

**From:** syriadiscussion@googlegroups.com [mailto:syriadiscussion@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of** David Swanson  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 5, 2016 6:25 AM  
**To:** David Swanson  
**Subject:** [syriadiscussion:4815] Syria: Another Pipeline War

## Syria: Another Pipeline War

[Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.](http://ecowatch.com/2016/02/25/robert-kennedy-jr-syria-pipeline-war/)  
<http://ecowatch.com/2016/02/25/robert-kennedy-jr-syria-pipeline-war/>

The fossil fuel industry's business model is to externalize its costs by clawing in obscene subsidies and tax deductions—causing grave environmental costs, including toxic pollution and [global warming](#). Among the other unassessed prices of the world's addiction to oil are social chaos, war, terror, the refugee crisis overseas, and the loss of democracy and civil rights abroad and at home.

As we focus on the rise of ISIS and search for the source of the savagery that took so many innocent lives in Paris and San Bernardino, we might want to look beyond the convenient explanations of religion and ideology and focus on the more complex rationales of history and oil, which mostly point the finger of blame for terrorism back at the champions of militarism, imperialism and petroleum here on our own shores.

America's unsavory record of violent interventions in Syria—obscure to the American people yet well known to Syrians—sowed fertile ground for the violent Islamic Jihadism that now complicates any effective response by our government to address the challenge of ISIS. So long as the American public and policymakers are unaware of this past, further interventions are likely to only compound the crisis. Moreover, our enemies delight in our ignorance.

As the [New York Times reported](#) in a Dec. 8, 2015 front page story, ISIS political leaders and strategic planners are working to provoke an American military intervention which, they know from experience, will flood their ranks with volunteer fighters, drown the voices of moderation and unify the Islamic world against America.

To understand this dynamic, we need to look at history from the Syrians' perspective and particularly the seeds of the current conflict. Long before our 2003 occupation of Iraq triggered the Sunni uprising that has now morphed into the Islamic State, the CIA had nurtured violent Jihadism as a Cold War weapon and freighted U.S./Syrian relationships with toxic baggage.

During the 1950's, President Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers rebuffed Soviet treaty proposals to leave the Middle East a cold war neutral zone and let Arabs rule Arabia. Instead, they mounted a clandestine war against Arab Nationalism—which CIA Director Allan Dulles equated with communism—particularly when Arab self-rule threatened oil concessions. They pumped secret American military aid to tyrants in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon favoring puppets with conservative Jihadist ideologies which they regarded as a reliable antidote to Soviet Marxism. At a White House meeting between the CIA's Director of Plans, Frank

Wisner, and Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in September of 1957, Eisenhower advised the agency, “We should do everything possible to stress the ‘holy war’ aspect.”

The CIA began its active meddling in Syria in 1949—barely a year after the agency’s creation. Syrian patriots had declared war on the Nazis, expelled their Vichy French colonial rulers and crafted a fragile secularist democracy based on the American model. But in March of 1949, Syria’s democratically elected president, Shukri-al-Kuwaiti, hesitated to approve the Trans Arabian Pipeline, an American project intended to connect the oil fields of Saudi Arabia to the ports of Lebanon via Syria. In his book, *Legacy of Ashes*, CIA historian Tim Weiner recounts that in retaliation, the [CIA engineered a coup](#), replacing al-Kuwaiti [with the CIA’s handpicked dictator](#), a convicted swindler named Husni al-Za’im. Al-Za’im barely had time to dissolve parliament and approve the American pipeline before his countrymen deposed him, 14 weeks into his regime.

Following several counter coups in the newly destabilized country, the Syrian people again tried democracy in 1955, re-electing al-Kuwaiti and his Ba’ath Party. Al-Kuwaiti was still a Cold War neutralist but, stung by American involvement in his ouster, he now leaned toward the Soviet camp. That posture caused Dulles to declare that “Syria is ripe for a coup” and send his two coup wizards, Kim Roosevelt and Rocky Stone to Damascus.

Two years earlier, Roosevelt and Stone had orchestrated a coup in Iran against the democratically elected President Mohammed Mosaddegh after Mosaddegh tried to renegotiate the terms of Iran’s lopsided contracts with the oil giant, BP. Mosaddegh was the first elected leader in Iran’s 4,000 year history, and a popular champion for democracy across the developing world. Mosaddegh expelled all British diplomats after uncovering a coup attempt by UK intelligence officers working in cahoots with BP.

