

The Geopolitics of Gas and the Syrian Crisis: Syrian “Opposition” Armed to Thwart Construction of Iran-Iraq-Syria Gas Pipeline

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What has one of the most democratic countries of the Middle East, Syria, done to tick off some of its neighbors in the West, the fierce fighters for democracy? The irrationality and unscrupulousness of the approaches Western countries have taken to the Syrian crisis, when the same people who in Europe are considered terrorists are declared «freedom fighters» when it comes to Syria, becomes clearer in light of the economic dimension of the Syrian tragedy. There is every reason to think that by helping destroy its own [cultural and historical roots](#) in Syria, Europe is first and foremost fighting for energy resources. And a special role is played by natural gas, which is emerging as the main fuel of the 21st century. The geopolitical problems connected with its production, transportation and use are perhaps more than any other topic on the radar of Western strategists.

In the apt expression of F. William Engdahl, «Natural gas is the flammable ingredient that is fueling this insane scramble for energy in the region.» A battle is raging over whether pipelines will go toward Europe from east to west, from Iran and Iraq to the Mediterranean coast of Syria, or take a more northbound route from Qatar and Saudi Arabia via Syria and Turkey. Having realized that the stalled Nabucco pipeline, and indeed the entire Southern Corridor, are backed up only by Azerbaijan’s reserves and can never equal Russian supplies to Europe or thwart the construction of the South Stream, the West is in a hurry to replace them with resources from the Persian Gulf. Syria ends up being a key link in this chain, and it leans in favor of Iran and Russia; thus it was decided in the Western capitals that its regime needs to change. The fight for «democracy» is a false flag thrown out to cover up totally different aims.

It is not difficult to notice that the rebellion in Syria began to grow two years ago, almost at the same time as the signing of a memorandum in Bushehr on June 25, 2011 regarding the construction of a new Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline... It is to stretch 1500 km from Asaluyeh on the largest gas field in the world, North Dome/South Pars (shared between Qatar and Iran) to Damascus. The length of pipeline on the territory of Iran will be 225 km, in Iraq 500 km, and in Syria 500-700 km. Later it may be extended along the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea to Greece. The possibility of supplying liquefied gas to Europe via Syria’s Mediterranean ports is also under consideration. Investments in this project equal 10 billion dollars. (1)

This pipeline, dubbed the «Islamic pipeline», was supposed to start operation in the period from 2014 to 2016. Its projected capacity is 110 million cubic meters of gas per day (40

billion cubic meters a year). Iraq, Syria and Lebanon have already declared their need for Iranian gas (25-30 million cubic meters per day for Iraq, 20-25 million cubic meters for Syria, and 5-7 million cubic meters until 2020 for Lebanon). Some of the gas will be supplied via the Arab gas transportation system to Jordan. Experts believe that this project could be an alternative to the Nabucco gas pipeline being promoted by the European Union (with a planned capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of gas per year), which doesn't have sufficient reserves. It was planned to run the Nabucco pipeline from Iraq, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan through the territory of Turkey. At first Iran was also considered as a resource base, but later it was excluded from the project. After the signing of the memorandum on the Islamic Pipeline, the head of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Javad Oji, stated that South Pars, with recoverable reserves of 16 trillion cubic meters of gas, is a «reliable source of gas, which is a prerequisite for the building of a pipeline which Nabucco does not have». It is easy to observe that about 20 billion cubic meters per year will remain from this pipeline for Europe, which would be able to compete with Nabucco's 30 billion, but not the 63 billion from the South Stream.

A gas pipeline from Iran would be highly profitable for Syria. Europe would gain from it as well, but clearly someone in the West didn't like it. The West's gas-supplying allies in the Persian Gulf weren't happy with it either, nor was would-be no. 1 gas transporter Turkey, as it would then be out of the game. The new «unholy alliance» which formed between them shamelessly declared its goal to be «protecting democratic values» in the Middle East, although logically speaking the U.S. and its allies ought to begin this with their own partners in the coalition against Syria from among the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, which are questionable in this regard.

