



# ENERGY RESOURCES. CONSEQUENCES IN SECURITY FIELD

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*From ancient times, the exploitation of energy resources has intersected with power disputes on international scene and with various forms of local, regional or world wars. In this paper we analyze the role of energy resources, especially oil and natural gases, in crises and conflicts of the beginning of the millennium based on the "game" and the interests of the actors involved in this "oil-rush".*

## 1. Theoretical approach

The "black gold" or natural gases usually means, besides the possible significant financial incomes, difficulties and misery in societies where they are discovered. The majority of hydrocarbons producer countries, especially from East, is lead by authoritarian and corrupt regimes, marked by unsustainable economic development and violent conflicts.

The risk of disputes and conflicts based on access, control and exploitation of energy resources remains rather high. Such conflicts may consist in various forms, from a classic war which involves military forces of great powers, as Persian Gulf war, to internal fights for power between different political, ethnical or tribal factions. In several cases, the ongoing conflicts were started by complex aspects of energy resources from that area. Consequently, the approach of energy problematic with preponderant military means, especially in the case of hydrocarbon resources, is associated with:

- *Territorial disputes* – dissensions over boundary and maritime areas which suddenly became very valuable because of the discovery of important hydrocarbon resources. Examples of such areas are: Caspian Sea, peculiarly those ones claimed by Azerbaijan and Iran; South of China Sea, areas claimed by China, Vietnam, Philippines, and Malaysia; and Bakassi Peninsula from Western Africa claimed by Nigeria and Cameroon;

- *Separatists actions* – when earnings from oil production from an area mostly populated by an ethnical minority are seized by the Government. Usually, members of that minority try to separate and establish their own state in order to obtain all oil incomes. Such situations are in Indonesia (Aceh region), Iraq (Kurds region), and in the southern part of Sudan. In other cases – as Nigerian Delta - the ethnical minorities fight to obtain a broader autonomy and therefore a higher percent from oil revenues;

- *Clashes between local leading groups* – due to the fact that anyone who controls the Government of oil producer countries controls the revenues allocation, too. Thus, those ones who have that control try to maintain their power as much as possible, using any means including repression, and those ones excluded from power are interested in using any instruments, including armed rebellion, terrorism or coup d'état in order to obtain control. Saudi Arabia and Nigeria are the most known examples. In other countries, as Venezuela, the disputes over oil revenues allocation have got some political violence accents;

- The great powers that use *force actions* and methods specific to colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Accordingly, energy resources competition remains a major source of crises and conflicts in contemporary world, as long as the demand increases more quickly than offer, and significant hydrocarbon reserves are localized in areas characterized by profound political-economic unbalances and instability.

International terrorism and many local conflicts are fed by poverty, bad governance, corruption, and poor economic development, resentments toward developed states and nations and globalization.

In the future, once the hydrocarbon production will be at maximum quotas, and consumption and prices will continue to increase, we may expect that the disputes and conflicts over those draining



resources to raise and to be a constant problem on international community's security agenda.

### 2. Disputes and conflicts based on energy interests

The correspondences between oil and military conflicts became evident, peculiarly before and during the First World War. Even Romania's oil reserves were in those years in attention of military coalitions. That was a historic time when our country was in the top five of world oil powers. The mechanized Second World War illustrates dramatically the dependence of military winner's status by the control of oil resources and the United Nations had the absolute supremacy. During the Cold War, the oil competition and political-military conflicts continued to be in the focus of international community. Confrontations between competitors were engaged mostly indirectly, great powers being constrained to respect – more or less formal – the states' right to independent capitalization of hydrocarbons. But, between 1973 and 1974, in a new Israeli-Arabs war context, the "oil weapon" was directly used to solve out some politico-military crises<sup>1</sup>. It was a unique moment of Arab solidarity that surprised the Occident and transformed the OPEC into a leading economic-political actor of international life.

However, after 1975 and especially after the inauguration of the first peace treaties between Israel and some Arab states (Egypt, Jordan), the superpowers USA and USSR restored their control in key-spaces that were rich in hydrocarbon resources. Superpowers cooperated in several areas. Thereby, the US influence became preponderant in Saudi Arabia and Gulf states where the major world oil fields are placed. The USSR maintained its influence in Libya and Algeria. In other regions, Western and South-West Africa, for example, the superpowers were confronting through "interposes" (Cuba and South Africa in Angola, Algeria and Morocco in Western Sahara).

The armed conflict between Iran and Iraq since '80s<sup>2</sup> brings into spotlight the political, military and oil equilibriums from the key-region of the Near and Middle East. USSR and USA alternatively supported both belligerents. In the 1988-1990, the Moscow may appear surprisingly as a winner: Islamist Iran, isolated on international level, depended much more on the diplomatic

and military support of the Soviet Union; and Iraq, disappointed by the inconsequence of the US diplomacy, moved in URSS direction, too. Even after the First Gulf War (1991), the Russian military and business groups obtained the dominant positions in oil sector, besides Germany and France. Concomitant, the Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Gulf emirates became very dependent, under military pressure of Saddam Hussein regime, on US and Great Britain's security protection. In addition, the explicit US alliance with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait allowed Washington to conduct the oil prices on international market into a favourable direction for Occident' interests.

Several fundamental mutations happened between 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries on regional and global level. Competition for oil and natural gases from Caspian Basin and Central Asia, a region that Moscow isn't able to control only thru administrative and military means, was started by the end of Cold War and USSR's dissolution that reshaped the Eurasian geopolitics. The extension of economic globalization turns the oil problematic to new issues.