Mosaddegh, however, made the fatal mistake of resisting his advisors’ pleas to also expel the CIA, which they correctly suspected, and was complicit in the British plot. Mosaddegh idealized the U.S. as a role model for Iran’s new democracy and incapable of such perfidies. Despite Dulles’ needling, President Truman had forbidden the CIA from actively joining the British caper to topple Mosaddegh.

When Eisenhower took office in January 1953, he immediately unleashed Dulles. After ousting Mosaddegh in “Operation Ajax,” Stone and Roosevelt installed Shah Reza Pahlavi, who favored U.S. oil companies, but whose two decades of CIA sponsored savagery toward his own people from the Peacock throne would finally ignite the 1979 Islamic revolution that has bedeviled our foreign policy for 35 years.

Flush from his Operation Ajax “success” in Iran, Stone arrived in Damascus in April 1956 with \$3 million in Syrian pounds to arm and incite Islamic militants and to bribe Syrian military officers and politicians to overthrow al-Kuwaiti’s democratically elected secularist regime. Working with the Muslim Brotherhood, Stone schemed to assassinate Syria’s Chief of Intelligence, its Chief of the General Staff and the Chief of the Communist Party and to [engineer “national conspiracies and various strong arm” provocations](#) in Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan that could be blamed on the Syrian Ba’athists.

The CIA's plan was to destabilize the Syrian government, and create a pretext for an invasion by Iraq and Jordan, whose governments were already under CIA control. Roosevelt forecasted that the CIA's newly installed puppet government would "rely first upon repressive measures and arbitrary exercise of power."

But all that CIA money failed to corrupt the Syrian military officers. The soldiers reported the CIA's bribery attempts to the Ba'athist regime. In response, the Syrian army invaded the American Embassy taking Stone prisoner. Following harsh interrogation, Stone made a televised confession to his roles in the Iranian coup and the CIA's aborted attempt to overthrow Syria's legitimate government.

The Syrian's ejected Stone and two U.S. Embassy staffers—the first time any American State Department diplomat was barred from an Arab country. The Eisenhower White House hollowly dismissed Stone's confession as "fabrications and slanders," a denial swallowed whole by the American press, led by the New York Times and believed by the American people, who shared Mosaddegh's idealistic view of their government.

Syria purged all politicians sympathetic to the U.S. and executed them for treason. In retaliation, the U.S. moved the Sixth Fleet to the Mediterranean, threatened war and goaded Turkey to invade Syria. The Turks assembled 50,000 troops on Syria's borders and only backed down in the face of unified opposition from the Arab League whose leaders were furious at the U.S. intervention.

Even after its expulsion, the CIA continued its secret efforts to topple Syria's democratically elected Ba'athist government. The CIA plotted with Britain's MI6 to form a "Free Syria Committee" and armed the Muslim Brotherhood to assassinate three Syrian government officials, who had helped expose "the American plot." (Matthew Jones in [\*The 'Preferred Plan': The Anglo-American Working Group Report on Covert Action in Syria, 1957\*](#)). The CIA's mischief pushed Syria even further away from the U.S. and into prolonged alliances with Russia and Egypt.

Following the second Syrian coup attempt, anti-American riots rocked the Mid-East from Lebanon to Algeria. Among the reverberations was the July 14, 1958 coup, led by the new wave of anti-American Army officers who overthrew Iraq's pro-American monarch, [Nuri al-Said](#). The coup leaders published secret government documents, exposing Nuri al-Said as a highly paid CIA puppet. In response to American treachery, the new Iraqi government invited Soviet diplomats and economic advisers to Iraq and turned its back on the West.

Having alienated Iraq and Syria, Kim Roosevelt fled the Mid-East to work as an executive for the oil industry that he had served so well during his public service career. Roosevelt's replacement, as CIA Station Chief, James Critchfield attempted a failed assassination plot against the new Iraqi president using a toxic handkerchief. Five years later the CIA finally succeeded in deposing the Iraqi president and installing the Ba'ath Party to power in Iraq.

