islamic State positions in Syria to the Russian embassy in Washington, a move apparently at odds with the Obama administration's official policy of not cooperating with Russia in the Syrian war... “I sent [Putin] a message Thursday and asked him if he wanted a copy of our map so he could bomb accurately in Syria, and then on Friday, the Russian embassy in Atlanta – I mean in Washington, called down and told me they would like very much to have the map,” Carter said at his Sunday school class in Georgia, according to a video of his remarks first aired by NBC News. “So in the future, if Russia doesn't bomb the right places, you'll know it's not Putin's fault but it's my fault,” he added as the audience laughed.*¹²

The US proposal of a “no-flight zone” in Syria could have become an official policy if Hillary Clinton won the presidential elections. Hillary Clinton is known as a politician that supports the idea of installing a “no-flight zone” in Syria. Such a policy fails to recognise, that it would definitely not get Russian support in the UN Security Council since Russia would veto it. A Russian veto in the UN Security Council would make the imposition of

⁶ “Weapons can end up with terrorists now US military aid restrictions to Syria lifted – Kremlin”. Russia Today. 9 December 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/369746-weapons-terrorists-supplies-obama/>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

⁷ “US knows weapons sent to Syrian rebels end up with terrorists’ – German journo to RT”. Russia Today. 27 September 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/360865-us-arms-terrorists-syria/>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

⁸ “US to supply terrorists with tanks and missiles”. Pravda Report. 9 December 2016. <http://www.pravdareport.com/video/09-12-2016/136381-usa-0/>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

⁹ Harris, M. “US using Israel, Saudi Arabia as conduit in Syria war: Analyst”. Press TV. 12 October 2016. <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/10/12/488715/Syria-US-Israel-Saudi-Arabia-Daesh-Aleppo-Syrian-troops>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

¹⁰ “Moon of Alabama: Syrian-Russian Offensive against Terrorists in Aleppo. US Supplies Advanced Weapons to Al Qaeda, A Few Links On Syria”. Global Research. 29 September 2016. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syrian-russian-offensive-against-terrorists-in-aleppo-us-supplies-advanced-weapons-to-al-qaeda/5548430>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

¹¹ “Russia, Turkey: US supporting Syria ‘terrorist’ groups. Turkish president lashes out at US-led forces as Russia says new Washington defence policy would empower ‘jihadists’”. Al Jazeera. 28 December 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/russia-turkey-syria-161228050019245.html>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

¹² Wisner, D. “Jimmy Carter offers help for Russia's bombing campaign in Syria”. Fox News. October 21, 2015. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/10/21/jimmy-carter-offers-help-for-russias-bombing-campaign-in-syria/>, Accessed on 24 October 2015.

a “no-flight zone” illegal in accordance with international law. The reason of the Russian veto would be that imposition of a possible “no-flight zone” in Syria would block Russian and/or Syrian Air Force activities; thereby the Russians would shoot themselves in the leg if agreeing with such a policy.

Only forces opposing Assad would benefit from such a “no-flight zone” since they are shielded from Russian and Syrian aerial reconnaissance and bombardment. They do not have an air force at all, so their military capabilities are unaffected by the restrictions of a “no-flight zone”. Clinton might suggest that the main policy goal of her “no-flight zone” is to save civil lives but that is an unacceptably high price for cornering Russia and ultimately bringing the world ever closer to an all-out war with Russia. Such a war would most probably be World War III, including massive strikes with nuclear weapons.

If Clinton’s policy is forced on Russia, it would corner Moscow in a way where there are no solutions without losing face. If a “no-flight zone” is successfully imposed on Russia that would change the outcome of the Syria war, since bulk of the Russian military capabilities intended to be used during the war would be paralysed. It would also be a precedent of Russian weakness and readiness to capitulate to Western diktats in any wars Russia might fight in the future. The message would suggest that the West only needs to impose a “no-flight zone” (i.e. in Syria), or a “no-go zone”(i.e. in Eastern Ukraine, where the separatists do not have an air force, and the Russian Air Force is not deployed either for political reasons), or both a “no-flight zone” and a “no-go zone” (i.e. Crimea, which would be entirely paralysed if Russia complies) and Russia would capitulate. It is obvious that no great powers could ever agree to such diktats, especially if the given superpower – the US – has military capabilities similar to that of Russia, including a powerful arsenal of nuclear strike capabilities.

