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Американская политика противодействия российским транспортно-энергетическим проектам: кейс «Голубого потока»

Аннотация. В статье представлены доказательства того, что США, начиная с 1998 или начала 1999 г., пытались помешать строительству газопроводов «Голубой поток-1» (1997—2002 гг.) и «Голубой поток-2» (2005—2007 гг.) между Россией и Турцией. Комплекс мер включал лоббирование и/или давление на правительства Италии, Венгрии, Болгарии и самой Турции. Хотя детали по большей части остаются неясными, в случае с Турцией меры были особенно агрессивными. Тем не менее, только второй проект оказался успешным, а на смену «Голубому потоку-2» в конечном итоге пришел «Турецкий поток».

Ключевые слова: США, Турция, Россия, газ, трубопровод, «Голубой поток».

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The US Obstruction Policy Towards Russian Energy Logistics: Case of Blue Stream

Abstract. This article presents evidence that the US, beginning in 1998 or early 1999, attempted to prevent the construction of the Blue Stream I (1997—2002) and Blue Stream II (2005—2007) gas pipelines between Russia and Turkey. These campaigns involved lobbying and/or pressure against the governments of Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey itself. While the details remain mostly unclear, both campaigns were especially intense and coercive/hostile in the case of Turkey. Nevertheless, only the second was successful, and Blue Stream II was in any case eventually succeeded by TurkStream.

Keywords: US, Turkey, Russia, gas, pipeline, Blue Stream.

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1. Introduction

Since the USSR's collapse, Russia has constructed, or planned the construction of, seven gas pipelines to the East Atlantic (NATO excluding North America). The first was Yamal-Yevropa, construction of which was largely completed by 1997, towards which the US actually took a neutral or even slightly supportive stance. However, as the US adopted an increasingly negative perception of Russia in the late 1990s, it began pursuing a variety of hostile policies, including a 'Pipeline Blockade'. This was intended to mi-

nimize US allies' economic ties to Russia, ties that the US feared might generate reluctance to adhere to the US's increasingly anti-Russian policies. The Blockade fell upon every Russian project after Yamal-Yevropa — starting with Blue Stream I, which the US began opposing in 1998 or 1999, and continuing through to TurkStream and NordStream II in recent years.

On the basis of numerous US, Turkish, and Western European sources, this article details the US's (attempted) obstruction of Russia's first two post-Yamal-Yevropa projects: Blue Streams I and II, which run (or were intended to run) from Russia to Turkey via the Black Sea.

In the case of Blue Stream I (Sec.2) — planned and built in 1997–2002 — this obstruction included USG pressure (whether solely rhetorical or more substantive) against the Turkish (and Italian) governments, beginning in early 1999 or some time in 1998, to abandon the project (Sec.2.1). It included US attempts, in autumn 1999, to dissuade Turkish signature of a tax protocol with Russia that was critical to Blue Stream I's commercial viability, attempts that culminated in a visit to Ankara, just days before the protocol was due to be signed, that prevented the signature — but, it turned out, for only a few weeks (Sec.2.2). And the effort continued to generate references to US “pressure” and “heavy opposition”, directed against the project and especially against Turkey, in the early 2000s (Sec.2.3).

As for Blue Stream II (Sec.3) — proposed and planned largely in 2005–2007 — US obstruction included lobbying and/or pressure against the Turkish, Bulgarian, and Hungarian governments to drop the project. This effort was, at least in the case of Turkey, clearly coercive/hostile, even if its specifics are unclear.

2. Blue Stream I (1997–2002)

After Yamal-Yevropa, the next Russian export pipeline was Blue Stream I, running from Russia across the Black Sea to Turkey. On 15 December 1997, the prime ministers of Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement on the project in Ankara [Frantz, 2001]. And, although the project did not appear to benefit from any US support (as Yamal-Yevropa had to a small degree), it also did not initially appear to have provoked any obstruction or even significant opposition from the US. That changed in 1999, or perhaps some time in 1998, when the US began trying to obstruct the project, with limited success.