A charismatic young murderer named Saddam Hussein was one of the [distinguished leaders](#) of the CIA's Ba'athists team. The Ba'ath Party's Interior Minister, Said Aburish, who took office

alongside Saddam Hussein, would later say, [“We came to power on a CIA train.”](#) Aburish recounted that the CIA supplied Saddam and his cronies a [“murder list”](#) of people who “had to be eliminated immediately in order to ensure success.”

Critchfield later acknowledged that the CIA had, in essence, [“created Saddam Hussein.”](#) During the Reagan years, the [CIA supplied Hussein](#) with billions of dollars in training, Special Forces support, and weapons and battlefield intelligence knowing that he was using poisonous mustard and nerve gas and biological weapons—including anthrax obtained from the U.S. government—in his war against Iran.

Reagan and his CIA Director, Bill Casey, regarded Saddam as a potential friend to the U.S. oil industry and a sturdy barrier against the spread of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Their emissary, Donald Rumsfeld, presented Saddam with a pair of pearl-handled revolvers and a menu of chemical/biological and conventional weapons on a 1983 trip to Bagdad. At the same time, the CIA was illegally supplying Saddam’s enemy—Iran—with thousands of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to fight Iraq, a crime made famous during the Iran Contra scandal. Jihadists from both sides later turned many of those CIA supplied weapons against the American people.

Even as America contemplates yet another violent Mid-East intervention, most Americans are unaware of the many ways that “blowback” from previous CIA blunders has helped craft the current crisis. The reverberations from decades of CIA shenanigans continue to echo across the Mid-East today in national capitals and from mosques to madras schools over the wrecked landscape of democracy and moderate Islam that the CIA helped obliterate.

In July 1956, less than two months after the CIA’s failed Syrian Coup, my uncle, Senator John F. Kennedy, infuriated the Eisenhower White House, the leaders of both political parties and our European allies with a [milestone speech](#) endorsing the right of self-governance in the Arab world and an end to America’s imperialist meddling in Arab countries. Throughout my lifetime, and particularly during my frequent travels to the Mid-East, countless Arabs have fondly recalled that speech to me as the clearest statement of the idealism they expected from the U.S.

Kennedy’s speech was a call for recommitting America to the high values our country had championed in the Atlantic Charter, the formal pledge that all the former European colonies would have the right to self-determination following World War II. FDR had strong-armed Churchill and the other allied leaders to sign the Atlantic Charter in 1941 as a precondition for U.S. support in the European war against fascism.

Thanks in large part to Allan Dulles and the CIA, whose foreign policy intrigues were often directly at odds with the stated policies of our nation, the idealistic path outlined in the Atlantic Charter was the road not taken. In 1957, my grandfather, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, sat on a secret committee charged with investigating CIA’s clandestine mischief in the Mid-East. The so called [“Bruce Lovett Report,”](#) to which he was a signatory, described CIA coup plots in Jordan, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Egypt, all common knowledge on the Arab street, but virtually unknown to the American people who believed, at face value, their government’s denials.

The report blamed the CIA for the rampant anti-Americanism that was then mysteriously taking root “in the many countries in the world today.” The Bruce Lovett Report pointed out that such interventions were antithetical to American values and had compromised America’s international leadership and moral authority without the knowledge of the American people. The report points out that the CIA never considered how we would treat such interventions if some foreign government engineered them in our country. This is the bloody history that modern interventionists like George W. Bush, [Ted Cruz](#) and [Marco Rubio](#) miss when they recite their narcissistic trope that Mid-East nationalists “hate us for our freedoms.”

The Syrian and Iranian coups soiled America’s reputation across the Mid-East and ploughed the fields of Islamic Jihadism which we have, ironically, purposefully nurtured. A parade of Iranian and Syrian dictators, including Bashar al-Assad and his father, have invoked the history of the CIA’s bloody coups as a pretext for their authoritarian rule, repressive tactics and their need for a strong Russian alliance. These stories are therefore well known to the people of Syria and Iran who naturally interpret talk of U.S. intervention in the context of that history.

