

How Does Controlling Syria's Oil Serve Washington's Strategic Objectives?

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Before the evacuation of 1,000 American troops from northern Syria to western Iraq, the Pentagon had 2,000 US forces in Syria. After the drawdown of US troops at Erdogan's insistence in order for Ankara to mount a ground offensive in northern Syria, the US has still deployed 1,000 troops, mainly in oil-rich eastern Deir al-Zor province and at al-Tanf military base.

Al-Tanf military base is strategically located in southeastern Syria on the border between Syria, Iraq and Jordan, and it straddles on a critically important Damascus-Baghdad highway, which serves as a lifeline for Damascus. Washington has illegally occupied 55-kilometer area around al-Tanf since 2016, and several hundred US Marines have trained several Syrian militant groups there.

It's worth noting that rather than fighting the Islamic State, the purpose of continued presence of the US forces at al-Tanf military base is to address Israel's concerns regarding the expansion of Iran's influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Regarding the oil- and natural gas-rich Deir al-Zor governorate, it's worth pointing out that Syria used to produce modest quantities of oil for domestic needs before the war – roughly 400,000 barrels per day, which isn't much compared to tens of millions barrels daily oil production in the Gulf states.

Although Donald Trump crowed in a characteristic blunt manner in a tweet after the withdrawal of 1,000 American troops from northern Syria that Washington had deployed forces in eastern Syria where there was oil, the purpose of exercising control over Syria's oil is neither to smuggle oil out of Syria nor to deny the valuable source of revenue to the Islamic State.

There is no denying the fact that the remnants of the Islamic State militants are still found in Syria and Iraq but its emirate has been completely dismantled in the region and its leadership is on the run. So much so that the fugitive caliph of the terrorist organization was killed in the bastion of a rival jihadist outfit, al-Nusra Front in Idlib, hundreds of kilometers away from the Islamic State strongholds in eastern Syria.

Much like the “scorched earth” battle strategy of medieval warlords – as in the case of the Islamic State which early in the year burned crops of local farmers while retreating from its former strongholds in eastern Syria – Washington's basic purpose in deploying the US forces in oil and natural gas fields of Deir al-Zor governorate is to deny the valuable source of

income to its other main rival in the region, Damascus.

After the devastation caused by eight years of proxy war, the Syrian government is in dire need of tens of billions dollars international assistance to rebuild the country. Not only is Washington hampering efforts to provide international aid to the hapless country, it is in fact squatting over Syria's own resources with the help of its only ally in the region, the Kurds.

Although Donald Trump claimed credit for expropriating Syria's oil wealth, it bears mentioning that "scorched earth" policy is not a business strategy, it is the institutional logic of the deep state. President Trump is known to be a businessman and at least ostensibly follows a non-interventionist ideology; being a novice in the craft of international diplomacy, however, he has time and again been misled by the Pentagon and Washington's national security establishment.

Regarding Washington's interest in propping up the Gulf's autocrats and fighting their wars in regional conflicts, it bears mentioning that in April 2016, the Saudi foreign minister [threatened](#) [1] that the Saudi kingdom would sell up to \$750 billion in treasury securities and other assets if the US Congress passed a bill that would allow Americans to sue the Saudi government in the United States courts for its role in the September 11, 2001 terror attack - though the bill was eventually passed, Saudi authorities have not been held accountable; even though 15 out of 19 9/11 hijackers were Saudi nationals.

Moreover, \$750 billion is only the Saudi investment in the United States, if we add its investment in Western Europe and the investments of UAE, Kuwait and Qatar in the Western economies, the sum total would amount to trillions of dollars of Gulf's investments in North America and Western Europe.

Furthermore, in order to bring home the significance of the Persian Gulf's oil in the energy-starved industrialized world, here are a few stats from the OPEC data: Saudi Arabia has the world's largest proven crude oil reserves of 265 billion barrels and its daily oil production exceeds 10 million barrels; Iran and Iraq, each, has 150 billion barrels reserves and has the capacity to produce 5 million barrels per day, each; while UAE and Kuwait, each, has 100 billion barrels reserves and produces 3 million barrels per day, each; thus, all the littoral states of the Persian Gulf, together, hold 788 billion barrels, more than half of world's 1477 billion barrels of proven oil reserves.

No wonder then, 36,000 United States troops have currently been deployed in their numerous military bases and aircraft carriers in the oil-rich Persian Gulf in accordance with the Carter Doctrine of 1980, which states: "Let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

Additionally, regarding the Western defense production industry's sales of arms to the Gulf Arab States, [a report](#) [2] authored by William Hartung of the US-based Center for International Policy found that the Obama administration had offered Saudi Arabia more than \$115 billion in weapons, military equipment and training during its eight-year tenure.

Similarly, the top items in Trump's agenda for his maiden visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 were: firstly, he threw his weight behind the idea of the Saudi-led "Arab NATO" to counter Iran's influence in the region; and secondly, he announced an unprecedented arms package

for Saudi Arabia. The package included between \$98 billion and \$128 billion in arms sales.

Therefore, keeping the economic dependence of the Western countries on the Gulf Arab States in mind, during the times of global recession when most of manufacturing has been outsourced to China, it is not surprising that when the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia decided to provide training and arms to the Islamic jihadists in the border regions of Turkey and Jordan against the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the Obama administration was left with no other choice but to toe the destructive policy of its regional Middle Eastern allies, despite the sectarian nature of the proxy war and its attendant consequences of breeding a new generation of Islamic jihadists who would become a long-term security risk not only to the Middle East but to the Western countries, as well.

Similarly, when King Abdullah's successor King Salman decided, on the whim of the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, to invade Yemen in March 2015, once again the Obama administration had to yield to the dictates of Saudi Arabia and UAE by fully coordinating the Gulf-led military campaign in Yemen not only by providing intelligence, planning and logistical support but also by selling billions of dollars' worth of arms and ammunition to the Gulf Arab States during the conflict.

In this reciprocal relationship, the US provides security to the ruling families of the Gulf Arab states by providing weapons and troops; and in return, the Gulf's petro-sheikhs contribute substantial investments to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars to the Western economies.

Regarding the Pax Americana which is the reality of the contemporary neocolonial order, according to a January 2017 [infographic](#) [3] by the New York Times, 210,000 US military personnel were stationed all over the world, including 79,000 in Europe, 45,000 in Japan, 28,500 in South Korea and 36,000 in the Middle East.

Although Donald Trump keeps complaining that NATO must share the cost of deployment of US troops, particularly in Europe where 47,000 American troops are stationed in Germany since the end of the Second World War, 15,000 in Italy and 8,000 in the United Kingdom, fact of the matter is that the cost is already shared between Washington and host countries.

Roughly, European countries pay one-third of the cost for maintaining US military bases in Europe whereas Washington chips in the remaining two-third. In the Far Eastern countries, 75% of the cost for the deployment of American troops is shared by Japan and the remaining 25% by Washington, and in South Korea, 40% cost is shared by the host country and the US contributes the remaining 60%.

Whereas the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) - Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar - pay two-third of the cost for maintaining 36,000 US troops in the Persian Gulf where more than half of world's proven oil reserves are located and Washington contributes the remaining one-third.

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