OIL AND GAS: ADDITIONAL PREDICAMENT TO SYRIAN CRISIS

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The Arab Spring is striking and causing impact on the geopolitical and economic strategic map of the Middle East.  In addition to Western meddling and economic stagnation that the Arab World is anguishing from, there is a third spoke in the wheel that is the «curse of oil». This article correlates in addition to other strategic factors the collision that oil has had on the political landscape of the Arab world, primarily based on the deduction that the Arab Spring is still a violent agent of democratic change.

There are various explanations regarding the hard-path of democracy in the Arab world.  Some argue that the socioeconomic preconditions of democracy do not exist, which is probably true in the economic sense. Others emphasize the hurdles created by a kinship oriented, patriarchal political culture marked by distrust and the survivalist instincts developed in a harsh Middle Eastern climate. Thus the norms and values needed to sustain a democratic political order simply do not exist. Sharabi[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn1" \o ") ascribes much of the regions authoritarian nature to such cultural factors.

Luciani[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn2" \o ") on the other hand makes the argument that the formation of states is influenced by the prevailing features of economic life and this holds especially true as it relates to the Arab world and the impact of oil on state formation. The features include a high degree of centralization and a tendency toward rigid rule. Oil and the Liquefied natural gas lend in terms of efficiency control to a centralized network of hydraulic installations that need to be centrally coordinated. And since oil must be exported to have value this process also lends itself to a high degree of government involvement. But more importantly than the liquid itself, is the impact that the revenues derived from the liquid have on the state polity. «While we should not speak of hydrocarbon societies and states, it is a fact that oil production appears to have a strong and decisive influence on the nature of the state. It does so through its effects on the structure of state revenues and the ratio between revenues that are obtained domestically and revenues that are obtained from abroad»[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn3" \o "). Suffice it to mention the Western and outside powers penetration in the whole-mark of the political arena.

Of course there are countless cultural, economic and external factors, which ultimately impact the political stability and development of societies. The focus here however, is the political penetration and domestic socio-political-economic effect that oil has had on this development. Several studies have established a strong correlation between economic realities and their impact on political and social developments. Ross[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn4" \o ") and others have provided strong empirical evidence to suggest that rentier states tend to be authoritarian in nature (A rentier state is a term in [political science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_science) and [international relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations) theory used to classify those [states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity)) which derive all or a substantial portion of their national revenues from the [rent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_rent) of indigenous resources to external clients). It is a basic economic reality that in recent times most Arab states are massively dependent on oil related revenues to fund their governments and by one Arab state supporting another or by remittances arriving from Arab oil exporting states.

The above reality creates pervasive insecurity characteristic in the Arab World and makes itself felt at several levels: at the level of regimes concerned about survival and the external exploitation of internal weakness; at the level of ethnic and religious groups, or classes, concerned about preserving their position or carving out additional autonomy; and at the level of individuals confronting dysfunctional states. The notion of «failed states», common in discussion of North African Arab states, may also have considerable relevance for the future of the Arab World. States confronting the demographic and economic challenges may simply prove incapable of adjustment and face collapse over the next decades. Political forces with more radical agendas may emerge to provide new solutions with different social and ideological bases, particularly Islam. Such successor regimes will still have to confront basic challenges, but may succeed in redefining these challenges in ways that defer traditional tests of governance as an example is the management of the economy. In other cases, the alternative to existing regimes may be prolonged chaos or what is so called the «coming anarchy» described by Robert Kaplan[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn5" \o ").

Over the past few years, it has been fashionable to point to the growth of civil society as a measure of political development and change in the Arab World. In places where civil society is well developed, it is generally viewed as an indicator of stability and democratization. Pressures for greater transparency and democratization have arguably been growing across the region, evident in states as diverse as Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The development of organizations outside the (most often authoritarian) government framework provides a potentially significant force for change over the longer term, suggesting that Middle Eastern societies are likely to become more complex and more diverse as new interest groups and sub-state actors emerge. This social complexity has potentially significant implications for the way in which states outside the region seek to influence the behavior of regional actors, especially in the context of economic instruments[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn6" \o "). A related trend, already evident in many places across the region, especially where a dynamic private sector has been accompanied by dysfunctional or chaotic government, has been for individuals increasingly to organize their lives without reference to the state. Ethnic, religious, and other «networks» have been leading beneficiaries of this phenomenon, reinforced by the growing ease of communication within and outside Middle Eastern societies[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn7" \o ").

**Unresolved Political Futures**

Leaderships across the region and specifically in the Arabian Gulf are aging. In the coming decade, most if not all of the established figures on the regional scene, whether moderate or radical, will no longer be present or effective. Who will replace them? In the near-to-mid term, many states, including key moderate regimes such as Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Gulf States will face potentially destabilizing successions.

More broadly, it is worth considering how durable traditional monarchies and authoritarian leaderships can be in an era of decreasing control, greater transparency, and pressures for reform. The problem of unresolved political futures is already a key driver in the evolution of the geopolitical setting in the Arab World, and one that is likely to acquire even greater significance as the current generation of leaders comes to an end. The issue of legitimacy is likely to be central to the region’s political evolution in the near future. Regime legitimacy will be under increasing pressure from many quarters, ranging from the inability to address pressing economic and social problems to crises of identity involving the organization of society as well as interactions with the West and the latter is so important and constitute the core of the matter. Many of the traditional external landing stage for regime legitimacy and I mean anti-colonial struggle, Arab nationalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, non-alignment realistically have disappeared or are showing signs of disappearing[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn8" \o ").