While the compliant American press parrots the narrative that our military support for the Syrian insurgency is purely humanitarian, many Syrians see the present crisis as just another proxy war over pipelines and geopolitics. Before rushing deeper into the conflagration, it would be wise for us to consider the abundant facts supporting that perspective.

### **A Pipeline War**

In their view, our war against Bashar Assad did not begin with the peaceful civil protests of the Arab Spring in 2011. Instead it began in 2000 when Qatar proposed to construct a \$10 billion, 1,500km pipeline through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey.

Note the purple line which traces the proposed Qatar-Turkey natural gas pipeline and note that all of the countries highlighted in red are part of a new coalition hastily put together after Turkey finally (in exchange for NATO's acquiescence on Erdogan's politically-motivated war with the PKK) agreed to allow the US to fly combat missions against ISIS targets from Incirlik. Now note which country along the purple line is not highlighted in red. That's because Bashar al-Assad didn't support the pipeline and now we're seeing what happens when you're a Mid-East strongman and you decide not to support something the US and Saudi Arabia want to get done. (Map: ZeroHedge.com via MintPress News)

Qatar shares with Iran, the South Pars/North Dome gas field, the world's richest natural gas repository. The international trade embargo, until recently, prohibited Iran from selling gas abroad and ensured that Qatar's gas could only reach European markets if it is liquefied and shipped by sea, a route that restricts volume and dramatically raises costs.

The proposed pipeline would have linked Qatar directly to European energy markets via distribution terminals in Turkey which would pocket rich transit fees. The Qatar/Turkey pipeline would have given the Sunni Kingdoms of the Persian Gulf decisive domination of world

natural gas markets and strengthen Qatar, America's closest ally in the Arab world. Qatar hosts two massive American military bases and the U.S. Central Command's Mid-East headquarters.

The EU, which gets 30 percent of its gas from Russia, was equally hungry for the pipeline which would have given its members cheap energy and relief from Vladimir Putin's stifling economic and political leverage. Turkey, Russia's second largest gas customer, was particularly anxious to end its reliance on its ancient rival and to position itself as the lucrative transect hub for Asian fuels to EU markets. The Qatari pipeline would have benefited Saudi Arabia's conservative Sunni Monarchy by giving them a foothold in Shia dominated Syria.

The Saudi's geopolitical goal is to contain the economic and political power of the Kingdom's principal rival, Iran, a Shiite state, and close ally of Bashar Assad. The Saudi monarchy viewed the U.S. sponsored Shia takeover in Iraq as a demotion to its regional power and was already engaged in a proxy war against Tehran in Yemen, highlighted by the Saudi genocide against the Iranian backed Houthi tribe.

Of course, the Russians, [who sell 70 percent](#) of their gas exports to Europe, viewed the Qatar/Turkey pipeline as an existential threat. In Putin's view, the Qatar pipeline is a NATO plot to change the status quo, deprive Russia of its only foothold in the Middle East, strangle the Russian economy and end Russian leverage in the European energy market. In 2009, Assad announced that he would refuse to sign the agreement to allow the pipeline to run through Syria "to protect the interests of our Russian ally."

Assad further enraged the Gulf's Sunni monarchs by endorsing a Russian approved "Islamic pipeline" running from Iran's side of the gas field through Syria and to the ports of Lebanon. The Islamic pipeline would make Shia Iran instead of Sunni Qatar, the principal supplier to the European energy market and dramatically increase Tehran's influence in the Mid-East and the world. Israel also was understandably determined to derail the Islamic pipeline which would enrich Iran and Syria and presumably strengthen their proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Secret cables and reports by the U.S., Saudi and Israeli intelligence agencies indicate that the moment Assad rejected the Qatari pipeline, military and intelligence planners quickly arrived at the consensus that fomenting a Sunni uprising in Syria to overthrow the uncooperative Bashar Assad was a feasible path to achieving the shared objective of completing the Qatar/Turkey gas link. In 2009, according to WikiLeaks, soon after Bashar Assad rejected the Qatar pipeline, the CIA [began funding](#) opposition groups in Syria.

Bashar Assad's family is Alawite, a Muslim sect widely perceived as aligned with the Shia camp. "Bashar Assad was never supposed to be president," says journalist Sy Hersh. "His father brought him back from medical school in London when his elder brother, the heir apparent, was killed in a car crash."