In public, the USG always claimed neutrality on the subject. For instance, in September 1999, US Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State for Caspian Basin Energy Diplomacy (henceforth shortened to “Caspian Energy Advisor”) John Wolf claimed that the US was not seeking to exclude Russia's economic interests from the region, was not trying to interfere in Blue Stream, and was instead focused on promoting the alternative Trans-Caspian Pipeline — and it would be up to the Turkish market to decide which is more profitable [ABD'nin...]. And in an April 2000 Congressional hearing, Assistant Secretary of Energy for International Affairs David Goldwyn insisted that “we are using our efforts to make sure that there is another horse in the race and that it is unfettered in its ability to compete with Blue Stream [The Status...].

We do not oppose Blue Stream. We do not try and set roadblocks in its way.” He later reiterated that “we have tended to try to stay out of the business of talking for or against Blue Stream.”

However — as would later also be the case with Blue Stream II, Nord Stream I, and South Stream — the US's public claims were contradicted by overwhelming evidence.

2.1. Initial US obstruction

The apparently first evidence of US obstruction came to light on 17 February 1999, when *Hurriyet* reported (originally in Turkish) that the major Blue Stream partnership between Russia's Gazprom and Italy's ENI has further discomfited the US Administration. The US has increased its diplomatic efforts towards Turkey and Italy to block the project.

We have learned that the four-hour visit to Turkey of Ambassador Richard Morningstar, Bill Clinton's special envoy for pipeline projects, was actually about the US's “discomfort with Blue Stream”. In meetings with Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and Minister of Energy Ziya Aktaş, Morningstar conveyed the US Administration's discomfort with developments in the Blue Stream project.

We have also learned that the US Administration has voiced the same concerns to Italy, the home of petroleum giant ENI and export credit agency SACE [Servizi Assicurativi del Commercio Estero], which are slated to realize the project. The subject [of the US's position/efforts] was raised during a visit to Moscow by Italy's PM and SACE's CEO. Meeting with Gazprom and Gazexport executives, Italian officials conveyed their government's message of “continue the project”, despite US requests to the contrary [ABD].

Notably, *Hurriyet* also alleged that the US's obstruction of Blue Stream was as old as the project itself; one day before PM Chernomyrdin came to Turkey to sign the Blue Stream agreement (15 December 1997) the US Ambassador to Turkey apparently asked the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources to not sign the intergovernmental agreement launching the project [Frantz, 2001]. That said, this is the only such allegation of which I am aware.

Two months later, *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly* (a venerable and prominent industry periodical) reported that ENI's two “mega-projects”, Blue Stream and a pipeline from Libya to Italy, “have run afoul of US government policy”. Indeed, “with Blue Stream, unwanted US attention could be a bigger problem” than it was for the Libyan project. Despite support for Blue Stream from Turkey, Italy, and a Dutch bank, “Washington is still struggling mightily to get Turkey to drop the deal”: for instance, sending Caspian Energy Advisor Morningstar to Turkey in mid-April, where he “put the full-court press on Ankara in lobbying to kill off Blue Stream” [Tumultuous times...].

Thus, early-to-mid-1999 saw two independent reports alleging the same thing: a sustained USG effort to halt Blue Stream — notable for its targeting of both the Italian and the Turkish governments, and for the prominent role played in it by Caspian Energy Advisor Morningstar — that began in early 1999 or sometime in 1998. Several years later, this reporting was corroborated by further evidence.

In a June 2003 interview with the Turkish newspaper *Radikal*, Mesut Yilmaz said that, as Prime Minister from 30 June 1997 to 11 January 1999, he had merely continued the Blue Stream project begun by the previous cabinet's Energy Minister — and that

“the US Ambassador told him at the time, ”do not do natural gas business with Russia”” [Çeteler her yerde...]. This probably places US obstruction some time in 1998 (or very early 1999), but it is not entirely certain that Yilmaz was referring here to the actual period of his Prime Ministership, since he remained a major impetus behind the Blue Stream project even after stepping down.

In any case, the most incontrovertible evidence of US obstruction of Blue Stream pertains to USG pressure on Yilmaz after he had left office. In June 2001, the New York Times reported that the success of Blue Stream “would represent a setback in American efforts to curtail Russia's influence in one of the world's most strategic regions”, and that “from the outset, American diplomats have warned that it would give Russia too much leverage over Turkey, and that it would constrain gas development in neighboring countries”. And, more specifically, the Times added that American diplomats stopped short of outright opposition to Blue Stream, but they cautioned their Turkish counterparts against relying too heavily on Russia, according to American officials. They also warned that Blue Stream threatened the Turkmenistan pipeline.