**Oil, Gas and the Syrian predicament**

Over the longer term, it is possible that shifts in the oil market could affect transfers of weapons and militarily useful technologies. Arms-for-oil policies were a noteworthy outcome of the first oil crisis, as European oil consumers sought to ensure themselves adequate oil supplies. Less sophisticated, but also less expensive sources of arms and technology are likely to expand, on the pattern of current Russian and Chinese transfers. More assertive regional policies in Moscow and Beijing something already evident, could hasten this development. Finally, new sources of arms and technology will develop within the region or nearby. Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran are all likely to emerge as more important suppliers with increasingly capable defense industries. These third level suppliers may also be the least agreeable to participation in any new regimes aimed at controlling conventional arms transfers to the region.

Of principal concern to U.S. security over the longer term would be the emergence of military third level supplier competitors. In the case of the former, it is difficult to envision a true matching military competitor arising. Given the many systemic problems facing all of the major states, none will realistically be able to challenge core U.S. military power in anything approaching equitable status. The emergence of a third supplier competitor, in this case a state or alliance of states sufficiently powerful militarily to dominate the local balance of power in ways harmful to the United States, is more plausible. There are a variety of alternative futures in which the United States could find itself facing such third level supplier competitors. Two paths are most plausible. First, a major outside power could invest heavily in building up one or more regional clients. Candidates for such a role include a resurgent Russia or a much more actively engaged China. Second, a third level supplier competitor could emerge from the collapse of key friendly regimes[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn9" \o ").

The rapid loss of major regional partners, combined with substantial military capabilities possessed by U.S. opponents, could yield a sharp shift in military balances and present a demanding third level supplier. The military, arms supplies, economic aspects, gas and oil are interconnected aspects of Middle Eastern geopolitics. They have always received considerable attention as a result of the region’s energy resources. As a projection on this complicated reality, Ruba Husari[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn10" \o ") wrote an Article on January 2, 2013 for the Carnegie Middle East Center stating that: The Arab Spring has already had an impact on the energy map in the Middle East. The Arab Gas Pipeline project, which from its inception more than a decade ago aimed to export Egyptian natural gas to Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and eventually Turkey and Europe, was one of the early victims of the Egyptian revolution. The facilities and pipeline in the Sinai were sabotaged repeatedly, depriving gas-hungry Israel and Jordan of their supply of Egyptian gas and interrupting feeds to Syria and Lebanon along the same line. In line with confused reality and on the issue of Syria, Husari states that: Syria might not be major oil or gas producer in the Middle East, but however depending on the outcome of the Syrian uprising; it is likely to be impacting the shape of the future regional energy map. The country’s geographic location offers Mediterranean access to landlocked entities in search of markets for their hydrocarbons and to countries seeking access to Europe without having to go through Turkey. The opportunities presented to many in the region by the current Syrian regime could be lost in a post-crisis Syria. To others, new opportunities will emerge under a new Syrian regime. In a parallel situation, the post-Mubarak regime in Egypt already cancelled its gas supply agreement with Israel on legal grounds and some would say for ideological reasons, albeit, while setting new energy priorities as it turns its focus primarily toward satisfying the domestic demand for energy. Gas exports will most likely be low on the priority list as Egypt seeks to reduce its use of fuel imports for power generation and household usage. This new trend in Egypt and the derailed pipeline will also affect some Arab countries, which might have to look elsewhere for new supplies. Turkey will have to put an end to two of its ambitions: reducing its dependence on Iranian and Russian gas to satisfy its domestic needs and using the Arab Gas Pipeline project to establish itself as a regional energy hub and preferred route for linking Middle Eastern gas producers to gas-hungry markets in Europe.

The above mentioned sequences of events in turn are creating a rivalry with Syria that has the potential to claim this privilege of gas facilities. The Syrian route to European markets could conceivably emerge as a serious future alternative to Turkey, depending on whom the post-crisis government aligns with and has been very much a real anxiety of Turkish support to the opposition trying to oust the present regime. Again and in the same token, Iraq, which is reemerging as a major oil exporter after more than three decades in the business of being energy indeterminate state, is looking to diversify its export routes. It needs alternatives to the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and to the export route via Turkey to the Turkish ports in southern Turkey Adana Province. Historically, Syria offered that alternative pass way. Iraq accessed the Mediterranean through Syria when the Iraq Petroleum Company was in operation as part of the Kirkuk-Haifa pipeline before the company’s nationalization in the early 1970s and Syria’s confiscation of the portions of the pipeline running through its territory. The pipeline was later reopened only to be shut down again by Damascus at the start of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) in a gesture of Syrian solidarity with Tehran.

The pipeline was bombed in 2003 by U.S. forces, the route remains viable for transporting Iraqi crude and potentially natural gas exports. More recently, as tensions rose between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government over oil-exploitation rights in Kurdistan region, access to the Mediterranean via Syria became even more pressing for the Iraqi government. The current Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline passes through the area of Fishkhabour in the Kurdish-controlled governorate of Dohuk, where its safety could become contingent on Kurdish goodwill if relations between Baghdad and Erbil were to deteriorate further.