Before the war started, according to Hersh, Assad was moving to liberalize the country—"They had internet and newspapers and ATM machines and Assad wanted to move toward the west. After 9/11, he gave thousands of invaluable files to the CIA on Jihadist radicals, who he considered a mutual enemy."

Assad's regime was deliberately secular and Syria was impressively diverse. The Syrian government and military, for example, were 80 percent Sunni. Assad maintained peace among his diverse peoples by a strong disciplined army loyal to the Assad family, an allegiance secured by a nationally esteemed and highly paid officer corps, a coldly efficient intelligence apparatus and a penchant for brutality which, prior to the war, was rather moderate compared to other Mideast leaders, including our current allies.

According to Hersh, "He certainly wasn't beheading people every Wednesday like the Saudis do in Mecca." Another veteran journalist, Bob Parry, echoes that assessment. "No one in the region has clean hands but in the realms of torture, mass killings, civil liberties and supporting terrorism, Assad is much better than the Saudis."

No one believed that the regime was vulnerable to the anarchy that had riven Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia. By the spring of 2011, there were small, peaceful demonstrations in Damascus against repression by Assad's regime. These were mainly the effluvia of the Arab Spring which spread virally across the Arab League states the previous summer. However, Huffington Post UK [reported](#) that in Syria the protests were, at least in part, orchestrated by the CIA. WikiLeaks cables indicate that the CIA was already on the ground in Syria.

But the Sunni Kingdoms wanted a much deeper involvement from America. On Sept. 4, 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry told a congressional hearing that the Sunni kingdoms had offered to foot the bill for a US. invasion of Syria to oust Bashar al-Assad. "In fact, some of them have said that if the United States is prepared to go do the whole thing, the way we've done it previously in other places [Iraq], they'll carry the cost," he stated. Kerry reiterated the offer to Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL27): "With respect to Arab countries offering to bear the costs of [an American invasion] to topple Assad, the answer is profoundly Yes, they have. The offer is on the table."

Despite pressure from Republicans, Barrack Obama balked at hiring out young Americans to die as mercenaries for a pipeline conglomerate. Obama wisely ignored Republican clamoring to put ground troops in Syria or to funnel more funding to "moderate insurgents." But by late 2011, Republican pressure and our Sunni allies had pushed the American government into the fray.

In 2011, the U.S. joined France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and England to form the "Friends of Syria Coalition," which formally demanded the removal of Assad. The CIA provided \$6 million to Barada, a British T.V. channel, to produce pieces entreating Assad's ouster. Saudi intelligence documents, published by WikiLeaks, show that by 2012, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were arming, training and funding radical Jihadist Sunni fighters from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere to overthrow the Assad's Shia allied regime. Qatar, which had the most to gain, invested \$3 billion in building the insurgency and invited the Pentagon to train insurgents at U.S. bases in Qatar. U.S. personnel also provided logistical support and intelligence to the rebels on the ground. The Times of London reported on Sept. 14, 2012, that the CIA also armed Jihadists with anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles and other weapons from Libyan armories that the agency smuggled by ratlines to Syria via Turkey. According to an [April 2014 article](#) by Seymour Hersh, the CIA weapons ratlines were financed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The idea of fomenting a Sunni-Shia civil war to weaken the Syrian and Iranian regimes so as to maintain control of the region's petro-chemical supplies was not a novel notion in the Pentagon's lexicon. A damning [2008 Pentagon funded Rand report](#) proposed a precise blueprint for what was about to happen. That report observes that control of the Persian Gulf oil and gas deposits will remain, for the U.S., "a strategic priority" that "will interact strongly with that of prosecuting the long war."

Rand recommends using "covert action, information operations, unconventional warfare" to enforce a "divide and rule" strategy. "The United States and its local allies could use the nationalist jihadists to launch a proxy campaign" and "U.S. leaders could also choose to capitalize on the sustained Shia-Sunni conflict trajectory by taking the side of the conservative Sunni regimes against Shiite empowerment movements in the Muslim world ... possibly supporting authoritative Sunni governments against a continuingly hostile Iran."