Another Russian policy option would be to ignore the “no-flight zone”. In this case, the US would have to make a difficult decision. One option would be to ignore Russian actions. In this case it would be a humiliation of the US, since their imposition of the “no-flight zone” is reduced something non-existent. Another policy option would be to shoot down Russian aircraft entering the “no-flight zone”. That would be an act of war and would lead to a major war between the US and Russia. Such a major war is in no one’s interest, since it would endanger the mere survival of humankind. Luckily, US president Trump is well aware of the dangers of such insane and illegal policies, and therefore we might avoid a major war between the US and Russia during his presidency.

“Layer” No. 2. – Conflict between alliances

Alliances are formed between great powers and countries in the region, including Syria. There are many alliances between different countries that are irrelevant for us this time, we need to focus on alliances that include either the US, or Russia. It is quite difficult to label alliances between the US and Saudi Arabia or Qatar clearly official or unofficial. The same logic applies to alliances between Russia, Iraq and Iran. Syria is clearly aligned with Russia, even according to the US or Russian mainstream. Alliances serve multiple purposes that are difficult to list. They provide business opportunities, allow access to military bases, etc. In case of Syria, the Russians have a history of very good relations with the Assad family,

dated back to Soviet times. Russia has military bases^{13, 14, 15, 16, 17} in Syria that are important for them since they provide access to region.

“Layer” No. 3. – The core – the multi-billion dollar gas pipeline business

There are two major natural gas pipeline project plans that turned out to be historically important not only for Syria, but for the US, Russia, Europe without even mentioning the source countries of Middle Eastern gas. There is a US-backed and a Russia-backed project aiming to supply Europe with natural gas but these projects have different source countries and their planned routes are also different. The US-backed pipeline project is planned to supply natural gas from Qatar through Saudi Arabia and Syria to Turkey and ultimately to Europe. The Russia-backed pipeline route is planned to supply natural gas from Iran through Iraq and Syria, then ultimately to Europe. As we can observe there is one thing in common: both gas supply pipeline routes cross Syria (Annex 1). Here comes the conflict.

The US-backed gas pipeline project supports businesses of US allies. Similarly the Russia-backed pipeline project supports businesses of Russian allies. The US pipeline project has an enormous strategic relevance once operational, since it opens up Middle Eastern gas supply to Europe in quantities that allow to lower European dependence on Russian gas. Once built, it would certainly compete with Russian gas prices, driving the prices of Russian gas lower. It would also bring an end to the quasi gas monopoly of Russia in Europe by serving gas supply diversification. It is a strategic interest of the US to weaken all rival states, including Russia. Since a great percentage of Russian state incomes come from energy exports, especially gas exports to Europe,¹⁸ such a gas pipeline supplying Middle Eastern gas to Europe is of historic relevance concerning the income of the Russian state, therefore the entire Russian development.

It is obvious, that Russia would lose bargaining power towards her European customers once the US-backed gas pipeline project is accomplished and the quasi-monopolistic status of Russian gas supply would become an issue of the past. For such reasons, Russia opposes the accomplishment of the US-backed pipeline to Europe.

¹³ “Russia Needs 2nd Syrian Airbase to ‘Enhance the Effectiveness’ of Combat Mission”. Sputnik News. 2 October 2016. <https://sputniknews.com/world/201610021045916425-russia-syria-hmeymim-airbase/>, Accessed on 17 November 2016.

¹⁴ “Russia opening second military airbase in Syria”. Business Insider. December 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-opening-second-military-airbase-in-syria-2015-12>, Accessed on 17 November 2016.

¹⁵ Kretsul, R. “Are Russia and the U.S. building military bases in Syria? The global media are increasingly reporting that the U.S. and Russia are building military bases in Syria”. Russia Beyond The Headlines. 26 January 2016. http://rbth.com/international/2016/01/26/are-russia-and-the-us-building-military-bases-in-syria_562379, Accessed on 17 November 2016.

¹⁶ “Russia has no plans to create new airbase near Syria’s Al Qamishli”. Russia Beyond The Headlines. 25 January 2016. http://rbth.com/news/2016/01/25/russia-has-no-plans-to-create-new-airbase-near-syrias-al-qamishli_562103, Accessed on 17 November 2016.

¹⁷ Durden, T. “Presenting The Russian Naval Base In Tartus, Syria, Or Good Luck UN Security Council”. Zerohedge. 4 February 2012. <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/presenting-russian-naval-base-tartus-syria-or-good-luck-un-security-council>, Accessed on 17 November 2016.

¹⁸ Ambrose, J. “Gazprom’s gas sales to Europe soar by a third”. The Telegraph. 30 August 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/08/30/gazproms-gas-sales-to-europe-soar-by-a-third/>, Accessed on 5 January 2017.