In September 1999, Mr. Yilmaz had dinner with several Clinton administration officials in Washington. He was out of government then, though he remained head of the Motherland Party.

“We really don't like this project,” an American official told him, according to a dinner participant and an official who was briefed about the conversation.

“Let me be plain,” Mr. Yilmaz was quoted as replying. “I'm going to get it done” [Frantz, 2001] .

This dinner would have taken place in the week preceding Monday 20 September 1999. (Approximately when Yilmaz travelled to Moscow “a week later” [İşte tartışılan...].)

2.2. US obstruction by blocking the Russo-Turkish tax protocol

It was also around this time — September 1999 — that the USG began to focus on blocking Blue Stream specifically by preventing Turkey's signature of a Russo-Turkish tax protocol. This effort is the best-attested component of the US's obstruction campaign.

In August 1999, the Russian Cabinet approved the draft of a protocol to the Russo-Turkish Blue Stream agreement, a protocol that would limit the tax obligations of companies involved in the Blue Stream project [Совместная компания...]. Observers generally agreed that this Additional Protocol “must be signed” if Blue Stream were to proceed, for otherwise “the project would be obviously unprofitable and incapable of finding credit” (“проект был очевидно убыточен и некредитоспособен”) [TCP v Blue Stream, 1999; С голубого ручейка...]. Indeed, the alleviation of the project's tax burden was, in principle, agreed upon by Russia and Turkey back in December 1997, as an integral component of the larger project.

However, Turkish signature of the Additional Protocol was not rapidly forthcoming. The Russians hoped that the Turks would finally sign during a state visit to Moscow on 4–6 November, but this did not happen either. The Protocol was certainly ready to be signed: in fact, the day before the Turkish state visit, Gazprom and BOTAS (Turkey's state-owned energy supply corporation) finished ironing out the text and initialed it. Prime Minister Ecevit simply declined to sign it — which rather dramatically upset the

agenda of the visit, the primary concrete item of which had been the Protocol's signature [Ecevit...].

And thus, for a period in autumn 1999, Blue Stream appeared to be in danger of being indefinitely frozen. For instance, on 19 November, Oxford Analytica predicted that the rival Trans-Caspian Pipeline would have good prospects if “Ankara does not sign the additional protocol for Blue Stream within the next few weeks” [TCP v Blue Stream, 1999].

And yet the Additional Protocol actually was signed — on 27 November, by Turkey's Ambassador to Russia and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister [Russia, Turkey sign...]. Progress on Blue Stream resumed, and the project was functionally completed by the end of 2002.

But what was it that had threatened or at least delayed the Additional Protocol — and thus the entire Blue Stream project?

There are several factors that may have played a role. Before Ecevit's November state visit, Interfax suggested that the Turks had doubts about the Additional Protocol's actual necessity, or alternatively, that they were holding the Protocol 'hostage' in order to pressure the Russian Duma to first ratify a double-taxation-avoidance treaty that Turkey had already ratified [В Москве рассчитывают...].

That said, while the Turks might certainly have disagreed with the Russians on the details of a tax protocol, it seems unlikely that they would have doubted its necessity outright, given that they had agreed to it in December 1997.

As for the double-taxation treaty, if anything it appears that the Russians may have been holding it hostage to the Turks' signature of the Additional Protocol — rather than the reverse — since the Duma ratified the double-taxation agreement the day after the Turks signed the Protocol [С голубого ручейка...]. Indeed, when the Additional Protocol was signed, Anatolia reported that “Saturday's [signing of the] protocol guarantees the approval of the agreement to prevent double taxation by the Russian parliament[,] which was earlier only approved by the Turkish parliament” [Russia, Turkey sign...].

The Russians, for their part, pointed to a very different cause of the trouble. In October, the head of Gazprom, Ryem Vyakhirev (Рем Вяхирев), blamed “external factors, including pressure from the US” («внешние факторы, в частности, давление со стороны Соединенных Штатов») [В Москве рассчитывают...]. And significant evidence supports this claim.