The fact that Iraq and Turkey are also in disagreement over what Iraq describes as «Turkish meddling» in salient direct oil and gas export deals with the Kurdistan Regional Government, among other contentions, also adds to the vulnerability of the Turkish-operated portions of the pipeline beyond Iraqi territory. And Baghdad is not the only one eyeing an oil-export route across Syria. For the Kurdistan Regional Government, change in Damascus also carries the potential of a new export route to the Mediterranean as an alternative to the Turkish route. Such a situation would be especially likely to emerge if the Kurdish areas of Syria were to gain effective autonomy after the Syrian conflict is over. Such an alignment of interests between the Kurds of Iraq and Syria would offer the Kurdistan Regional Government an alternative to dependence on Turkey.

Whatever regime emerges in Damascus after the Syrian uprising could redraw the energy map of the region. Competition for supplies and markets nonetheless to control transit routes for energy resources would ultimately shape the future energy map which will depend on who the regional and international winners and losers are. That is why the factionalization of Syrian opposition is understood from the perspective of multiple penetrations by regional and international powers. For Iraq and Iran, a new regime that allies itself with Sunni Turkey or the Gulf states would come at the expense of future cooperation in the energy sphere and strike a blow against Iraqi and Iranian ambitions to have direct access to the Mediterranean without having to rely on Turkish goodwill. The degree of autonomy that a new regime emerging in Syria would be able to grant Syrian Kurds, as well as the latter’s ability to establish an autonomous region within the new state, will determine whether Iraq’s Kurds will be able to free themselves from the pressures of Ankara and Baghdad and establish a direct export route for their oil reserves through Syrian Kurdish territory.

**Post-Sanction Iran and Syria**

To further explore the regional dimension of the Syrian predicament one has to look at the Iranian high strategic stakes in Syria, and thus far Iran has not hesitated to defend its interest both financially and militarily. Those stakes extend to the energy sphere, where only a friendly regime in Damascus could open the way for Iran to expand its natural gas exports westward in a post-sanctions era. Authorities in Iran have long been pursuing a pipeline scheme that would feed Iranian gas to Iraq, where gas shortages will persist for the next few years, and Syria, where Iranian gas would replace the now-defunct Egyptian gas imports. Over the longer term, Iran aims to seek markets beyond the region, and the Mediterranean through Iraq and Syria offers Tehran, from a geo-economic configurations access to Europe, when and if sanctions are lifted then the opportunity will be there ready for Iran to find the resources and outside technical help to develop its gas wealth.

**Syrian Dilemma: International Dimension**

In dealing with the International dimension of the Syrian dilemma one could look at the U.S. Interest and what are its ventures? In an era in which U.S. interests are being examined more critically, the Arab World continues to present high pledge for American policymakers. Few of the pledges entail: The survival of Israel and completion of the Arab-Israeli peace process especially in light of the Arab Spring and the drastic and bloody stalemate situation in Syria, notwithstanding access to oil, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in light of the new development in Iran, and holding terrorism in check especially with the rising of magnitude of the Islamic Fundamentalists as evident recently in Syria[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn11" \o ").

Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The United States has been committed to the security and prosperity of Israel since the founding of the state, and this commitment will almost certainly remain a key interest in how to deal with the changing landscape in the Arab World and the potential threat that might come from turmoil Syria. The ultimate outcome of the blood-spattered disorder in Syria will have a considerable influence over the region’s future propensity for conflict and the demands on U.S. strategy and forces. Achievement of a comprehensive peace will very likely bring increased demands for monitoring and security guarantees. Failure will raise more conventional demands for deterrence and reassurance. Notwithstanding, and at the same time, the U.S. would feel obligated to the increasing prosperity and military capability of Israel, not to mention economic aid in light of the fiscal shortage (budget limitation) in the United States.

Oil and Security: Access to Middle Eastern oil in adequate amounts and at reasonable prices will almost certainly remain a vital interest for the U.S., a large proportion of world petroleum reserves are to be found in the Arab World. The Gulf States alone account for 65 percent of proven world oil reserves, and despite changing patterns of demand and consumption over the past two decades, almost 35 percent of the industrialized world’s oil supply came from the Gulf. The five countries with the greatest proven reserves are all in the Middle East. If Caspian oil and gas are included, and the U.S. takes that into consideration especially because since much of the future production from this region will be exported via the Levant or the Gulf thus the region’s importance in energy terms is greatly reinforced. Growing energy needs in Eastern Europe and Asia could place greater pressure on demand and further increase the strategic significance of the region’s oil resources. Although world oil production continues to grow rapidly, world reserves have grown even faster, and the bulk of these new additions have been in the Middle East[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn12" \o "). Given U.S. systemic interest in international economic stability, the United States is unlikely to abandon its current role as ultimate guarantor of world access to Middle Eastern oil. Future aggression by Iraq or Iran against the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula would doubtless trigger an American military response on the order of the Desert Storm operation[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn13" \o ").