The US-Russia pipeline struggle is not a new phenomenon in history. A very similar conflict occurred during the classic Cold War. Before we get into further details of the 21st-century conflict, it is worth to analyse the historical background, since it is all about natural gas supply to Europe by pipelines and the key parties involved are mostly the same: Europe, the US and the Soviet Union where the leading party was undoubtedly Russia. The gas supply cooperation between Europe and the Soviet Union (ultimately Russia) was managed with no conflicts despite the Cold War era. Whenever a problem occurred with the gas transportation that was due to purely technical and not political reasons. The technical problems of the pipeline system were urgently repaired and the business did not suffer. Such cooperation between Europe and the Soviet Union was born and functioned despite the US efforts to derail this cooperation from the very beginning.

During the beginning of the Reagan administration in the 1980's, the US campaigned against the planned construction of the natural gas pipeline called Yamal, that later provided gas to Europe. The quarrel was tough. There were countless meetings between the US and European leaders when the US attempted to convince the Europeans not to construct the pipeline and claimed that there were more reliable suppliers of natural gas than the contemporary Soviet Union. One example of the alternative sources recommended by the US was the gigantic Troll gas field in Norway.¹⁹

It is remarkable that during the classic Cold War with the notorious Iron Curtain and the antagonistic opposition between the Western world and the Soviet Union the gas pipeline business went smoothly and the US was the unsuccessful spoiler of such cooperation. It is also interesting, that the contradictions between the two poles appeared far larger than today since there were two, entirely different social systems, and despite the fact that the pipeline wars and supply disruption were on the rise after the demise of the Soviet Union. History repeats itself since the US appears to be the unsuccessful spoiler in case of the Syria war where the attempt to kick Russia out of the Russian-European gas supply business fails entirely. The failure of the US to manage a natural gas pipeline supply route from the Middle East to Europe is comparable to the failure of the Regan administration to derail the European-Soviet natural gas pipeline business.

In the case of Syria in the 21st Century, before the civil war, the power of the alliances in the region was demonstrated by the decision of President Assad concerning the fate of the US-backed pipeline project plan. The Syrian president refused to support the US backed project, supporting the interests of his greatest and most powerful ally: Russia. This act made the US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (initially Turkey as well) a deadly enemy of Assad. Now we get a glimpse why US president Obama and other Western leaders hand in hand with Western mainstream media insisted so many times that "Assad must go": "*The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo.*"²⁰ From the Western point of view: yes, "Assad must go" since not only did he ruin a lucrative multi-billion-dollar business of the US and her allies, but he

¹⁹ Wendt, A. "Reagan's warning was on the mark". Financial Times. 2 May 2014. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4382e8ee-ca3f-11e3-8a31-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3XHJQCINe>, Accessed on 2 January 2016.

²⁰ "Remarks by President Obama to the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York". The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. 13 October 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-united-nations-general-assembly>, Accessed on 20 February 2016.

also spoiled the effort countering Russia in economic terms and also made the wrong move if we consider energy supply diversity of Europe, ultimately European energy security. The bottom line is: “Assad must go” because he is a reliable Russian ally.

In the case of the Russia-backed gas pipeline project the situation is a little bit more complex. Russia does not want a gas pipeline project connecting the Middle East with Europe, since that reduces Europe’s gas dependence on Russia. However, if such a pipeline project is ever realised, it should connect Russian allies from the Middle East with Europe. In this case setting the gas prices and determining of the quantities supplied to Europe could be orchestrated predominantly on the basis of Russian interests, leaving room for lucrative business to Russian allies. One might suggest that it is a cartel but this appears to be the likely reality once the Russia-backed pipeline might be built.