WikiLeaks cables from as early as 2006 show the U.S. State Department, at the urging of the Israeli government, proposing to partner with Turkey, Qatar and Egypt to foment Sunni civil war in Syria to weaken Iran. The stated purpose, according to the secret cable, was to incite Assad into a brutal crackdown of Syria's Sunni population.

As predicted, Assad's overreaction to the foreign made crisis—dropping barrel bombs onto Sunni strongholds and killing civilians—polarized Syria's Shia/Sunni divide and allowed U.S. policymakers to sell Americans the idea that the pipeline struggle was a humanitarian war. When Sunni soldiers of the Syrian Army began defecting in 2013, the Western Coalition armed the "Free Syrian Army" to further destabilize Syria. The press portrait of the Free Syria Army as cohesive battalions of Syrian moderates was delusional. The dissolved units regrouped in hundreds of independent militias most of whom were commanded by or allied with Jihadi militants who were the most committed and effective fighters. By then, the Sunni armies of Al Qaeda Iraq (AQI) were crossing the border from Iraq into Syria and joining forces with the battalions of deserters from the Free Syria Army, many of them trained and armed by the U.S.

Despite the prevailing media portrait of a moderate Arab uprising against the tyrant Assad, U.S. Intelligence planners knew from the outset that their pipeline proxies were radical jihadists who would probably carve themselves a brand new Islamic caliphate from the Sunni regions of Syria and Iraq. Two years before ISIS throat cutters stepped on the world stage, a seven-page Aug. 12, 2012 study by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), obtained by the right wing group Judicial Watch, warned that thanks to the ongoing support by U.S./Sunni Coalition for radical Sunni Jihadists, "the Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood and AQI (now ISIS), are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria."

Using U.S. and Gulf State funding, these groups had turned the peaceful protests against Bashar Assad toward "a clear sectarian (Shiite vs Sunni) direction." The paper notes that the conflict had become a sectarian civil war supported by Sunni "religious and political powers." The report paints the Syrian conflict as a global war for control of the region's resources with "the west, Gulf countries and Turkey supporting [Assad's] opposition, while Russia, China and Iran support the regime."

The Pentagon authors of the seven-page report appear to endorse the predicted advent of the ISIS caliphate:

“If the situation continues unravelling, there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor) and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want in order to isolate the Syrian regime.” The Pentagon report warns that this new principality could move across the Iraqi border to Mosul and Ramadi and “declare an Islamic state through its union with other terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria.”

Of course, this is precisely what has happened. Not coincidentally, the regions of Syria occupied by ISIS exactly encompass the proposed route of the Qatari pipeline.

But then in 2014, our Sunni proxies horrified the American people by severing heads and driving a million refugees toward Europe. “Strategies based upon the idea that the enemy of my enemy is my friend can be kind of blinding,” says Tim Clemente, who chaired the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force between 2004 and 2008 and served as liaison in Iraq between the FBI, the Iraqi National Police and the U.S. Military. “We made the same mistake when we trained the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. The moment the Russians left, our supposed friends started smashing antiquities, enslaving women, severing body parts and shooting at us.”

When ISIS’ “Jihadi John” began murdering prisoners on TV, the White House pivoted, talking less about deposing Assad and more about regional stability. The Obama Administration began putting daylight between itself and the insurgency we had funded. The White House pointed accusing fingers at our allies. On Oct. 3, 2014, Vice President Joe Biden told students at the John F. Kennedy, Jr. forum at the Institute of Politics at Harvard that “Our allies in the region are our biggest problem in Syria.” He explained that Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were “so determined to take down Assad” that they had launched a “proxy Sunni-Shia war” funneling “hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of weapons to Jihadists of the al-Nusra front and al-Qaeda”—the two groups that merged in 2014 to form ISIS.

Biden seemed angered that our trusted “friends” could not be trusted to follow the American agenda. “ISI[S] is a direct outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion,” declared Obama, disassociating himself from the Sunni rebellion, “which is an example of unintended consequences which is why we should generally aim before we shoot.” As if to demonstrate their contempt for America’s new found restraint, our putative allies, the Turks responded to the U.S. rebukes by shooting down a plane belonging to our other putative ally, the Russians—probably to spoil a potential deal between Russia and the U.S. that would leave Assad in power.