The Sunnite countries also see the Islamic Pipeline from the viewpoint of interconfessional contradictions, considering it a «Shiite pipeline from Shiite Iran through the territory of Iraq with its Shiite majority and into the territory of Shiite-friendly Alawite Assad». As renowned researcher on energy issues F. William Engdahl writes, this geopolitical drama is intensified by the fact that the South Pars field lies in the Persian Gulf directly on the border between Shiite Iran and Sunnite Qatar. But tiny Qatar, which is no match for Iran in power, makes active use of its connections with the military presence of the U.S. and NATO in the Persian Gulf. On the territory of Qatar are a command node of the Pentagon's Central Command of the U.S. Armed Forces, the headquarters of the Head Command of the U.S. Air Force, the No. 83 Expeditionary Air Group of the British Air Force and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing of the U.S. Air Force. Qatar, in Engdahl's opinion, has other plans for its share in the South Pars gas field and is not eager to join efforts with Iran, Syria and Iraq. It is not at all interested in the success of an Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline, which would be completely independent of the transit routes of Qatar or Turkey leading to Europe. In fact, Qatar is doing all it can to thwart the construction of the pipeline, including arming the «opposition» fighters in Syria, many of whom come from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Libya. (2)

Qatar's resolve is fed by the discovery by Syrian geological exploration companies in 2011 of Syria's own large gas-producing area near the Lebanese border, not far from the Mediterranean port of Tartus which Russia leases, and the detection of a significant gas field near Homs. According to preliminary estimates, these discoveries should substantially increase the country's gas reserves, which previously amounted to 284 billion cubic meters. The fact that the export of Syrian or Iranian gas to the European Union could take place through the port of Tartus, which has ties to Russia, is unsatisfactory to Qatar and its Western patrons as well. (3)

The Arabic newspaper Al-Akhbar cites information according to which there is a plan approved by the U.S. government to create a new pipeline for transporting gas from Qatar to Europe involving Turkey and Israel. The capacity of such a pipeline is not mentioned, but considering the resources of the Persian Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean region, it could exceed that of both the Islamic Pipeline and Nabucco, directly challenging Russia's South Stream. The main developer of this project is Frederick Hoff, who is «in charge of gas issues in the Levant» and a member of the U.S. «Syrian Crisis Committee». This new pipeline is to begin in Qatar, cross Saudi territory and then the territory of Jordan, thus bypassing Shiite Iraq, and reach Syria. Near Homs the pipeline is to branch in three directions: to Latakia, Tripoli in northern Lebanon, and Turkey. Homs, where there are also hydrocarbon reserves, is the «project's main crossroads», and it is not surprising that it is in the vicinity of this city and its «key», Al-Qusayr, that the fiercest fighting is taking place. Here the fate of Syria is being decided. The parts of Syrian territory where detachments of rebels are operating with the support of the U.S., Qatar and Turkey, that is, the north, Homs and the environs of Damascus, coincide with the route that the pipeline is to follow to Turkey and Tripoli, Lebanon. A comparison of a map of armed hostilities and a map of the Qatar pipeline route indicates a link between armed activities and the desire to control these Syrian territories. Qatar's allies are trying to accomplish three goals: «to break Russia's gas monopoly in Europe; to free Turkey from its dependence on Iranian gas; and to give Israel the chance to export its gas to Europe by land at less cost». (4) As Asia Times analyst Pepe Escobar indicated, the Emir of Qatar apparently made a deal with the «Muslim Brotherhood» according to which it will support their international expansion in exchange for a pact of peace within Qatar. A «Muslim Brotherhood» regime in Jordan and in Syria, supported by Qatar, would abruptly change the entire geopolitical world gas market – decidedly in favor of Qatar and to the detriment of Russia, Syria, Iran and Iraq. It would also be a crushing blow to China. (5)

The war against Syria is aimed at pushing this project through, as well as at the breakdown of the agreement between Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus. Its implementation has been halted several times due to military action, but in February 2013 Iraq declared its readiness to sign a framework agreement which would enable the construction of the pipeline. (6) It is worth noting that after this, more and more new groups of Iraqi Shiites have risen up in support of Assad; as The Washington Post admits, they have «no little battle experience» in confronting Americans in their country. Along with fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah, they make an ever more formidable force. (7) The stakes in the «elimination game» started in Syria by the West over the gas pipeline continue to grow. The end of the European Union's embargo on supplying weapons to the Syrian opposition, which according to the BBC the majority of EU member countries were against (8) (democracy, where are you?), might not be able to help the rebels.

As for civilization and justice, when profit is at stake, sentiment doesn't matter. The main thing is not to play the wrong card in this unfair game that smells of blood and gas.

Notes

(1) <http://www.voltairenet.org/article176676.html>

(2)

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-turkey-israel-and-the-greater-middle-east-energy-war/5307902>

(3) <http://www.naturalgasasia.com/syria-homs-gas-discovery>

(4)

<http://zebrastationpolaire.over-blog.com/article-la-guerre-civile-en-syrie-et-la-geopolitique-petrogazie>

re-112539126.html

(5) http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NI28Ak03.html

(6) <http://news.day.az/iran/385108.html>

(7) http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqi-shiites-fight-for-syrian-

(8) http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/rolling_news/2013/05/130527_rn_syria_uk_embargo.shtml

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