*“Turkey attempted to persuade Syrian President Bashar Assad to reject the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline and to work with the proposed Qatari-Turkish pipeline, which would ultimately satisfy Turkey and the Gulf Arab nations’ quest for dominance over gas supplies, who are the United State’s allies. But after Assad refused Turkey’s proposal, Turkey and its allies became the major architects to start Syria’s “civil war.” ... The Memorandum of Understanding for the Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline was signed in July, 2012 – just as Syria’s civil war was spreading to Damascus and Aleppo. In July 2013, leaders from Syria, Iran, and Iraq met to sign a preliminary agreement on the pipeline with the hopes of finalizing the deal by the end of the year. This pipeline would by-pass Turkey. The plan by Assad to support the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline plan was a “direct slap in the face” to Qatar’s plans to build a pipeline through Syria ... In July, 2013, Russia rejected a Saudi proposal to abandon Syria’s president, Bashar Assad, in return for a huge arms deal and a pledge to boost Russian influence in the Arab world. ...The Saudi prince also reassured Putin that “whatever regime comes after” Assad, it will be “completely” in the Saudis’ hands and will not sign any agreement allowing any Gulf country to transport its gas across Syria to Europe and compete with Russian gas exports ... Putin rejected the Saudi Arabian proposal. When this happened, Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia then let the Russians know that the only option left in Syria was military action. So, why did Russia reject the proposal to partner with Saudi Arabia? Asked about the Putin-Bandar meeting, a Syrian politician said: “Saudi Arabia thinks that politics is a simple matter of buying people or countries. It doesn’t understand that Russia is a major power and that this is not how it determines its policy. Syria and Russia have had close ties for over half a century in all fields and it’s not Saudi money that will change this fact”.*²¹

Similarly “deadly sins” that Assad “committed” were also done by the former Libyan dictator, Col. Muammar Gaddafi when he nationalised private energy industry of his country, hurting the private interests of Western energy companies. Once Gaddafi came to power, Libya became a flourishing country with one of the highest living standards and social security in comparison to the countries in the region. Gaddafi was brutally tortured and murdered in a war supported by the US and Western powers under the pretext of protecting Libyan civilians against the “regime”. Since Western protection of civilians was “accomplished” by bringing the Gaddafi “regime” down, the country descended into civil war, chaos and could not recover ever since. The fall of Gaddafi is also a major reason of the illegal, massive

²¹ “The Roots of the War in Syria”. Syrian Free Press. 27 October 2015. <https://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/war-for-pipelines/>, Accessed on 20 January 2016.

immigration wave to Europe, which erupted in 2015, since Libya no longer stops the flow of migrants crossing its borders.

The fate of the oil rich Iraq of Saddam Hussein was quite similar to that of Libya under Gaddafi. Saddam got to war with Iran and he was a very good US ally at that time, since the oil and gas rich Iran was one of the greatest enemies declared by the US. Once he invaded Kuwait, he did the wrong thing hurting US interests. The US invaded Iraq, but left Saddam in power because his rule was needed to counter Iran. Later on, based on false pretexts such as “possession of weapons of mass destruction” posing a threat to the US and her allies, and alleged links to Al-Qaeda, the US invaded Iraq again and got rid of Saddam. Weapons of mass destruction were not found after years of systematic search, and Al-Qaeda links were proved to be non-existent. Later on, a new pretext appeared on the US side suggesting that the US “liberated” the country from dictatorship and “brought democracy” to the Iraqi people. Iraq descended into endless civil war and destruction, and – instead of democracy – ISIS was born.

WHY PIPELINE WARS ARE DIRTY? AT LEAST IN THE CASE OF SYRIA

The pipeline projects mentioned in this article – one from Soviet times during the classic Cold War, the others planned to cross contemporary Syria – are multibillion-dollar projects and they provide far more than enough reasons to wage wars and destroy countries, causing enormous human suffering. In case of the Cold War, a war in literal terms between the West and the Soviet Union was not “on the table”: the natural gas pipeline project was a great example of economic cooperation on the basis of stability, mutual respect of each-others interests and building a smoothly running business despite all differences. The interference of the US – which was an integral part of the Western world (as she is today) – was an interference of a third party. One might suggest that the US interference was driven by legitimate security concerns but history proved that these concerns were unjustified until the end of the Cold War in its classic term. The US itself risked nothing when referring to security concerns since all the potential risks and benefits were taken by Europe and the Soviet Union. The US was not dependent on Russian gas supply in this project and that justifies the labelling of the US as an outsider. The US was a deadly enemy of the former Soviet Union attempting to block, derail all forms of cooperation that would strengthen both the Soviet Union and Europe even though the latter was part of the Western system. This attitude was destructive and failed as history proved it. This is why my overall evaluation of the role of the US at that time concerning natural gas pipeline cooperation is negative. The US attitude could even be called dirty if we realise, that without a European gas business with the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, Europe would have definitely suffered from shortage of natural gas. Keep in mind that gas pipelines connecting Europe and the Middle East are still under planning or development (Annex 2). Europe is still dependent on the Russian natural gas supply that delayed but did not stop the depletion of Europe’s own conventional, natural gas fields. If we keep in mind these facts, US interference in the natural gas business was retrospectively a “dirty policy”, even though it was not a “dirty pipeline war” in literal terms of war.