Across the Mid-East, Arab leaders routinely accuse the U.S. of having created ISIS. To most Americans immersed in U.S. media perspective, such accusations seem insane. However, to many Arabs, the evidence of U.S. involvement is so abundant that they conclude that our role in fostering ISIS must have been deliberate. On Sept. 22, 2014, according to the New York Times, Iraqi leader, Shiite Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, told Baghdad demonstrators that “the CIA created ISIS.” Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister, Bahaa Al-Araji, echoed al-Sadr’s accusation. “We know

who made Daesh,” Iraq’s Treasury Secretary, Haidar al-Assadi, told the Digital News Aggregate, “The Islamic State is a clear creation of the United States, and the United States is trying to intervene again using the excuse of the Islamic State.”

In fact, many of the ISIS fighters and their commanders are ideological and organizational successors to the Jihadists that the CIA has been nurturing for 30 years. The CIA began arming and training the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in 1979 to fight the Soviets. Following the Soviet withdrawal, the CIA’s Afghan Mujahedeen became the Taliban while its foreign fighters, including Osama bin Laden, formed Al-Qaeda. In 2004, then British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told the House of Commons that Al-Qaeda took its name—meaning “database” in Arabic—from the voluminous CIA database of Jihadists—Mujahedeen foreign fighters and arms smugglers trained and equipped by the CIA during the Afghan conflict.

Prior to the American invasion, there was no Al-Qaeda in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Bush destroyed Saddam’s secularist government and his viceroy, Paul Bremer, in a monumental act of mismanagement, effectively created the Sunni Army, now named ISIS. Bremer elevated the Shiites to power and banned Saddam’s ruling Ba’ath Party laying off some 700,000, mostly Sunni, government and party officials from ministers to school teachers. He then disbanded the 380,000 man army, which was 80 percent Sunni.

Bremer’s actions stripped a million of Iraq’s Sunnis of rank, property, wealth and power; leaving a desperate underclass of angry, educated, capable, trained and heavily armed Sunnis with little left to lose. General Petraeus’ decision to import dirty war tactics, including torture and death squads, from the CIA’s El Salvador conflict in order to shock and awe the Sunni resistance, instead ignited a shockingly bloody spiral of sectarian violence that devolved quickly into escalating atrocities topped finally by the Sunni Army signature head cutting. The Sunni insurgency named itself Al-Qaeda Iraq (AQI).

Beginning in 2011, our allies funded the invasion by AQI fighters into Syria. In June 2014 having entered Syria, AQI changed its name to ISIS. According to the [New Yorker](#), “ISIS is run by a council of former Iraqi Generals ... many are members of Saddam Hussein’s secular Ba’ath Party, who converted to radical Islam in American prisons.” The \$500 million in U.S. military aid that Obama did send to Syria almost certainly ended up benefiting these militant Jihadists. On Sept. 16, 2015, incredulous senators from the Armed Services Committee listened to U.S. General Lloyd Austin, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, explain that the Pentagon had spent \$500 million to train and arm “moderate” insurgents in Syria and had only “four or five reliable moderate fighters” to show instead of the promised 5,000. The remainder apparently deserted or defected to ISIS.

Tim Clemente told me that the incomprehensible difference between the Iraq and Syria conflicts are the millions of military aged men who are fleeing the battlefield for Europe rather than staying to fight for their communities. “You have this formidable fighting force and they are all running away. I don’t understand how you can have millions of military aged men running away from the battlefield. In Iraq, the bravery was heartbreaking—I had friends who refused to leave the country even though they knew they would die. They’d just tell you it’s my country, I need to stay and fight,” Clemente said.

The obvious explanation is that the nation's moderates are fleeing a war that is not their war. They simply want to escape being crushed between the anvil of Assad's Russian backed tyranny and the vicious Jihadi Sunni hammer that we had a hand in wielding in a global battle over competing pipelines. You can't blame the Syrian people for not widely embracing a blueprint for their nation minted in either Washington or Moscow. The super powers have left no options for an idealistic future that moderate Syrians might consider fighting for. And no one wants to die for a pipeline.

