

Syria: the Mediterranean Piece

By Mary Beaudoin

What's left out when the U.S. talks about Syria is that it is in a key position for exporting natural gas. Adding weapons to the region makes it explosive.

We know that the Syrian people have suffered terribly from the violence that has erupted. Undeniably many factors are involved. But are we in the West to believe that the people need to be rescued by us so that they, too, can come to enjoy the democratic rights that U.S. citizens appear to have less and less of every day? Or is something else going on there?

What's Missing from This Picture? When Washington, corporate media, or pundits address Syria, they neglect to mention that Syria is situated on the eastern Mediterranean in a key position with regard to natural gas—and its export to the world.

Although NATO as an organization claims not to be interfering in Syria, countries belonging to NATO that were involved in Libya have been intervening in Syria (through proxy and special ops): the U.S., Britain, and France. They are aligned with Turkey, Israel and Jordan, plus the Gulf Council of Arab monarchies.



Syria is in a key position in the “New Great Game,” which has extended to the Mediterranean as world powers struggle for natural gas.

The coalition is aligned against the official state government of Syria and its allies Iran, Russia, and China. Having energy interests in the Middle East, Russia and China are blocking a “regime change” coup d’état in the UN Security Council.

The “New Great Game,” once defined as the quest for natural gas through Central Asia, now extends to the Middle East as world powers struggle for control in the Mediterranean. German/American geopolitical analyst F. William Engdahl says natural gas is not only the “clean energy” of choice in Europe, but also the only way European Union governments “from Germany to France to Italy and Spain will be able to meet EU mandated CO2 reductions by 2020.” Russia is well positioned to assist in the development and transportation of natural gas from Iran and Syria en route for Europe. This is because Russia has maintained a military facility in the Syrian port of Tartus since the Cold War, and it has experience with its own domestic gas industry—it’s vast reserves are currently the biggest supplier to the EU.

Rival pipeline routes through which natural gas can be transported from the Persian Gulf are a big part of the issue, according to Dmitry Minin of the Strategic Culture Foundation: “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.”

The objective of eliminating the competition can explain why countries allied with the U.S. have been instrumental in funneling arms to Syrian rebels and why they have met fierce resistance.

Other energy transit routes are part of the whole picture. So, too, is the discovery of huge reserves of natural gas and oil in the southeastern Mediterranean Sea. In 2010, the World Petroleum Resources Project of the U.S. Geological Survey was tasked with conducting an “Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas Resources of the Levant Basin Province, Eastern Mediterranean.” The area described is off the coast of Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, and close to Cyprus. Production in specific fields is large enough to create exports.

This close proximity of hydrocarbon reserves and their transportation routes is a source of volatility in the region. Israel, which receives \$3 billion a year in aid from the U.S., has conducted three bombing raids, engaged in espionage, and used its military in the Golan Heights to aid rebels opposed to the Syrian government. Hezbollah from Lebanon crossed into Syria to fight on the pro-government side.

The war in Syria has taken a tragic toll with UN estimates of 93,000 deaths. In June of 2013, the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees counted more than one and a half million externally—and four and a half million internally--displaced people (among them Iraqis who had found refuge in Syria from the destruction of Iraq). Modern infrastructure has been severely damaged. Irreplaceable cultural artifacts have been ruined or looted. As in Iraq, divide-and-conquer tactics manifest

in ethnic and sectarian divisions inflamed by kidnappings, killings, and the targeted destruction of sacred mosques in a country that had been largely pluralistic.

Anna Macdonald, Oxfam's Head of Arms Control warned that "sending further arms into Syria would simply fuel the deadly arms race which is unfolding on Syrian soil, and it will be civilians who pay the highest price."

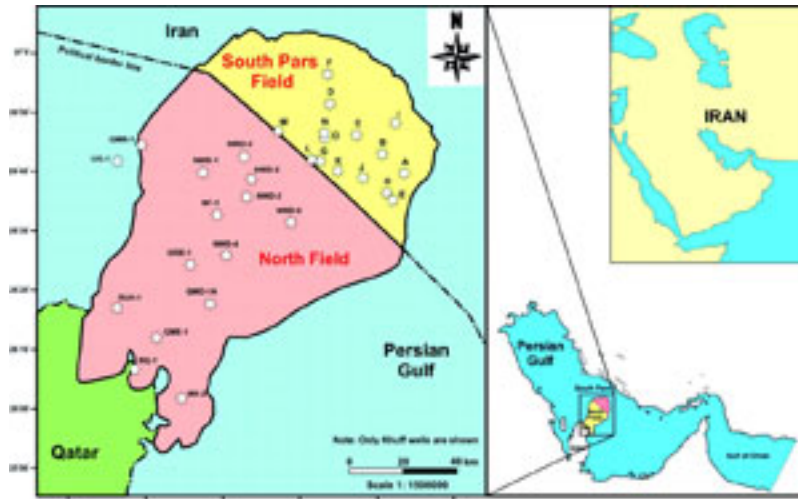
People of good will anywhere feel anguish hearing about the suffering of the Syrian people. But what can citizens of the United States do about it? We can't really control what other countries do. The only thing we can do is look at the role our own nation is playing and try to do something about that.