Nuclear Proliferation: There continues to be a strong consensus within the U.S. strategic decision makers about the need to prevent the emergence of competitors capable of successfully challenging U.S. military power and in this respect, the regional balance of power between Iran and its allies specifically Syria on the one hand, and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the other are closely observed. Such competitors again could come from within or outside the region especially if Russia and China continue to rally along the side of the Iranian alliance fortified by potential nuclear capabilities[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn14" \o "). The United States will also continue to have a closely related interest in preventing regional powers, and non-state actors, from acquiring new or additional weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery at longer range. These weapons can be classed as a systemic concern for the United States. But the Middle East has emerged as a focal point for WMD challenges, with longer-range ballistic missiles poised to change the relationship between the traditional Middle East and adjacent regions in security terms. Indeed, many of today’s leading proliferation risks are arrayed along an arc stretching from Algeria to Pakistan[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn15" \o ").

U.S. and Terrorism: Recent events have reinforced American awareness of terrorism as a security problem. Terrorism is a well-established mode of conflict on the Middle Eastern scene. Now it is claimed to be entrenched in the Syrian conflict. The U.S. has opted to continue to have a keen stake in limiting the threat of terrorism to friendly regimes and Western citizens and assets, as well as preventing the spillover of political violence emanating from the region. A variety of future regional conflict scenarios may stem from terrorist action, and counterterrorism is likely to be a motivating factor in many instances of U.S. and Western military intervention. Terrorism might also emerge as a tactic for regimes bent on more-traditional forms of regional aggression. In the future, U.S. strategy will probably address the problem of terrorism both as a stand-alone threat and as a «fifth column» or «asymmetric» risk in regional conflicts[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn16" \o "). Potential extra-regional peer competitors might include a resurgent Russia, a more assertive European Union, or, at the borderlands of the Middle East, China. Such developments across the region might trigger the starting point of the premise that political-military trends inside the region, as well as on its periphery, will influence the U.S to use air and space power in defense of its national interests as it makes out of it.

**Syria a Setback Society**

Syria is in turmoil as a result of internal and external challenges. The most consequential trends in this context include: Demographic change and relentless urbanization, problems of economic growth and reform, dysfunctional societies and the erosion of state control, and crises of political legitimacy and the challenges of Islam and nationalism. Taken together, these trends have encouraged and will almost certainly continue to support a pervasive sense of insecurity within the Arab World and the Middle Eastern societies at large that is if we only include Turkey and Iran. When officials and observers within the region itself talk about future security, they will be concerned first and foremost with domestic security. The key issues identified so far will all have consequences for the types of conflict and non-conflict demands and constraints the U.S. is likely to be held responsible of their consequences across the region.

Although global population growth has slowed considerably, disproving the extremely pessimistic assumptions of the 1970s, the population trends in the Middle East have not followed this hopeful pattern and specifically in Syria. Overall, the Syrian population was expected to double by 2025 a count estimated before the start of upheaval, with annual growth rates of roughly 3 percent[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn17" \o "). Over the last ten years, the Gulf States and the countries of the Maghreb, including Egypt, have experienced population growth on the order of 40%, with the result that per capita GNP has dropped sharply. The population around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean is likely to reach 350 million not long after the end of the century (by contrast, the total population of the current members of the European Union will not exceed 300 million in the same period).

From a social viewpoint, it is perhaps more significant that the proportion of people under 15 years of age in these highest-growth areas will reach 30% by 2025. Demographic change of this kind will have a number of potentially destabilizing consequences most notably in Syria. First, as the crisis starts to see its end, it will reinforce long-standing trends toward relocation and urbanization across the country as populations move to the cities in search of jobs and social services. Uncontrolled dislocation and urbanization is already a well-established trend around the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Cities such as Cairo, Damascus and Istanbul, designed for hundreds of thousands, now rank among the most densely populated in the world. Indeed, the Middle East has long been dominated by its cities, including provincial cities in the rural hinterland. Cities are and will continue to be the focus for intellectual, economic, and political activity. As a whole, the region is more heavily urbanized than East Asia, South Asia, or Africa[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn18" \o ").

The inability of the future government/s to adjust to the problems of urbanization will have political consequences. Islamist movements in particular will make their mark in urban politics where they could register striking electoral successes. Whereas traditional rural relationships among families, clans, landowners, and peasants once formed the basis for political stability in many Middle Eastern societies, Middle Eastern politics now turn increasingly on economic relationships and new systems of patronage based in the cities. It is in the cities that disparities between the «haves» and «have-nots» are most striking (theory of relative deprivation). The future shape of Middle Eastern politics and Syria is not an exception, whether radical or moderate, is likely to center on urban areas, and control of the cities will be a leading measure of state control. Any Western involvement in the region’s internal conflicts for example, to defend friendly Arab States or to protect Western citizens and assets, will have to account for the likelihood of operations in urban areas, with all the constraints on deployment, mobility, and the use of force this implies.

Population increases are also changing the character of Middle Eastern states and introducing or deepening sources of internal conflict soliciting spiral foreign penetration that is going to be non-stop. Population growth and urbanization have simply changed the nature of Syria and its surrounding countries. Transformations have occurred as a result of migration and population growth and in some cases disparities in population growth along ethnic and religious lines have fundamentally altered political balances and the prospects for stability. Prominent examples include the steady erosion of the Maronite position in Lebanon in the face of a growing Muslim population; the expanding and increasingly assertive Shiite population in the smaller Gulf States; the relatively rapid growth of Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq; and the high birth rates among Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. Demographic changes along these lines will continue to be a source of friction within Middle Eastern societies as old political arrangements and ethnic compacts lose their relevance. For this reason among others, ethnic and separatist conflicts are likely to be a feature on the regional scene in the future.

