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Energy Geopolitics and the U.S. ‘Mission’ in Iraq and Syria

The Mad Scramble for Oil and Gas

by ROB URIE

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In announcing that the U.S. will ‘officially’ launch military campaigns in Iraq and Syria President Barack Obama appealed to vague fears of an Islamic ‘other,’ IS (Islamic State), without explaining how it is a threat to the U.S. or in U.S. interests to suppress it. The plausibility of ‘humanitarian intervention’ faces the facts that the U.S. war on Iraq launched in 2003 broke the country along sectarian lines, led directly to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and was preceded by economic sanctions estimated to have killed a few hundred thousand more. And through direct CIA and indirect proxy support for the Syrian ‘opposition’ the U.S. has fueled a bloody war with no resolution in sight.

The war against IS has taken on an air of self-evidence in the U.S. media without many details being put forward to support it. ‘Defeating terrorism’ has been the standard line of murderous demagogues for decades and Mr. Obama just recently acceded to Israel’s murder of over two thousand captive Palestinians under the claim that any who were slaughtered were ‘terrorists’ by way of the fact they are now dead. The Syrian government could legitimately claim that the opposition the U.S. is funding in Syria is ‘terrorist’ within the frame Mr. Obama is putting forward. And left wholly unstated is the relation through energy geopolitics of Mr. Obama’s military ‘coalition’ in Europe with the U.S. proxy war in Ukraine.

Even the White House appears to understand that it isn't productive for Mr. Obama to recall the human and geopolitical catastrophes that the (George W) Bush administration so recently caused in Iraq in any detail. Left unstated was that none of the Bush administration's given rationales for the war and occupation had basis in fact, although they were widely believed to at the time. This would seemingly make the 'war on terror' rationale that Mr. Obama is now offering a difficult sell. The serial videos of Western journalists being beheaded are public relations 'win' for White House efforts to bring the always-compliant American press on board. And even Mr. Obama's remaining 'liberal' supporters must cringe when serial catastrophe generator Dick Cheney is 'recommending' the same essential policies for the Middle East that Mr. Obama is.

U.S. history in the Middle East has not always been as opaque as it is now, if only because information didn't travel the globe at today's speed. It is now widely conceded that Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party was brought to power in a CIA orchestrated coup in Iraq in 1960. In nearby Iran the CIA had orchestrated a coup seven years earlier in 1953 following Iranian attempts to recover Iranian oil for the Iranian people. And earlier still, in 1949, the CIA facilitated a coup to overthrow the Syrian government in order to complete an oil pipeline from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean Sea.

The common factor in these coups was oil, natural gas and pipelines for their transport. However, in each case the rationale provided to the public, to the extent any was offered, centered around Cold War geopolitics and keeping the 'communist menace' at bay. Standard CIA protocol at the time was to hire phony agents provocateurs to pose as 'communists' complete with phony protest signs to convince the American public through the always-credulous U.S. press that the purpose of the coups was to 'prevent the spread of communism.' This same playbook was used throughout Central America in the 1950s and 1960s. To believe that President Barack Obama is motivated by desire to limit-end terrorist violence requires overlooking this history of contrived rationales for wars and coups up to and including George W Bush's in the 2003 war on Iraq, overlooking the actual history of the U.S. installing brutal dictators and slaughtering millions of innocents in wars of choice and Mr. Obama's own role in using drone terrorism to further his own goals in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, etc. To the point made more than once, 'terrorism' is the new 'communism' in Western political slander.

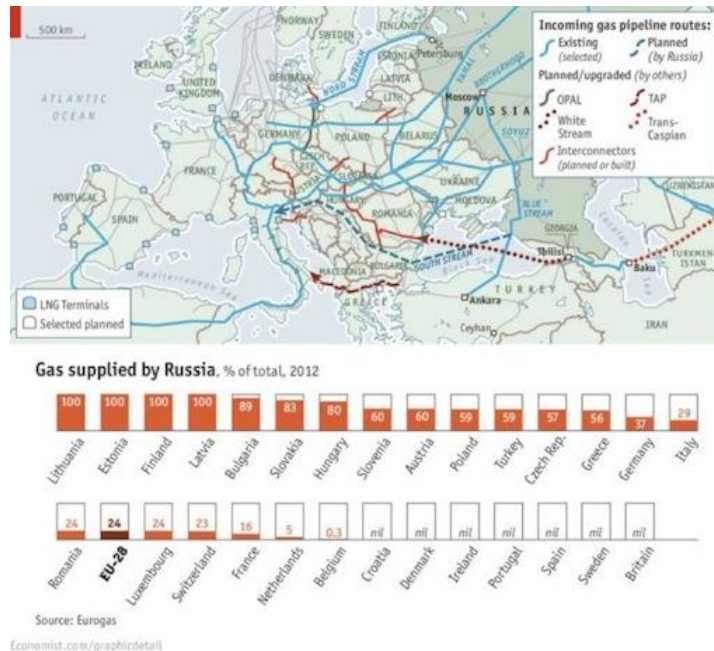
From the time the pipeline project was conceived in 1945 Syria had been the lone holdout in not giving government sanction. At the behest of ARAMCO (formerly known as the Arabian American Oil Company) the CIA intervened. Under the guise of Cold War anti-communist activities the CIA helped organize and fund a coup in Syria. Within months of the coup the Syrian government approved the project and construction of the Syrian leg of the pipeline was begun. The Trans-Arabian Pipeline, as it was called, is no longer in service. But a new (natural gas) pipeline that unites North Africa with the Middle East, Turkey and eventually with Europe, to deliver North African, Iranian and Iraqi natural gas has the Syrian leg of the project completed.