On 29 October — six days before Ecevit's visit to Moscow, and while the Russians still expected Ecevit to sign the Additional Protocol on that visit — the Turkish newspaper Radikal reported that the Protocol “will not be signed, due to the objection of the [Turkish] Ministry of Foreign Affairs”. Why had the Ministry objected? “Taking into account the objections of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan (which want to themselves sell gas to Turkey), and the criticism of the US, the Foreign Ministry advised PM Ecevit against signing the agreement” [Zeyrek, 1999]. The credibility of this report is particularly enhanced by its accurate prediction of what was, at the time, not public knowledge: that Ecevit would decline to sign the Additional Protocol. Whichever sources accurately predicted this can also probably be relied upon to accurately explain its cause.

Then, in another article, on 5 November, Radikal reported that the US had pressured Ecevit on Blue Stream — moreover, with decisive results — not only via the Turkish

Foreign Ministry, but also directly: “before the trip, Ecevit told his Ministry of Energy that he would sign the protocol, but then changed his mind after speaking with the US President's Special Advisor for Caspian Issues, [John] Wolf.” (The article also quoted one frustrated Gazprom official, whose words were probably relayed by a member of the Turkish delegation then in Moscow, complaining that “your Prime Minister will not sign the protocol until the US does”) [Mavi Akim...].

Hurriyet corroborated this report, writing on Saturday 6 November that “the Turkish government could not sign the Protocol, even though it wanted to”, due to “pressure exerted by the US, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan — who oppose Blue Stream — upon the Turkish government”. Specifically, the paper reported that “the US government sent a special envoy to Ankara at the beginning of this week” (i.e. between Monday 1 and Wednesday 3 November, since the trip began on 4 November) “who delivered the US expectation that the Additional Protocol will not be signed” [Ecevit...]. This envoy was presumably Caspian Energy Advisor John Wolf, also mentioned by Radikal, who arrived in Turkey less than four days before the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow.

In fact, the US at this time seems to have been pushing against Blue Stream along every vector it could find. On 3 November (the day before Ecevit's visit to Moscow) the head of the Virtue Party, Recai Kutan, met with Dep.Sec.State Marc Grossman in Washington. Although Kutan's party was not even in power at the time — nor, indeed, had it ever been in power, nor would it ever attain power — Grossman “expressed concern regarding Blue Stream” to Kutan, according to Kutan himself [FP lideri Kutan...].

Finally, Oxford Analytica also credited/blamed the US (and others) for blocking the Protocol's signature, although it specifically suggested that Ecevit “for the sake of ties with Washington...did not want to sign the protocol so soon after his visit to the United States and so close to hosting the OSCE summit” [TCP v Blue Stream, 1999].

In sum, the US went to significant lengths, right before the Protocol was due to be signed, to prevent it from being signed. It lobbied and/or pressured the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the Turkish PM, and apparently any Turkish politicians that it could ahold of. And this appears to have (temporarily) yielded dramatic positive results: the most prominent item on the agenda of Russo-Turkish cooperation, which the Turkish government had originally intended to move forward with (otherwise it would have never been included on the Moscow agenda in the first place), was dropped by the Turks at the last minute.

That said, there is a second factor that genuinely might have played a large role in the postponement of the Protocol's signature.

Some of the above-presented reports pointed the finger not only at the US, but also at Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and the upcoming OSCE summit in Istanbul. The theory is that Turkey (or, more specifically, the Turkish Foreign Ministry) was concerned that Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan might be angered or dismayed by progress on Blue Stream, and respond by refusing to sign agreements on their own projects with Turkey that were due to be signed at the OSCE summit.

On 6 November, the newspaper *Dunya* reported that before his departure for Russia, PM Ecevit was told by the [Turkish] Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the protocol should be left until after the OSCE summit. Also taking into account the reservations

of the Turkic republics and the US, PM Ecevit convinced Putin to leave the protocol until after the OSCE summit. Despite not signing the protocol, Ecevit said that Turkey had not given up on Blue Stream, and assured the Russians that it would move forward.

And, of course, Turkey indeed signed the Protocol almost immediately after the summit: on 27 November, just eight days after the Istanbul summit ended on 19 November, suggesting that Dunya was also right to partly credit/blame the “Turkic republics” — and what they might do during the OSCE summit — for the delay [Mavi Akim...].