In the case of Syria it is obviously not merely a “war of pipeline plans”, discussed by politicians and experts, but a serious war in literal terms. Since (a) an entire country was destroyed because various parties of the conflict attempted to pursue their own interests in order to build their own preferred pipelines, (b) most parties of the conflict lied to their public

and (c) even the risk of a new world war between Russia and the US was risen: I consider this pipeline war “dirty” in nature. Even though this pipeline war is labelled “dirty”, the roles of the various parties show significant differences in ethical terms.

I would abstain this time from an analysis to determine whether the contemporary US – a key party in this pipeline war – is a genuine and benevolent bourgeois democracy or not. However, it can be safely concluded that the US has indeed extremely problematic allies deeply affecting the Syria war. The most problematic US ally is definitely Saudi Arabia. Without getting into too many details of how virtually all pillars of a contemporary Western-style democracy are entirely absent in Saudi Arabia – suppression of women, child-marriages, public beheadings, stoning to death, cutting off hands as a punishment, financing, training, and arming the most brutal types of international terrorism, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda jihadist fighters etc. – there is an unfortunate silence concerning this on the side of official mainstream US policy makers, most of whom officially raise no concerns about their ally. To make it even worse, the US supports Sunni radicals and meanwhile opposes Shia, when the overwhelming majority of Islamist terrorists around the world are Sunni, not Shia.²²

Saudi Arabia is a traditional ally of the US and most probably has the most significant *direct* role in the Syria war. The US does not only have extremely problematic allies, but US policy makers made very “problematic” decisions when directly supporting such allies during the Syria war, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In light of this, US criticisms of the “authoritarian regime” of Vladimir Putin are not credible. There are problems concerning human rights in Russia – like in many other countries of the world – but at a different scale in comparison to Saudi Arabia. Those who criticize Russia, must demonstrate a good example themselves. In this case, when we are talking about the alliance of the US and Saudi Arabia, the US fails to provide a good example. The US demonstrates, the *there is no dictatorship dirty enough to disqualify itself from becoming a US ally, once US interests drive the lone superpower to form alliances. Such alliances are clearly not based on values*, as often claimed by US mainstream (when claims are made in a generalised way, not even mentioning Saudi Arabia). It proves the lack of value-based policymaking on the side of Washington, at least in case of Saudi Arabia (Qatar, Chile and other dictatorships).

Such realities discredit US involvement in the Syria war, when the “sins” of the “Assad regime” against the Syrian people are emphasised by mainstream politicians and media. Since I have no knowledge of any existing *genuine* “Muslim democracy” at all (including the relatively secular Turkey, or Tunisia), it leads to a conclusion that that there are either some forms of dictatorships in the Muslim world, or instability, chaos and bloodshed. This is precisely what happened during the so called “Arab Spring” – which was praised by mainstream Western politicians and policy makers (at least at the beginning) and now it appears that the dictatorships that were overthrown were still the “lesser evil” in terms of human suffering, than the chaos and destruction of the “liberation”, resulting in endless sectarian violence. Syria was flourishing and liveable before the long lasting civil war, ignited and supported mostly by several foreign powers. The power of Mr. Assad is secular. The Saudis and ultimately

²² Zuesse, E. “Trump Team Targets Iran”. Strategic Culture. 13 January 2017. <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/01/13/trump-team-targets-iran.html>, Accessed on 13 January 2017.

the US – when insisting that “Assad must go”^{23, 24, 25} – in fact support Sunni style Sharia law in Syria. US policies drive Syria to become a puppet regime of Saudi Arabia, ultimately the US herself. Such a US policy is deeply cynical and unacceptable, especially if we refer to the foundations of traditional “Western values” as the basis of the settlement in Syria.

The facts and arguments – that provide a glimpse of the undemocratic and destructive nature of US policies – suggest that the Syria war is a “dirty pipeline war”, at least from the perspective of US and Saudi policies.

Russian intentions are of a different kind. When Russia claims that she supports a secular government (based upon the official request of that government) and she fights terrorists, Russia is right. The so-called “moderate opposition” of President Assad is a fiction, not promising reconciliation and national unity. From this point of view, the “dirty pipeline war” is not symmetric at all.