Map (1) above: The Arab Gas Pipeline conceived to transport natural gas from Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Iraq has already been built through Syria. Plans are to complete the pipeline from Syria to Turkey where it will eventually connect to the planned Nabucco pipeline to deliver gas to Europe. Iran has recently expressed interest in connecting to the pipeline to run from Iraq. This is almost certainly the reason for the U.S. alliance with Iran to defeat IS. Source: EIA

The point was made contemporaneously that the ‘Arab Spring’ followed the planned and partially completed pipeline projects to a country. The ‘Egyptian Revolution’ perceived at the time to have emerged from Arab Spring uprising finds the Egyptian military now in control of the government. The Egyptian military is a major recipient of U.S. foreign ‘aid.’ U.S. / NATO regime change in Libya was initially sold as humanitarian intervention to aid a Libyan liberation movement. Likewise, U.S. funding and support for the Syrian opposition was initially sold as humanitarian support for a Syrian liberation movement. The other side of current and proposed pipelines finds Mr. Obama’s ‘coalition’ of Germany, France, Britain, etc. ready to defeat global terrorism with the added benefit of limiting Europe’s dependence on oil and gas from Russia.

Adding ambiguity is that Russian gas pipelines now run directly from Russia to the major EU countries (map below). By reports the U.S. appears the more enthusiastic proponent of punishing Russia with economic sanctions as part of the U.S. / NATO proxy war now underway in Ukraine. European leaders have at least publicly been more reticent given the relatively high degree of trade between Europe and Russia. Also adding ambiguity is that there is at present no pipeline built to supply Europe with Iraqi, Iranian and North African natural gas. Russia has the capacity to create a very cold winter indeed for Ukraine, Austria, Germany, Italy and to a lesser extent France, hence the scramble to store natural gas in Europe in anticipation.



Map (2) above: Europe is by degree dependent on imported natural gas with the average EU-28 country receiving a quarter of its gas from Russia. Mr. Obama's 'coalition' to fight global terror ranges from the highly dependent (Germany, Italy) to the somewhat dependent (France). These would not coincidentally be the beneficiaries of alternate supplies from Iran, Iraq and North Africa. The Arab Gas Pipeline has already been built from Egypt through Syria. Source: Economist / Eurogas.

The history of the U.S. in the Middle East is of sequential coups and wars that have been put forward under the guise of geopolitics. The misdirection used in the 1940s – 1960s was of 'containing the communist menace.' The misdirection since then has combined manufactured fear of an 'other' through the 'war on terror' with the liberal / progressive sop of 'humanitarian intervention.' George W. Bush was able to bring a large contingent of 'liberal hawks' along with his war on Iraq under the ruse of 'removing a brutal dictator.' Already known before the launch of that war was that there is hardly a mass grave in the Middle East that doesn't have U.S. energy geopolitics associated it.

The relation of the U.S. / NATO proxy war in Ukraine to renewed military intervention in Iraq and Syria is about who supplies Europe with oil and gas. The strategy appears to be to break the relation between Russia and Europe and use U.S. and 'coalition' control over Middle Eastern oil and gas to sell it to Europe. This ties twentieth century geopolitics to the long-standing use of American state power to further the private interests of multi-national oil and gas companies. It is also in every conceivable dimension a moral, political, economic and environmental atrocity. Mr. Obama was able to sell his 'humanitarian interventions' in North Africa to apparently receptive audiences. Now he is selling his wholly implausible 'war on terror' to perpetuate permanent death, misery and destruction across a wide swath of the Middle East. Odds are there will be a lot of 'takers.'