Still, even this report also identified the US as an obstacle to Blue Stream, just like the “Turkic republics”. Moreover, the supposed Azeri-Turkmen threat was logically questionable, casting doubt on whether it actually existed and, if it did, on whether it would have had any credibility in Turkey’s view. Cutting off one’s own commercial dealings with another country, to punish it for also dealing with some third country, seems more than likely to backfire. And Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan were in an extremely poor position from which to blackmail Turkey, as it was (and remains) essentially their only way to get their gas westward, whereas Turkey had (and retains) plenty of options in terms of gas supply.

In any case, even if there were other causes of Turkey’s delay in signing the Protocol, and even if the US did not succeed in preventing signature permanently, the numerous above reports indicate that the US certainly sought such an outcome.

2.3. Continuing US obstruction

And this is still not quite the end of the evidence for the US’s general campaign of obstruction.

In January 2002, Radikal quoted a “high-ranking Ministry of Energy official”, who said that, during PM Ecevit’s visit to the US that month, “US National Security Council officials complained [to the Turkish delegation] that “despite all our objections, Iranian gas has reached Turkey. Blue Stream is also happening””. The same official, according to Radikal, “also described the completion of these projects, despite US pressure, as a success” [Kırkı çıkan’...].

Finally, in a January 2004 report for the EU Commission’s Directorate-General for Energy and Transport, the Dutch Clingendael Institute wrote that The US has heavily opposed the Blue Stream pipeline, as it endangers the prospects for the TCGP. The pipeline would also increase Turkey’s reliance on Russian gas from a current 66 % to about 80 %, and could hamper US efforts to reduce Russian influence in the South Caucasus [van der Linde, et al., 2004].

Notably, Clingendael is itself close to the USG. For instance, it hosted the round-table and reception for the “internal energy conference” of the US’s Embassy to the Hague in October 2009, an event “intended for [USG] energy officers and key Washington working[-]level staff” [US Embassy Hague].

2.4. Conclusion

In sum, it is virtually certain that the US tried to obstruct Blue Stream I by persuading, pressuring, and/or coercing the Italian and especially Turkish governments, to which attest well over 11 distinct sources:

— Hurriyet (multiple unidentified sources);

- Petroleum Intelligence Weekly (unidentified source(s));
- PM Mesut Yilmaz;
- a (presumably American) participant in the dinner with Yilmaz, cited by the New York Times;
- a US official briefed on the dinner and cited by the Times;
- Radikal (multiple unidentified sources, some of whom correctly predicted the non-signature of the Additional Protocol);
- Virtue Party head Recai Kutan;
- Oxford Analytica (unidentified source(s));
- Dunya (unidentified source(s), who correctly predicted the Protocol's post-OSCE-summit signature);
- a Turkish Energy Ministry official cited by Radikal;
- the Clingendael Institute (unidentified source(s)).

But did this effort involve anything more substantial than persuasion and cajoling? It is not entirely clear. To some extent, intense US lobbying, even if devoid of any explicit pledges of reward or punishment, would nevertheless be bolstered by the implicit possibility that the future behavior of the then-global-hegemon, towards the target of the lobbying, might be affected by the target's (non)compliance with the hegemon's demands.

Beyond this, one possibility is that it was actually the USG — not Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan — that was threatening to scuttle the Baku-Ceyhan and/or Trans-Caspian agreements that were due to be signed at the OSCE summit. According to Radikal (29 October), the Turkish Foreign Ministry warned Ecevit that “Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan will not sign [the Baku-Ceyhan and TCP] agreements if the Blue Stream Tax Protocol is concluded in Moscow” — but there is no indication that it was the Azeri and Turkmen governments that told the Foreign Ministry this [Zeyrek, 1999]. Similarly, the Hurriyet article from a week later (6 November) reported that Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan were merely “worried” that Blue Stream could harm them. But the US actually made a threat, warning “that Blue Stream will jeopardize the Baku-Ceyhan petroleum and natural gas pipeline” via a special envoy “who delivered the US expectation that the Additional Protocol will not be signed” [Ecevit...]. Thus, the only warnings related to OSCE/Baku-Ceyhan/TCP, actually reported as having been communicated to Turkey, apparently came from the US itself, which may have been either bluffing/lying about the positions of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, or ‘precommitting’ them to a position that it would itself ensure that they took, if necessary. (Otherwise, it is unclear why Baku and Ashgabat would not take responsibility for communicating their own positions to Turkey.)