Russia fights radical jihadists, no matter what we call them: Al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, “opposition” etc. For those, who are sceptical concerning a prosperous and ultimately stable future of Syria under President Assad, in alliance with Russia and Iran, I would suggest they should see the masses celebrating the liberation and Christmas in Aleppo. I would also suggest the evaluation of the UN reaction when Palmyra – full of historic sites and treasures – was liberated from the jihadists – or the future reaction of the UN when Palmyra would be retaken again by Syrian government forces.^{26, 27, 28} Both Syrian government and Russian sources claim, that the jihadist retaking of the once liberated Palmyra was a result of a deliberate US retaliation. The US-led coalition postponed striking jihadist forces allowing them to regroup, concentrate manpower and weaponry to retake Palmyra. The jihadist success was a big surprise and it was achieved despite heavy Russian bombings of the advancing jihadist forces. Syrian government and Russian sources also claim that the jihadist radicals were fully aware of the plans of the US-led coalition in advance. Otherwise, they could not have attacked Palmyra with forces capable to retake the city.

Unlike the jihadist terrorists of ISIS, who deliberately destroy any cultural heritage, including monuments contradicting to their fundamentalist beliefs²⁹ in Palmyra and anywhere

²³ Hijab, R. “There’s hope for Syria: but first, Assad must go”. The Telegraph. 7 September 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/07/theres-hope-for-syria---but-first-assad-must-go/>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁴ Wintour, P. “Boris Johnson says Assad must go if Syrians’ suffering is to end, New foreign secretary takes stance ahead of international talks that differs from December column asserting UK could not ‘be picky’ about its allies”. The Guardian. 19 July 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/19/boris-johnson-bashar-al-assad-must-go-if-syrians-suffering-to-end>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁵ Chollet, D. “Assad must go, but regime change is not the answer”. The Washington Post. 29 September 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/09/29/assad-must-go-but-regime-change-is-not-the-answer/?utm_term=.790faa740ed2, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁶ McKirdy, E. and Dewan, A. “Reports: ISIS retakes ancient Syrian city of Palmyra”. CNN. 12 December 2016. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/12/middleeast/palmyra-syria-isis-russia/>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁷ Shaheen, K. “Islamic State retakes historic city of Palmyra. Isis-affiliated news channel claims victory for jihadi fighters after intense fighting prompts Syrian military to withdraw”. The Guardian. 11 December 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/11/islamic-state-retakes-palmyra-syria>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁸ Solomon, E. “Isis retakes ancient Syrian city of Palmyra: Loss for Assad’s forces will raise questions about limitations of air strikes”. The Financial Times. 12 December 2016. <https://www.ft.com/content/be2ede50-c054-11e6-9bca-2b93a6856354>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.

²⁹ Such as portrayal of faces, proof of cultures different to radical Islam existed in the Middle East etc.

under their control, the government of President Assad aims to preserve these treasures of history. The Syrian government supports archaeology research and wants to benefit from tourism to historic sites. Western mainstream politicians and media never congratulated, nor celebrated Russia or Assad for liberating Palmyra, that shows the deeply destructive, cynical, manipulated, and partial nature of the contemporary Western establishment. Similar reactions are expected, when the second liberation of Palmyra would take place.

Syria under the rule of the secular government of President Assad – with the aid of Russia and Iran – would be a better place to live in comparison to an unending civil war, or the rise to power of a Saudi Sunni puppet regime under Sharia law, supported by the US. From this point of view the “dirty pipeline war” is far from being “equally dirty”, if we consider the roles of the key parties involved.

IN BIG POLITICS AND WAR IN SYRIA ENDLESS PATIENCE IS REQUIRED – THE ISRAELI ATTACKS

Israel bombed Syrian Arab Army targets several times in Syria. Sometimes targets were hit from outside of Syrian airspace (i.e. from Lebanon), sometimes after Israeli jets entered Syrian airspace. *“The air force of ... Israel ... hit al-Mezzeh military airport west of Damascus just after midnight (on 13 January 2017 – the auth.). Several missiles were fired from the Lake Tiberias area and landed in the surroundings of al-Mezzeh airport at 12:25 after midnight, causing a fire to erupt. A military source said the new Israeli attack came in support of the terrorist organizations ’to raise their morale’.*

The General Command of the Army and the Armed Forces has warned ... Israel ... of the repercussions of this ’flagrant attack’, said the source. The Command pledged to continue its war on terrorism ’until eliminating it and cutting off the arms supporting it’, the source added. Al-Mezzeh military airport came under a similar Israeli attack on December 7 of last year, where several ground-to-ground missiles were fired from inside the occupied Palestinian territories to the west of Tall Abu al-Nada (hill).”³⁰

Bombing military targets of the government of another country without a United Nations Security Council Resolution (Mandate) or upon the request of the targeted Syrian government (the latter is absurd) are classic acts of aggression and war, unless there is a justifiable case of self-defence. There are multiple UNSC Resolutions condemning ISIS in Iraq and Syria, also Al-Nusra Front in Syria etc.³¹ but there is no resolution that allows the destruction of the Armed Forces of the Syrian government.