Population size and growth will be a factor in the power balance and potential regime stability of future Syria. Large population can be a source of vulnerability when coupled with low economic growth rates in addition to the pressures noted above. The most stable and powerful states in the future may be those where demographic pressures and economic performance have been brought into line, allowing regimes to devote additional resources to investment, development of defense industries, and the acquisition of modern military forces without risking domestic chaos.

**Russian stakes in Syria**

The perplexing outcome of the Syrian conflict go beyond the fate of the Assad dynasty, stretching to questions of who, in the future, will be exporting which gas, from where, and to which buyers. A friendly regime in Syria would take Russian interests into consideration, while a new regime that does not look at Moscow favorably will be an obstacle to Russia. The latter’s energy interests in the region would also require the emergence of a friendly regime that would take Russian interests into consideration. A new regime that is allied with the West would be an obstacle to Russia’s expanding presence across the emerging East Mediterranean gas basin and its ability to maneuver to protect its own share of the gas market against competing natural gas resources.

In trying to guarantee its share in the division of zones of influence, and interests, with other powers, Russia wants to make sure it has a say in the emerging East Mediterranean gas province, which involves Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey. Conscious of Europe’s declared attempts to free itself from dependence on Russian gas, Moscow’s objective is to make sure that any export schemes from the East Mediterranean to Europe will not compete with its own gas-export plans through the existing trans–Black Sea Blue Stream pipeline to Turkey and the upcoming South Stream pipeline to Europe.

Russia has been consolidating its business relations with Cyprus. Moscow was even negotiating a bailout scheme in case Cyprus fails to secure a deal from the EU. Russian companies are eager to sign the contract to develop Cyprus’s offshore gas, competing with the likes of Shell and Total. Russia has also positioned itself in Lebanon and chosen local partners to be part of a project developing gas found off the Lebanese coast. Interestingly, Gazprom bank, a subsidiary of Russia’s biggest government-controlled gas company (of which Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev was once chairman) has already established a presence in Lebanon as Gazprom bank-Invest.

Gazprom has also been aggressively angling for a share of Israeli-discovered offshore gas reserves. Russian President Vladimir Putin did the company’s bidding himself with Israeli officials, but Gazprom has not yet won a stake in one of the Israeli gas licenses, having recently lost out on one opportunity to Australia’s largest oil and gas company, Woo Gazprom leaders have not only developed their project, but they also made sure to counter Nabucco. Thus, Gazprom owns 30% of the project to build a second pipeline to Europe, broadly following the same route as Nabucco[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn19" \o ") which is, by the admission of his supporters, a proposed «policy» intended to show its strength by slowing or blocking the Nabucco project. Besides Moscow rushed to buy gas in Central Asia and Caspian Sea in order to suppress its opponents, it is trying to ridicule Washington politically, economically and strategically at the same time.

Gazprom operates gas facilities in Austria, that is to say in the strategic area of Germany, and also leases facilities in Britain and France. However, it is the major storage facilities in Austria which will be used to redraw the energy map of Europe, since they feed Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Germany. At these facilities, we must add the center storage of Katrina, that Gazprom is building in cooperation with Germany in order to export gas to the major consumption centers of Western Europe.

Gazprom has set up a joint facility of storage with Serbia in order to supply gas to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia itself. Feasibility studies have been conducted on similar modes of storage in the Czech Republic, Romania, Belgium, Great Britain, Slovakia, Turkey, Greece and even France. Gazprom strengthens the position of Moscow, provider 41% of European gas supplies. This means a substantial change in relations between East and West in the short, medium and long term. It also announced a decline of U.S. influence, by missile shields interposed, seeing the establishment of a new international organization, which the gas will be the main pillar. Finally it explains the intensification of the fight for gas on the east coast of the Mediterranean in the Middle East.

**Nabucco Vs. Turkey**

Nabucco would bring gas 3,900 kilometers from Turkey to Austria and was designed to provide 31 billion cubic meters of gas annually from the Middle East and the Caspian Basin to European markets. The willingness of the NATO coalition-United States-France to end the obstacles that rose up against its gas interests in the Middle East, notably Syria and Lebanon, is that it is necessary to provide stability and caring for the environment when it comes to gas infrastructure and investment. The Syrian response was to sign a contract to transfer its territory to Iranian gas through Iraq. Thus, it is on the Syrian and Lebanese gas that focuses the battle, will supply be directed through Nabucco or South Stream?

The Nabucco consortium consists of several companies: German (REW), Austrian (OML), Turkey (Botas), Bulgarian (Energy Holding Company), and Romanian (Trans-gas). Five years ago, the initial project costs were estimated at $ 11.2 billion, but could reach $ 21.4 billion by 2017. This raises many questions about its viability given that Gazprom was able to conclude contracts with various countries that were alienated from Nabucco, which could no longer rely on the surplus of Turkmenistan, especially since the failed attempts to hold on Iranian gas. This is one of the unsung secret of battle for Iran, which has crossed the red line in its challenge to the U.S. and Europe, by choosing Iraq and Syria as transport paths part of its gas.

