Hype in the West regarding Russia’s plans to seize Kyiv and its other “schemes” garnered response and comments in the Middle Eastern political circles and media. Among these the US-driven propaganda narratives regarding Moscow’s alleged intent to use its gas as a geopolitical weapon and about the gas stranglehold that Russia has allegedly put on Europe’s neck is surrounded by lively debates.

In this regard, a number of Arab commentators are reminiscing about the “freedom gas” slogan. And indeed, back in the day, US president Donald Trump touted American liquefied gas that was supposed to free the Old World from dependence on Russia.

As Al-Arabiya reports, following these plans, in January the US accounted for 45% of LNG supplies arriving in Europe from outside (almost 12 billion cubic meters). Washington wants to sideline the Russian gas as it seeks alternative gas supply sources.

Another incentive derives from the mounting pressure on the US administration in terms of demands to cut exports of this commodity in order to offset the soaring prices at the domestic market. For that reason, the US is seeking another gas sources, including in the Middle East, a region that accounts for 15% of natural gas production globally.

As for the positions of Arab producers, as the Saudi author reports, compared to Russia that covers 40% of gas consumption in Europe, supplies from Algeria account just for 8%, while Qatar stands for 5%, which is followed by
Libya. The way the local gas exporters react to this development can be estimated by the Middle Eastern media’s feedback.

According to Libyan Oil and Gas Minister Mohamed Aoun, his country is impotent to influence the gas crisis in Europe in terms of attenuating its sufferings. The Libyan gas that was back in the day flowing to Europe via Greenstream pipeline connecting Libya and Italy is now used only for supporting local thermal power plants.

For now, Algeria will not be able to replace Russian gas in case of shortages due to a simple reason: a vast difference in production volumes of the two countries. Objectively speaking, Algeria lacks resources for this purpose, says a former responsible head of the Algerian company SONATRACH.

Qatar is the second largest LNG exporter globally, that is why Washington bets big on Doha to sideline Russia in the European gas market.

Some researchers argue about the chances of Qatari gas becoming an alternative to the Russian fuel, citing Doha’s ambitious plans to significantly step up its LNG production and export capacities in the coming years. Other Middle Eastern experts, however, have voiced caution in this regard.

75% of Qatari LNG is exported to Asian countries: Japan, South Korea, etc. 90% of deliveries are long-term contracts. Last year, in particular, China and Qatar signed the largest contract of such sort. This means that only a tiny fraction of Qatari gas is sold on the spot market.

According to a BCS Global Market analyst, as cited by the Arab source, it is necessary to transfer half of LNG consumed by Asia to Europe to replace Gazprom. Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi pointed out that Doha considered its gas contracts to be “sacred” while fulfillment of contractual obligations is the nation’s priority.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Qatar’s foreign minister, said that Qatar will not “be a part of some kind of conflict and political polarization.” As for the energy competition, it is open while Qatar intends to compete with Russia, the US and other producers.

Besides, Qatar demands to refrain from reselling the gas it supplies, a pattern of behavior some European countries are engaged in, in order to transfer the fuel to Asian countries with excess profit in mind.

At the same time, as the Arab outlet reports, generally speaking, the Russian pipeline gas has an edge over the Qatari fuel. This method is more convenient and cost-effective since the pipeline gas does not require liquefaction, long-distance sea transportation and expensive-to-run on-shore equipment for accepting and storing fuel.

Analysts also urge to take into account Europe’s push to rely more heavily on gas since the green energy sector plans to stop using coal in the upcoming decades. Moreover, gas consumption in the Middle East is increasing by 4.6% annually, which will be an understandable cause for cutting exports from this region.

In recent years, Washington has been consumed with an idea to become a global energy security hegemon, pushing back against Europe’s energy independence and its ties with Russia, especially in the gas industry. Under the last US administration Washington was dead set on finding an alternative to the Russian gas, but failed miserably.

The Egyptian political scientist assumes that geostrategic reality predetermines imminent economic bilateral tying of Russia and Europe. In recent years, even when Europe slapped sanctions on Russia, they did not affect the gas sector.

For Europe ditching of the Russian gas will prove problematic since such a move would require a lot of time and efforts for construction of brand-new infrastructure for accepting, processing and distributing LNG among the consumers. For Russia, such backpedaling (a matter Western experts like to drone on) would be suicidal.

More and more Middle Eastern analysts agree that restless authors’ hysteria about the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine reached its peak.

The Emirati outlet concludes Russia is determined to avoid the war that would disembowel it and expose it in the eyes of the world community as a violator of international legal norms...

But, as the metaphor goes, if a knife is put to Russia's throat, then it will certainly resort to some military measures to shield itself in the long run and protect its Eastern borders from Western encroachment. Despite a threat of severe sanctions and other risks, moving forward, this nation has much more to gain than it stands to lose.
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