The official position of Israel concerning the latest incident is quite similar to that of possessing nuclear weapons: *“Israel neither confirms nor denies involvement in striking targets inside Syria. Asked about Friday’s incident, an Israeli military spokeswoman said: We don’t comment on reports of this kind.”*³² The interpretation of such statements could

³⁰ “Lone Bear: Friday morning: in support of terrorist gangs, Israeli jets bomb Mezzeh [Syrian military airport west-Damascus]”. Syrian Free Press. 13 January 2017. <https://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2017/01/13/friday-morning-in-support-of-terrorist-gangs-israeli-jets-bomb-mezzeh-syrian-military-airport-west-damascus/>, Accessed on 15 January 2017.

³¹ “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2107: adopted by the Security Council at its 7242nd meeting, on 15 August 2014”. 2014. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2016-03/UNSCR-Res-2170.pdf>, Accessed on 15 January 2017.

³² Al-Khalidi, S. “Syrian army says Israel fires rockets at airbase near Damascus”. Reuters. 13 January 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-airport-idUSKBN14W35J>, Accessed on 15 January 2017.

be the following: “Yes, we did it, and we are not shy to deny it, but we do not want to talk about it at all.” Why? Because the actions of Israel are clearly not in compliance with international law and a possible explanation referring to self-defence would be very difficult and would raise a lot of other questions. Similar Israeli logic applies to the possession nuclear weapons that has been neither denied, nor confirmed by official Israeli sources ever since they acquired nuclear weapons.

Given the technological level of the Israeli Air Force, its electronic warfare capabilities, etc. it is highly unlikely that the Syrian government is capable of destroying Israeli jets. However, Russia is most likely technically capable to shoot down Israeli jets with no problems, especially so since the presence of the newest and most powerful Russian S-400 air defence assets.³³³⁴

This raises the question whether Russia is in a position to interfere and stop Israel from bombing Syrian government targets. We need to keep in mind that Israeli bombing is far from having a chance to alter the outcome of the Syrian war, especially since the heavy Russian military involvement. In other words, the Israeli bombardment is limited in nature and even though it is most likely that Russia is technically capable to shoot down Israeli jets, the political and economic price of that would most likely to be far higher than what Russia wants to pay.

In case Russia shoots down Israeli jets, US president, Donald Trump would come under enormous pressure. The bulk of the US and other Western establishments would make an “uproar” that a “Russian aggression” resulted in “war against Israel”, which “has the right of self-defence” and “has the right to exist” etc. The “uproar” of the Western establishment could be more intense than in the aftermath of the alleged Russian hacking of the Democratic Party, including presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, thus allegedly contributing to the election victory of Donald Trump. Various voices suggesting that a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine would allow peace³⁵ would weaken in favour of anti-Russian hysteria, warmongering, pledges to support Israel, and retaliation. Russia would most likely lose the momentum of the new US president, Donald Trump who intends to normalise relations and possibly lift the economic sanctions against Russia. These arguments explain why Israel can get away after such airstrikes unpunished.

CONCLUSIONS

The war in Syria is motivated by intentions mostly excluded from official policies, since they are designed for public consumption and public delusion. It is not desirable for the Western political elite to officially admit the truth that *“Yes, we are going to war to destroy an entire country because that country is an ally of our rival, Russia and they want to build a natural gas pipeline which contradicts our plans. You people, the taxpayers would pay the costs of our military adventures. Human suffering through years and the destruction of most of the*

³³ ‘Главком ВКС РФ: С поставкой С-400 Россия сразу навела порядок в воздушном пространстве Сирии’. Russia Today. 27 December 2015. <https://russian.rt.com/article/139106>, Accessed on 1 January 2016.

³⁴ “США и их союзники обеспокоены тем, что российские С-400 могут покрыть всю территорию Сирии”. Russia Today. 26 November 2015. <https://russian.rt.com/article/132770>, Accessed on 1 January 2016.

³⁵ Irish, J. and Wroughton, L. “At Paris meeting, major powers to warn Trump over Middle East peace”. Reuters. 15 January 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-france-idUSKBN14Y0SD>, Accessed on 15 January 2017.