Thus, the best hope for Nabucco remains in the supply of gas from Azerbaijan. And the Shah Denis field becomes almost the sole source of gain of a project that seems to have failed even before it started. This is what reveals the acceleration signatures of contracts awarded by Moscow for the redemption of a Nabucco sources originally intended, on the one hand, and the difficulties in imposing geopolitical change in Iran, Syria and Lebanon on the other part. This at a time when Turkey is quick to claim its share of the Nabucco project, either by signing a contract with Azerbaijan for the purchase of 6 billion cubic meters of gas in 2017, by the annexation of Syria and Lebanon with the hope to block the transit of Iranian oil or to receive a share of the rich gas in Syria. Apparently a place in the new world order, that of gas or something else, go through a number of services, ranging from military support to the hosting of strategic missile defense system.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Nabucco is Russia’s attempt to disrupt the negotiating process and provide better contracts in favor of Gazprom for North Stream and South Stream, which would invalidate the efforts of the United States and Europe, at the same time, would diminish their influence, and could harm their energy policy in Iran and/or in the Mediterranean. In addition, Gazprom could become one of the investors or operators of major new gas fields in Syria or Lebanon. It is no coincidence that on 16 August, 2011, the Syrian Ministry of Oil announced the discovery of a gas well in Karaa, near Homs. Its production capacity would be 400,000 cubic meters per day (146 million cubic meters per year), not to mention the gas present in the Mediterranean.

Projects Nord Stream and South Stream thus reduces the influence of U.S. policy, which now seems to lag behind. The signs of hostility between the States of Central Europe and Russia have improved, but Poland and the United States seem unwilling to give up. Indeed, in late October 2011, they announced the change in energy policy following the discovery of coal deposits which should reduce European dependence vis-à-vis Russia and the Middle East. This seems to be an ambitious but long-term, because of the many procedures required before marketing; corresponding to the coal found in sedimentary rocks thousands of meters underground and require hydraulic fracturing techniques under high pressure to release the gas, not to mention the environmental risks[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn20" \o ").

**Role of China**

The Sino-Russian cooperation in the energy sector is the engine of the strategic partnership between the two giants. This is, according to experts, the «base» of their double veto reiterated in favor of Syria. This cooperation is not only the supply of China on preferential terms. China is led to become directly involved in gas distribution through the acquisition of assets and facilities, in addition to a proposed joint control of distribution networks. Meanwhile, Moscow shows its flexibility on the price of gas, subject to being allowed access to highly profitable Chinese domestic market. It was agreed, therefore, that experts from Russia and China would work together in the following areas: «The coordination of energy strategies, forecasting and prospecting, market development, energy efficiency, and energy sources alternative».

Other common strategic interests concern the risks facing the project of «missile shield» U.S. Washington has involved not only Japan and South Korea but, beginning in September 2011, India was also invited to become partner. Accordingly, the concerns of both countries meet at the time when Washington’s stimulus strategy in Central Asia, that is to say, on the Silk Road. This strategy is the same as that launched by George Bush (draft Greater Central Asia) to roll back the influence of Russia and China in cooperation with Turkey to solve the situation in Afghanistan by 2014, and impose military force by NATO in the region. Uzbekistan has already hinted that it might welcome NATO, and Putin said that this is an intrusion and an attempt by the U.S. and the West to undermine Russia. The alternative for Russia is the expansion of space-Russia Kazakhstan-Belarus cooperation with Beijing. This overview of the mechanisms of current international struggle provides an idea of the formation process of the new international order based on the struggle for military supremacy and whose keystone is energy (oil and gas).

**Syria: Curse of Gas**

When Israel began extracting oil and gas during the 2009, it was clear that the Mediterranean basin had entered the game and that Syria would be appealing because of its geopolitical location. According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP, the think tank of AIPAC)[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn21" \o "), the Mediterranean basin contains the largest reserves of gas and it is Syria that there would be the most important. This institution also hypothesized that the battle between Turkey and Cyprus would expand because of the inability of Turkey to assume the loss of the Nabucco project (despite the contract signed with Moscow in December 2011 for the transport of part of South Stream gas via Turkey).

The revelation of the secret Syrian gas raises awareness of the enormity of the issue about it. Who controls Syria could control the Middle East. And from Syria, gateway to Asia, he will hold «the key to Russia House,» as stated in the Tsarina Catherine II, as well as that of China via the Silk Road. Thus, it would provide ability to dominate the world because this century is the century of gas. It is for this reason that the signatories to the agreement of Damascus, allowing gas to pass through Iran-Iraq and access to the Mediterranean, creating a new geopolitical space and cutting the lifeline of Nabucco. Well informed specialists have indicated that «Syria is the key to the new era of gas».