What is the answer? If our objective is long-term peace in the Mid-East, self-government by the Arab nations and national security at home, we must undertake any new intervention in the region with an eye on history and an intense desire to learn its lessons. Only when we Americans understand the historical and political context of this conflict will we apply appropriate scrutiny to the decisions of our leaders.

Using the same imagery and language that supported our 2003 war against Saddam Hussein, our political leaders led Americans to believe that our Syrian intervention is an idealistic war against tyranny, terrorism and religious fanaticism. We tend to dismiss, as mere cynicism, the views of those Arabs who see the current crisis as a rerun of the same old plots about pipelines and geopolitics. But, if we are to have an effective foreign policy, we must recognize the Syrian conflict is a war over control of resources indistinguishable from the myriad clandestine and undeclared oil wars we have been fighting in the Mid-East for 65 years. And only when we see this conflict as a proxy war over a pipeline do events become comprehensible.

It's the only paradigm that explains why the GOP on Capitol Hill and the Obama administration are still fixated on regime change rather than regional stability, why the Obama administration can find no Syrian moderates to fight the war, why ISIS blew up a Russian passenger plane, why the Saudi's just executed a powerful Shia cleric only to have their embassy burned in Tehran, why Russia is bombing non-ISIS fighters and why Turkey went out of its way to down a Russian jet. The million refugees now flooding into Europe are refugees of a pipeline war and CIA blundering.

Clemente compares ISIS to Colombia's FARC—a drug cartel with a revolutionary ideology to inspire its foot soldiers. “You have to think of ISIS as an oil cartel,” Clemente said. “In the end, money is the governing rationale. The religious ideology is a tool that inspires its soldiers to give their lives for an oil cartel.”

Once we strip this conflict of its humanitarian patina and recognize the Syrian conflict as an oil war, our foreign policy strategy becomes clear. Instead, our first priority should be the one no one ever mentions—we need to kick our Mid-East oil jones, an increasingly feasible objective, as the U.S. becomes more energy independent. Next, we need to dramatically reduce our military profile in the Middle East and let the Arabs run Arabia. Other than humanitarian assistance and guaranteeing the security of Israel's borders, the U.S. has no legitimate role in this conflict. While the facts prove that we played a role in creating the crisis, history shows that we have little power to resolve it.

As we contemplate history, it's breathtaking to consider the astonishing consistency with which virtually every violent intervention in the Middle East since World War II by our country has resulted in miserable failure. The long list of CIA and military adventures has each cost us dearly in national treasure, in liberty at home, in our moral authority abroad and in our national security. Without any memorable exception, every violent intervention has resulted in a catastrophic blowback far more costly to our country than any problems the authors our meddling intended to solve. Our mischief has neither improved life in the Middle East nor has it made America safer.

A 1997 U.S. Department of Defense report found that "the data show a strong correlation between U.S. involvement abroad and an increase in terrorist attacks against the U.S." Let's face it, what we call the "war on terror" is really just another oil war. We've squandered \$6 trillion on three wars abroad and on constructing a national security warfare state at home since oilman Cheney declared the "Long War" in 2001. The only winners have been the military contractors and oil companies who have pocketed historic profits. We have compromised our values, butchered our own youth, killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people, subverted our idealism and squandered our national treasures in fruitless and costly adventures abroad. In the process, we have turned America, once the world's beacon of freedom, into a national security surveillance state and an international moral pariah.

America's founding fathers warned Americans against standing armies, foreign entanglements and, in John Adams' words, "going abroad in search of monsters to destroy." Those wise men understood that imperialism abroad is incompatible with democracy and civil rights at home. They wanted America to be a "city on a hill"—a model of democracy for the rest of the world.

The Atlantic Charter echoed their seminal American ideal that each nation should have the right to self-determination. Over the past seven decades, the Dulles brothers, the Cheney Gang, the neocons and their ilk have hijacked that fundamental principle of American idealism and deployed our military and intelligence apparatus to serve the mercantile interests of large corporations and particularly, the petroleum companies and military contractors who have literally made a killing from these conflicts. It's time for Americans to turn America away from this new imperialism and back to the path of idealism and democracy. We should let the Arabs govern Arabia and turn our energies to the great endeavor of nation building at home. We need to begin this process, not by invading Syria, but by ending our ruinous addiction to oil.