Syrian infrastructure does not matter: it would be the problem of the country that we destroy" etc. Such arguments – once officially admitted – would provoke outrage and withdrawal of public support from any government, who might argue this way.

The pipeline wars are all about great-power rivalry, mainly between the US and Russia, but countries around Syria are also deeply involved. In our case in Syria, the main goal of the US is to replace a Russian ally with that of the US.

Replacing Assad's power with no matter how radical jihadists firmly aligned with Saudi-Arabia (and ultimately with the US) – that would install a Sunni dictatorship in Syria based on Sharia law – could have allowed to build a pipeline through Syria to Europe, providing natural gas from US allies in the Middle East. As a result, European dependency on Russian gas would be reduced.

The potential extent of the Russian natural gas market loss in Europe depends on several factors. It depends on the amount and the price of the natural gas supplied from the Middle East. Since the infrastructure to supply gas from Russia to Europe is already built and the gas supply from the Middle East would definitely need new infrastructure investments, the degree to which Europe would abandon already existing infrastructure allowing Russian supply – as long as it can be justified by politics and also forces of the market – is yet unknown.

If Europe might entirely get rid of Russian gas supply that would contradict supply diversification. Such a development would be unwelcome, since the dependency on Russia would be replaced with another dependency on the Middle East.

Russia would suffer in economic terms if the European gas market might become unavailable. However, it would cause only temporary problems, because there are many countries in the world that are eager to buy Russian gas.

The Syrian government – firmly aligned with Russia – makes US-backed pipeline plans crossing Syria impossible, since Assad enjoys a wide range of Russian support. This includes political, economic and military support when Russia acts as a truly great power, a real "heavy weight". The liberation of Aleppo proves this conclusion, since it marks the de facto victory of Mr. Assad and ultimately Russia.

Unlike the US, Russia is not interested in installing a natural gas pipeline from the Middle East through Syria to Europe since the project would lower the European dependency on Russian gas. However, if such a project strengthens Russia's allies in the Middle East, Russia will be most likely to support it, as she did before the civil war in Syria.

Natural gas pipelines are multibillion-dollar projects and they provide far more than enough reasons to wage wars and destroy countries, causing enormous human suffering. An entire country – that is Syria in our case – was mostly destroyed because of various parties of the conflict, which attempted to pursue their own interests in order to build their own preferred pipelines.

Since most parties of the conflict lied to their public and even the risk of a new world war was raised, I consider pipeline wars dirty in nature. Had Hillary Clinton been elected as the next president of the US, the danger of a major war between the US and Russia would have become higher than at any other time since the dissolution of the USSR.

Pipeline wars are not equally dirty if we consider the true motivations and actions of the major players involved in the wars.

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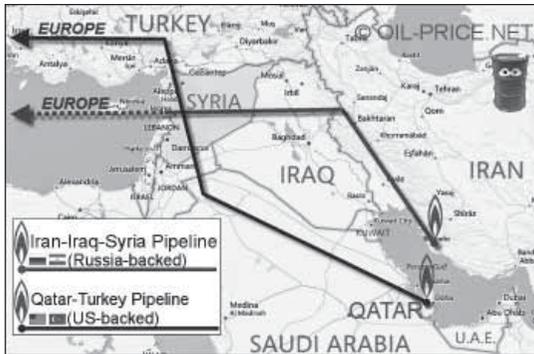
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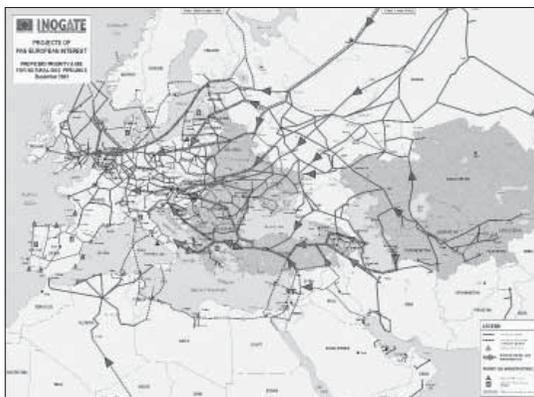
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Annex 1 Alternative, planned pipeline projects, aimed to supply Middle Eastern gas to Europe, through Syria³⁶



Annex 2 Europe – Proposed Natural Gas Pipeline Map³⁷

³⁶ Source: <https://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/war-for-pipelines/> (Accessed on 15 January 2016)

³⁷ Source: <http://www.mappery.com/map-of/Europe-Proposed-Natural-Gas-Pipelines-Map> (Accessed on 16 January 2017)