**Syria predicament: Between Islam and Nationalism**

It is likely that the two most powerful forces on the Middle Eastern political scene in the future will be Islam and nationalism. Over 30 years after the Islamic revolution in Iran, political Islam is far from a spent force in the internal politics of Muslim countries. Indeed, it shows clear signs of vigor in a wide variety of settings in and around the Middle East. The evolution of Islamists in key states, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Jordan, and Iran, as well as the Syrian rebellion, Bosnia and Chechnya on the periphery, is already being driven by Islamic politics in government or in opposition. Attempts by established regimes to crush radical Islamic opposition, as in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan have proven to be unsuccessful. These movements reflect deep-seated political, economic, and social problems. Repressed and driven underground, Islamic movements tend to be viewed by much of the Muslim public, with keen eye on the Sunni lower classes, as the only legitimate answer to their societies’ predicaments and to their deepening identity crisis.

Under these circumstances Islamist movements are acquiring a monopoly by default as the only serious opposition to failing regimes[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn22" \o ").The pressures giving rise to the Islamist phenomenon are long term, and the phenomenon itself is likely to prove durable. Authoritarian government framework, as assumed by some scholars, provides a potentially significant force for change over the longer term, suggesting that Middle Eastern societies after the Arab Spring are likely to become more complex and more diverse as new interest groups and sub-state actors emerge. The social complexity in Syria has potentially significant implications for the way in which states outside the region seek to influence the behavior of regional actors, especially in the context of economic instruments. A related trend, already evident in Syria, especially where a private sector has been accompanied by dysfunctional or chaotic society, has been for individuals increasingly to organize their lives without reference to the state. Ethnic, religious, and other «networks» have been leading beneficiaries of this phenomenon, reinforced by the growing ease of communication within and outside Syria[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn23" \o "). Indeed, the information revolution is itself a leading driver in the political and security future of Syria and the Middle East at large. This infrastructure is also bolstering the effectiveness of opposition movements, both peaceful and violent, including terrorists. Modern telecommunications have emerged as the basis for more effective communication between exiled opposition leaders and their supporters in Syria and elsewhere. In the 1970s, Ayatollah Khomeini used smuggled cassettes to spread his message in Iran. Today, Islamists rely on the Internet to reach over the barriers to political organization erected by regimes[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn24" \o "). The net result of this trend is likely to be a progressive loss of central control in traditionally authoritarian societies across the greater Middle East. This loss by itself is likely to result in the collapse of regimes as it did in some Arab States, it will be important factor in the ability of diverse groups, whether moderate or extreme, to undermine the power and legitimacy of the present and future ruling elites. However, the power of Islam as a religious, cultural, and political force is likely to be another «permanently operating factor» across the Middle East.

The growth of Islamist movements and the possible rise of more new Islamic regimes will have potentially important implications for conflict within and among Middle Eastern societies (Sunni vs. Shiia), as well as between the Muslim world and the West. Where violent Islamist movements exist but cannot easily triumph, as in Syria, the stage may be set for prolonged strife affecting regional balances and the ability of states to clash or cooperate with the West. Moderate movements in power may establish an acceptable relation with the West. Others may adopt an uncompromisingly revolutionary and anti-Western stance. In security terms, the Western debate about Islamic «fundamentalism» has turned on the potential for the emergence of a concerted Islamic bloc poised for a «clash of civilizations» with the West[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftn25" \o "). However, It should be made very clear that the powerful cleavages within the Muslim Middle East again Sunni vs. Shiia, make the prospects for a broad civilizational clash remote. Moreover, it is worth noting that while Islamic movements in general may not wish the West well, their principal targets are internal, and their agendas, even in power, are likely, and for a long period of time, to be overwhelmingly domestic.

In the fashionable focus on Islam as a force in Middle Eastern futures, it is easy to forget the powerful role of nationalism as a driver in the evolution of the region. In leading countries such as Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, the experience of throwing off the old regime and constructing a modern state remains a powerful image in contemporary politics. Some observers have described the current Egyptian and Algerian turmoil as the second half of an unfinished nationalist revolution. Turkey’s Islamists rely heavily on nationalistic images and rhetoric. Nationalism can arguably be seen as the leading force behind the recent behavior of states as diverse as Iran, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref1" \o ")-   Sharabi, Hisham (1983), «The Poor Rich Arabs» in Arab Resources, The Transformation of a Society, Center of Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Croom Helm, London.

[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref2" \o ")-   Luciani, Giacomo(1995) «Resources, Revenues, and Authoritarianism in the Arab World: Beyond the Rentier State?» in Brynen, Korany and Noble Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Volume One Lynne Reinner, London.

[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref3" \o ")-   Luciani, Giacomo (1990), «Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework» in The Arab State ed. Luciani, Giacomo, University of California Press, 65-84.

[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref4" \o ")-   Ross, Michael. (April 2000), «Does Resource Wealth Impede Democratization?» Paper delivered at the 2000 American Political Science Association meeting in Washington DC.

[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref5" \o ")-   Robert Kaplan, «The Coming Anarchy», Atlantic Monthly, February 1994.

[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref6" \o ")-   Ian O. Lesser and Graham E. Fuller, «**A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West**», Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995, p. 4.

[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref7" \o ")-   23The rise of networks and their political implications are treated in David Ronfeldt, «Tribes, Institutions, Markets, Networks: A Framework About Societal Evolution», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, P-7967, 1996.

[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref8" \o ")-   Ian O. Lesser, «Oil, the Persian Gulf, and Grand Strategy: Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-4072-CENTCOM/JCS, 2012.

[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref9" \o ")-   Richard F. Grimmett, «Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations», 2009–2012, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 2012.