Ultimately, the available evidence cannot conclusively prove that the US employed positive or negative incentives — as opposed to mere rhetoric — to prevent Turkish (or Italian) participation in Blue Stream. However, much of the evidence — the US's warnings about Baku-Ceyhan/TCP; Ecevit's sudden about-face following John Wolf's last-minute flight to Ankara — certainly suggests that the US employed tactics capable of suddenly getting the target to do what it had not wanted to do, even if their effects were in this case short-lived.

3. Blue Stream II (2005—2007)

The addition of a second line to Blue Stream — Blue Stream II — was actively pursued really only from 2005 until 2007 (at which point the project was replaced/ superseded/succeeded by South Stream). However, even in this relatively short period of time, and despite the project never making much real progress, the US determined that it opposed the project, and sought to block it.

Evidence of the US's hostile attitude, towards Blue Stream II, is available from as early as 2 February 2006 (barely five months after Putin publicly proposed the project on 29 August 2005), when US Embassy Ankara noted that a Turkish government official had argued “for expanding Blue Stream” [Putin, Berlusconi...]. But as the Embassy put it, “of course, the idea runs counter to diversification of European sourcing” [US Embassy Ankara].

As for actual obstruction of Blue Stream II, coordinated effort began by 14 July 2006. On that date, a “Southern Ring Energy Officers' Conference” took place in Athens, attended by Dep.Assist.Sec.State Bryza and by officials from the DoS Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, the CIA, the Department of Energy, and Embassies Ankara, Athens, Baku, Bucharest, Rome, Sofia, Tbilisi, Tirana, and Zagreb. A subsequent cable from Embassy Athens reported that Gazprom is reportedly considering a \$5—6 billion USD investment to expand Blue Stream instead of a \$300-\$400 million USD infrastructure upgrade on its Ukraine transit facilities. Conference participants discussed how we might counter Gazprom's efforts, concluding that the single most important tactic would be to get key TGI [Turkey-Greece-Italy Pipeline] partner countries to form a coordinated front, if possible. Other ideas discussed included embarking on a PR campaign to expose Gazprom's unorthodox tactics and unreliability; and educating regional policy makers on the long-term merits of developing alternatives to Gazprom, including market diversity and national energy security [US Embassy Athens].

Aside from this effort to coordinate US obstruction of Blue Stream II, there is also available evidence of US obstructive activities specifically in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

In Turkey, the US Ambassador “warned” Turkish Energy Minister Guler, on 27 February 2006, “that Turkey's discussions with Russia about increased purchases of gas and expanding Blue Stream could send negative signals to the market about TCP [Trans-Caspian Pipeline] prospects” [US Embassy Ankara].

And although is entirely unclear what exactly the US did, or threatened to do, in order to coerce Turkey out of participation in Blue Stream II, it is clear that it was doing something, since by 2007 the Turkish government had grown frustrated with it. In a 24 July 2007 conversation with the US Ambassador, “Guler noted that the U.S. doesn't support Blue Stream II expansion”. And with no clear prospects for Azerbaijani or Iraqi supply of the 'southern corridor' alternative preferred by the US, Guler was left asking the Ambassador: “Where do we buy gas?” Again, he noted that Azerbaijani, Turkmen, and Iraqi supplies were uncertain, and Iran “risky and unreliable”. This being the case — the cable paraphrases him saying — “the U.S. has given Turkey few alternatives; the USG is against Blue Stream II”. And then the cable again quotes him verbatim: “How do I do my job?”

Notably, in response, the Ambassador did not (for instance) say that it was Turkey's choice to refrain from Blue Stream II, or that the US had not actually done anything to impede Turkey's participation in Blue Stream II, or that the US did not actually oppose Blue Stream II at all. Nor did he offer any possibility of compromise to address Turkish concerns and frustrations. Instead, he evidently accepted Guler's frustration with US obstruction of Blue Stream II as having a logical basis — i.e. the US was, in fact, obstructing it — but refused to engage with Guler's transparent push for a change in US policy. Instead, he defended the policy's merits, arguing that Russian gas is no better (or any more permissible) than Iranian:

The Ambassador explained that Blue Stream expansion increases Turkey's reliance on Russia and bottles up Caspian gas. Iran is unreliable and high risk. We recognize and sympathize with Turkey's situation but the answer for Turkey and for Europe is to work together and “make the Caspian Energy Strategy work” [US Embassy Ankara].

