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What You Need to Know About the Middle East

By William Blum
November 5, 2015



Are you confused by the Middle East? Here are some things you should know. (But you'll probably still be confused.)

* The US, France, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and the Gulf monarchies have all in the recent past supported al Qaeda and/or the Islamic State (ISIS) with arms, money, and/or manpower.

* The first example of this was in 1979 when the United States began covert operations in Afghanistan, six months before the Russians arrived, promoting Islamic fundamentalism across the southern tier of the Soviet Union against "godless communism". All the al-Qaeda/Taliban shit then followed.

* In addition to Afghanistan, the United States has provided support to Islamic militants in Bosnia, Kosovo, Libya, the Caucasus, and Syria.

* The United States overthrew the secular governments of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya and is trying to do the same with Syria, thus giving great impetus to the rise of ISIS. Said Barack Obama in March of this year: “ISIS is a direct outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion. Which is an example of unintended consequences. Which is why we should generally aim before we shoot.”

* More than a million refugees from these wars of Washington are currently over-running Europe and North Africa. God Bless American exceptionalism.

* The Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish Kurds have all fought against ISIS, but Turkey – close US ally and member of NATO – has fought against each of them.

* Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanese factions have each supported the Syrian government in various ways in Damascus’s struggle against ISIS and other terrorist groups, including the (much celebrated but seldom seen) “moderate” ones. For this all four countries have been sharply criticized by Washington.

* The United States has bombed ISIS in Syria, but has used the same occasions to damage Syria’s infrastructure and oil-producing capacity.

* Russia has bombed ISIS in Syria, but has used the same occasions to attack Syria’s other enemies.

* The mainstream media almost never mentions the proposed Qatar natural-gas pipelines – whose path to Europe Syria has stood in the way of for years – as a reason for much of the hostility toward Syria. The pipelines could dethrone Russia as Europe’s dominant source of energy.

* In Libya, during the beginning of the 2011 civil war, anti-Gaddafi rebels, many of whom were al-Qaeda affiliated militias, were protected by NATO in “no-fly zones”.

* US policy in Syria in the years leading up to the 2011 uprising against Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, which began the whole current mess, was designed to promote sectarianism, which in turn led to civil war with the goal of regime change.

* US Secretary of State John Kerry declared on October 22 that in resolving Syria's civil war the country "should not be broken up, that it must remain secular, and that Syrians should choose their future leader." (All of which actually describes Syria under Assad.) Then Kerry said: "One thing stands in the way of being able to rapidly move to implement that, and it's a person called Assad, Bashar Assad."

Why does the government of the United States hate Syrian president Bashar al-Assad with such passion?

Is it because, as we're told, he's a brutal dictator? But how can that be the reason for the hatred? It would be difficult indeed to name a brutal dictatorship of the second half of the 20th Century or of the 21st century that was not supported by the United States; not only supported, but often put into power and kept in power against the wishes of the population; at present the list would include Saudi Arabia, Honduras, Indonesia, Egypt, Colombia, Qatar, and Israel.

The United States, I suggest, is hostile to the Syrian government for the same reason it has been hostile to Cuba for more than half a century; and hostile to Venezuela for the past 15 years; and earlier to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; and to Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Chile; and so on continuing through the world atlas and history books.

What these governments have had in common can be summarized in a single word – independence ... independence from American foreign policy; the refusal to be a client state of Washington; the refusal to be continuously hostile to Washington's Officially Designated Enemies; insufficient respect and zeal for the capitalist way of life.