And Just What Role Has Our Nation Been Playing?

Syria and its allies have met head-on with neocon plans laid in previous decades, and not associated in the public mind with the Obama administration. What we're seeing now was described in a 1996 framework created in a study group led by Richard Perle and entitled, "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm." The plan includes making "tribal alliances with Arab tribes that cross into Syrian territory and are hostile to the Syrian ruling elite" and suggests "striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon and, should that prove insufficient, striking at select targets in Syria proper." Throughout the document, ways in which the United States can be persuaded to buy in are pointed out. Self-described "Machiavellian" Michael Ledeen wrote an opinion in the Wall Street Journal April 4, 2002, in which he stated, "We do not want stability in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and even Saudi Arabia...The real issue is not whether, but how to destabilize."

Five years later, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that there was "a new strategic alignment in the Middle East." She went on to say that Iran and Syria had chosen to be on "the other side" and that they "have made their choice and their choice is to destabilize."

Of course she hardly meant that they were choosing to destabilize themselves. In the same 2007 New Yorker article about Rice's testimony, investigative reporter Seymour Hersch wrote: "The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and Syria." On April 17, 2011, this was confirmed when the Washington Post published an article "U.S. secretly backed Syrian opposition groups," reporting what was in diplomatic cables exposed by Wikileaks.



Vast reserves of natural gas lie in the Pars Fields in the Persian Gulf, an area split between Qatar and Iran.

A 2013 report on Syria from the U.S. Energy Information Administration reveals the ultimate result of destabilization: “The continued violence threatens to derail Syria's ambitions of becoming an important energy transit country to its neighbors, the Mediterranean, and Europe.”

On March 24, 2013, the New York Times, while generally framing its reports in favor of deposing the Syrian government, reported that “with help from the C.I.A., Arab governments and Turkey have sharply increased their military aid to Syria’s opposition fighters in recent months, expanding a secret airlift of arms and equipment for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries, and the accounts of rebel commanders.”

By June, the U.S. leadership was openly discussing adding more fuel to the fire. Aside from what it had been doing with its NATO partners and allies, backing the various groups fighting the Syrian state and supporting a new government-in-waiting outside Syria, it sent Patriot missile batteries, F-16 fighter jets, and troops for joint military exercises along the Syrian border in neighboring Jordan. On June 21, the Los Angeles Times reported that since last November, the U.S. Special Op teams had already been training rebels on heavy weaponry.

But supporting the “rebels” is problematic for the U.S in a rapidly escalating low-intensity war. Rebel forces include jihadists like Al-Qaeda-related Al Nusra groups, which are on the U.S. terrorist list—which begs the question: weren’t we supposed to be in a war against terrorists, and just who has been instigating and executing these plans for “regime change”?

Independent journalists and observers have long been maintaining that Libya’s murderous “rebels” went to Syria and brought weapons with them. On June 23, the

New York Times” reported on Al Qaeda-aligned fighters acquiring these weapons. Is the U.S., itself, engaged in what it calls “material support for terrorism”?

When the rebels appeared to be defeated in key areas and the violence was subsiding, Secretary of State John Kerry said that the U.S. would be sending more weapons. This action comes at the time we are expecting to hold peace talks in Geneva in August to stabilize the country, calling to mind what Einstein said: “You can’t simultaneously prevent and prepare for war.”

And the U.S. knows it. In anticipation of the Geneva II peace conference, if the conference even takes place, the U.S. is stacking the deck. The Obama administration has announced that the conference will be delayed till August to strengthen the position of the rebels, in the hopes of weakening the current Syrian government and handing Syria over to the opposition.

In the meantime, authentic peacemakers are attempting to end the violence. The Musalaha Reconciliation Movement, a nonpolitical movement from all sections of Syrian society invited Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mairead Maguire to Syria. Leading a delegation from eight countries, she met with refugees in camps, affected communities, religious leaders, combatants, government representatives, and opposition delegates and said that “an appeal to end all violence and for Syrians to be left alone without outside interference was made by all those we met during our visit to Syria.” The delegation also called for the lifting of U.S.-led economic sanctions “that target the Syrian population for purely political reasons in order to achieve regime change.”

She concluded the message with a request that in Syria we “strive to establish a nonwar zone and proclaim an Oasis of Peace for the Human Family.”

Even former U.S. national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned that U.S. military intervention in Syria now will only make matters worse. And he is renowned as the geostrategist who called for American primacy on the “Grand Chessboard.”

Mary Beaudoin is the editor of the Women Against Military Madness newsletter.

Endnotes

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