As for Bulgaria, a cable from US Embassy Sofia reported that, in a 3 November 2006 meeting between Dep.Assist.Sec.State Bryza, Ambassador to Bulgaria John Beyrle, and Bulgarian Economy and Energy Minister Ovcharov, “Ovcharov agreed with Bryza” (who evidently made this argument) “that Blue Stream was not commercially viable, and Blue Stream's planned expansion would make even less commercial sense” [US Embassy Sofia]. It is not clear whether US activity in Bulgaria, aimed at obstructing Blue Stream II, extended beyond criticizing it in front of Bulgarian officials.

Finally, in Hungary, in a 8 March 2007 cable, US Embassy Budapest described PM Gyurcsany as having a “pro-Russia position” on energy, and proposed that he might be trying “to secure for Hungary the 10bcm Blue[-]Stream-linked gas storage facility”. According to the Embassy, “whatever the PM's rationale — or rationalization” for this effort, in the most charitable analysis his approach seems to rest on two dangerous misconceptions: that Russia and Europe are “codependent;” and that Hungary can somehow secure a privileged position vis-a-vis Moscow. We will be meeting with Dr. Valki as soon as possible to engage him on this issue.

Laszlo Valki, as reported elsewhere in the cable, was the Director of the National Foreign and Security Policy Council just formed by Gyurcsany. Embassy Budapest evidently hoped that he might be open to US arguments against Gyurcsany's “misconceptions” and, thus, that he might constitute a possible avenue for pushback against Hungarian participation in Blue Stream II [US Embassy Budapest].

A month later, Embassy Budapest did not appear to have had much success with Valki. In a 4 April cable, it warned of “a heightened risk of Gyurcsany's gravitation toward Moscow”, but said that:

On Blue Stream and other issues, we see them [the Russians] offering him [Gyurcsany] the illusion of easy solutions. In response we can only offer cold, hard truth. Continued high-level engagement will help address the risk of his drift to the east, and we will make every effort to answer his questions...and get him to act in order to address our concerns [US Embassy Budapest].

Precisely how Embassy Budapest intended to “get him to act” is not clear — but I would note that the ellipses in this passage are not mine, but rather were included in the original text, with the effect of giving the final phrase a rather ominous tone. At minimum, it is certain that Embassy Budapest was acting on the basis of US opposition to

Blue Stream II, and doing so at least by criticizing the project in talks with the most senior Hungarian officials that could be found.

In sum, the US opposed Blue Stream II more or less from the project's inception. Its diplomatic service accordingly sought to develop and coordinate action to obstruct Blue Stream II, action that we know took place at least in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Hungary. In the latter two cases, the limited evidence available indicates only lobbying with the Bulgarian and Hungarian governments. But in the (most important) case of Turkey, US obstruction appears to have gone further, placing enough anti-Blue-Stream-II pressure upon the Turkish government to prompt complaints from it, and efforts by it to soften the US's position. Such complaints and efforts imply a degree of US obstruction actually worth pushing back against, and were met with a USG response that simultaneously accepted their premise — US obstruction of Blue Stream II — and refused to budge from that obstruction. Overall, it is clear that the US opposed Blue Stream II and attempted to obstruct it — through lobbying, and through more coercive/direct methods of unclear scope and content.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned above, these efforts were apparently successful, as Blue Stream II was scrapped in favor of a new planned pipeline, South Stream. Pursued largely in 2007—2014, South Stream also faced US opposition (to be discussed in future work) and was also eventually abandoned. However, it was in turn replaced by what is essentially a re-born Blue Stream II, but with twice the throughput volume: TurkStream. And TurkStream, rapidly planned and built in 2016—2019, was actually realized, despite fierce US opposition (also to be discussed in future work). Indeed, it was not only realized, but also — unlike the Nord Streams — kept in operation even after 2022.

As a result, of the six Russian westward/southward export pipelines planned since Yamal-Yevropa, only Blue Stream I and TurkStream are actually operating as of 2024. This is not the consequence of some extraordinary pro-Russian attitude on the part of Turkey, but rather a testament to Turkey's willingness and ability to define and pursue its own interests, guarding its sovereignty and agency against the US pressure that it has faced (and likely continues to face) regarding the three projects (including the two discussed in this article).

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