

“Robbing” Syria’s Oil to Thwart Syria’s Recovery

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In the name of what the US president called “securing the oil” or what the Pentagon chose to describe as an attempt to “protect” Syria’s oil, the US is basically indulging in what can, in simple terms, be described as purposeful pillaging of Syria’s natural resources.

There are three objectives that the US aims to achieve through this “control” of Syria’s oil. First, it can thwart all attempts towards Syria’s territorial reunification under Damascus. Secondly, it can keep a lid on a critical source of Syria’s economy and can thus thwart Syria’s economic recovery and reconstruction. Thirdly, by “controlling” the oil, the US can clip Kurds and prevent their bid to make a deal with the Russians and the Syrians for integration with Damascus; hence, Pentagon’s “warning” to everyone—Russians and Syrians in particular—against any attempts at recovering the oil fields. This, however, is equally going to make US-Turkey rapprochement extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The US, by deciding to directly control Syria’s oil, has re-intensified its geopolitical struggle in and around Syria. The US position close to the critical M2 Baghdad-Damascus highway indicates how it intends to stay militarily engaged in the Levant after the defeat of the Islamic State and Syria’s strong drive, supported as it is by Russia and Iran, towards re-establishing Damascus’ authority all over Syria.

During the recently concluded NATO summit in Brussels, Esper confirmed that the US is sending an unspecified number of troops and materiel to “guard the oil fields” held presently by Kurdish forces, adding also that reinforcements “will continue until we believe we have sufficient capability” [to hold the oil fields for as long as we want].

The decision to “control” oil fields has, unsurprisingly enough, come at a time when Russia, Iran and Turkey, have advanced well enough into bringing peace to Syria and creating a new constitution. Even the Syria opposition groups have confidently said that a political deal will be clinched next year. According to co-chair Hadi al-Bahra,

“I hope that the 75th anniversary of the United Nations next year will be an opportunity to celebrate another achievement by the universal organization, namely the success of efforts under the auspices of a special envoy for political process, who will bring peace and justice to all Syrians.”

The joint statement released after a meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey in Geneva emphasised the same. All the parties, said the statement,

“Confirmed the continued commitment of the guarantor countries of the Astana format to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.”

Even if a deal happens, lack of enough resources available to rebuild Syria will start causing new crisis, weakening Damascus' hands. A "struggle for resources" might tear Syria apart. Given the US plan that goes specifically to this direction and mindful of the consequences that a minus-oil Syria will have to face, Russia is all the more critical of US policies. With the Russian foreign minister calling US policies "arrogant", "illegal" and a violation of international law, the tempo for intense geo-political struggle has been set. This puts the US on one side, and the Astana countries on the other.

Notwithstanding the US 'permission' to let Turkey do its military operation in Syria, the fact that the US has once again started supporting Kurds (although it is more like thwarting Kurdish attempts to make peace with Damascus) means that Ankara will have some serious objections to it. This puts Russia, Iran and Turkey on the same page, reinforcing the Astana peace process.

Turkey, without any doubt, will see in the US "control" of Syrian oil fields and a tactical support for Kurds a threat to its interests... a process that might continue to gain momentum towards the ultimate objective of creating an autonomous Kurdistan in Syria - a territory that is supposed to become the bedrock of US and Israeli activities in the whole region.

This means that the prospects of a US-Turkey rapprochement will become a lot weaker than they seemed three weeks ago. There can perhaps be nothing more inflammatory to the Turkish national security establishment and public alike than collaboration between Kurdish militias and a NATO ally, the US. Within Turkey's national security calculation, this collaboration can have no objective other than breaking Turkey from within and creating an independent state of Kurdistan in the Middle East.

The US' renewed attempts at creating a mess in Syria through controlling the life-line of its economy is, therefore, going to have many consequences that will, once again, leave it surrounded by foes (Russia and Iran) and estranged allies (Turkey). It is obvious that the bid to control Syria's oil has nothing with the fight against terrorism; it signifies a renewed US geo-political struggle to stay alive in the Middle East - something that no country in the region, save Israel and Saudi Arabia, will appreciate and welcome.

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