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref10" \o ")-  Article on January 2, 2013 for the Carnegie Middle East Center.

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref11" \o ")-  U.S. interests are discussed in similar fashion in Commission on America’s National Interests, «America’s National Interests», RAND/CSIA/Nixon Center, July 2012, pp. 3–49.

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref12" \o ")-  G. C. Georgiou, «United States Energy Security Policy and Options for the Future», Energy Policy, Vol. 41, August 2012, pp. 800–839. And Alan Richards and John Waterbury, «A Political Economy of the Middle East», Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996, p. 53.

[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref13" \o ")-  Currently, the United States imports some 10% of its oil from the Persian Gulf, and Europe almost 30%. For two perspectives on this disparity in the context of overwhelming U.S. involvement in Gulf defense, see Shibley Telhami and Michael O’Hanlon, «Europe’s Oil, Our Troops», New York Times, December 10, 2010; and Lawrence J. Korb, «Holding the Bag in the Gulf», New York Times, September 18, 1996.

[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref14" \o ")-  The Burke Chair at CSIS has prepared a detailed analysis of the history and character of  U.S. and Iranian strategic competition as part of a project supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation. By [Dr. Anthony Cordesman](http://csis.org/expert/anthony-h-cordesman) and [Aram Nerguizian](http://csis.org/expert/aram-nerguizian), Feb. 2013.

[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref15" \o ")-  See Ian O. Lesser and Ashley J. Tellis, «Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-742-A, 2009.

[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref16" \o ")-  «Democracy, Terrorism and the Middle East», By Chris Forster, The Foreign Policy Centre, April 2007.

[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref17" \o ")-  «Demographics of Syria», From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref18" \o ")-  Richards, Alan and Waterbury, John (1996) «A Political Economy of the Middle East Westview» p. 251.

[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref19" \o ")-  The Nabucco pipeline (also referred to as the Turkey–Austria gas pipeline) is a proposed [natural gas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas) [pipeline](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pipeline_transport) from [Erzurum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erzurum) in [Turkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey) to [Baumgarten an der March](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baumgarten_an_der_March) in [Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria). The aim of the Nabucco pipeline is to diversify the [natural gas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas) suppliers and delivery routes for Europe, thus reducing [European dependence on Russian energy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia_in_the_European_energy_sector). From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref20" \o ")-  Ibid. «Sections on Alternative projects and Economic and political aspects».

[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref21" \o ")-  The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) is a [think tank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank) based in [Washington, D.C.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_D.C.) focused on [United States foreign policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_policy_of_the_United_States) in the Middle East. Established in 1985 the institute's [mission statement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mission_statement) states that it seeks «to advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East». The group is often described as being pro-Israel.

[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref22" \o ")-  Ian O. Lesser and Ashley J. Tellis, «Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-742-A, 1996. See also Lesser and Fuller, p. 165.

[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref23" \o ")-  «The rise of networks and their political implications» are treated in David Ronfeldt, «Tribes, Institutions, Markets, Networks: A Framework About Societal Evolution», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, P-7967, 2012.

[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref24" \o ")-  Brian Nichiporuk and Carl H. Builder, «Information Technologies and the Future of Land Warfare», Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-560-A, 2012.

[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis" \l "_ftnref25" \o ")-  Samuel Huntington, «The Clash of Civilizations?» Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993.

**النفط والغاز: مأزق إضافي بالنسبة إلى الأزمة السورية**

الربيع العربي يضرب ويترك تأثيره على الخارطة الإستراتيجية الجغرافية والاقتصادية في الشرق الأوسط. بالإضافة إلى تدخّلات البلدان الأجنبية والركود الاقتصادي الذي يعاني منه العالم العربي ثمة عصا ثالثة في عجلة تتمثل بـ«لعنة النفط». هذا المقال يربط، بالإضافة إلى العناصر الإستراتيجية الأخرى، التأثير الذي أحدثه النفط في الخارطة السياسية للعالم العربي وفي المقام الأول بناءً على الاستنتاج بأن الربيع العربي لا يزال عنصراً عنيفاً للتغيير الديمقراطي.  
ثمة تفسيرات عديدة بخصوص المسار الصعب للديمقراطية في العالم العربي ويقول البعض أن الشروط الاقتصادية والاجتماعية المسبقة للديمقراطية غير موجودة وهذا صحيح على الأرجح من الناحية الاقتصادية. البعض الآخر يركزّ على العقبات التي تحدثها سياسة تعتمد على صلات القربة المطبوعة بعدم الثقة وغرائز الصمود التي تتطوّر في المناخ الشرق أوسطي. لهذا فإن المعايير والقيم الضرورية من أجل نظام سياسي ديمقراطي مستدام غير موجودة بكل بساطة.  
هناك عناصر خارجية واقتصادية وثقافية لا تحصى تؤثر في نهاية الأمر على الاستقرار السياسي وتطوّر المجتمعات. إلا أن التركيز هنا فهو على الاختراق السياسي والتأثير الاقتصادي – السياسي – الاجتماعي الذي أحدثه النفط على هذا التطوّر.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/oil-and-gas-additional-predicament-syrian-crisis#sthash.C1h3L36P.dpuf