The transnational companies pressure on market liberalization and free access to energy resources and raw materials that are strongly sustained by international financial organisms. The oil markets became gradually more open from Russian Federation to Libya and Algeria. In the framework of globalization we witness the energy power ascension, as "Asiatic tigers", China, India, Brazil, etc.

The world's economic picture is more dynamic and the competition increases on resources or manufactures and services markets. In the same context, it is obvious that the economic power of European Union and Japan is growing, but US still remains the main beneficiary of globalization.

Economic-political repositions generate the "usually" military collisions. Those conflicts, mainly local ones, were intrastate, usually with external interferences, or interstates.

Thus, after 1990, the conflicts from Chechnya, Dagestan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, and Uzbekistan were recorded in Caspian and Central Asiatic area. Areal arms race is placed in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Uzbekistan, etc. Many of those armed conflicts were materialized in areas rich in hydrocarbons and on routes of energy resources that are alternative to the Russian ones.



Maintaining the Chechnya and Dagestan within Russian Federation explains somehow the interest for Baku-Novorossiisk pipeline<sup>3</sup>. Instead, different divisions from Georgia (South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara) or Nagorno-Karabakh are close by Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan alternative pipeline. Concomitantly, the Kurds rebellion from South-East Turkey and North-West Iran threatened the ambitious Nabucco project (from Iran to Central Europe).

In the Near and Middle East, the Second Gulf War from 2003, ended with the collapse of Saddam Hussein regime, has changed the local oil geopolitics thru military means<sup>4</sup>. The Iraqi energy resources, controlled until 2003 by the Russians, Germans, and Frenchmen, were now managed by the democratic Government from Bagdad. On the other hand, the main local deposits tend to pass in possession of the semi-independent authorities from Iraqi Kurdistan and Basra area. The stake of oil revenues explains not only the intensification of fights between Shiite and Sunnite communities but the approval of a new law for the state's federalization.

Despite the internal disputes, inter-religious conflicts, and Al-Qaeda attacks, there are some profitable oil businesses in Iraq from which local leaders benefit, also Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and certainly transnational companies.

A forceful military, land, navy and air disposition – mainly American – protects the extraction, the process, and the export of oil and natural gases' products to Eastern Asia, European Union, and North America. Recently, UN peace forces (preponderant NATO) were deployed to South Lebanon<sup>5</sup>, in order to consolidate the Mediterranean flank of this strategic disposition that is vital for world's economy.

To the East of Iraq, US-Iran tensions are primarily confrontations associated to oil resources competition, too. The Teheran Islamist regime aims to discourage any US' attempt to insert Iran by force in the world's economic circuits through its nuclear program. Meantime, the Russian-American, Russian-Chinese, and American-Chinese games of interests overlap the American-Iranian tensions. Threatened by the George W. Bush's Administration, the Teheran authorities insistently appeal to Russian Federation and China protection.

The notable advances of influence's extension of Chinese economy in Central Asia are very

interesting. A strategic pipeline connects already Kazakhstan to China. Other strategic pipeline will be rapidly built from Turkistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to Eastern China<sup>6</sup>. Chinese specialists are also very active in hydrocarbon areas from Iran and Pakistan. Consequently, the "Great Game" of Caspic oil will be played between USA, Russian Federation, EU, and China. Thus the contiguous states (Kazakhstan, Turkistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan) must soon take into account a new regional context.

In the near future it may be possible for these countries to be constrained to make diplomatic-economic and military choices hard to imagine in the past: to integrate in Shanghai Group or in different forms of association with NATO and EU.

Also, the various military conflicts from Southern and South-Eastern Asia are associated with the problems of the hydrocarbon resources' capitalization. There are also some speculations referring to the fact that military operations of NATO and US in Afghanistan and Pakistan may target creation of an alternative route from Central Asia to Indian Ocean. In Bangladesh, the Islamist radicals act with violence against authorities and foreign companies, and in Pakistan, the rich oil Balochistan militates for independence. The long time civil conflict from Aceh area<sup>7</sup> (Western Indonesia) is associated with the distribution of the benefits resulted from hydrocarbons' capitalization between local people and central power. Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, and Philippines compete for region's maritime deposits. Military dictatorship from Burma is subject of the "cross-fire" of local guerrillas, China, India, Thailand, and regional and transnational companies. Eastern Timor became the scene of internal fights in the framework of hydrocarbons competition between Indonesia and Australia.

The tensions, crises, and conflicts from Africa<sup>8</sup> were caused by traditional ethnic and tribal or religious causes, territorial disputes, etc. But, in the last decades it has recorded an interference of these confrontations with the amplification of international competition for resources, especially oil.

Thus, the economic competition in Africa from oil point of view is focalized on foreign companies' competition. Various forcible means are used such as: bribe of local leaders, political support for some regimes, etc. The population has a relative



profit from an economic and living standard point of view where there are powerful leaders who succeeded to converge under their influence all of the interests groups, as in Libya and Gabon. On the other hand, there are countries like Nigeria or Angola where corruption is the “password”, and state and oil companies’ lack of transparency hide almost everything in that field excepting the pollution effects: biosphere destruction, miserable living conditions of population, and high mortality rate. In that framework, the oil may be the real chance for Africa.

But, today it remains preponderant a chance for Occident. The correlation between international disputes for hydrocarbons and other resources and local conflicts is visible in: civil war from Sudan (carried out in oil areas from East, South, and West and even in Darfur); repeatedly rebellions from Chad; recent Islamist coup d’état from Mauritania; Islamists’ constant action in Algeria; rebellions of populations from Nigerian Delta; civil war from the two Congo republics, especially in the Ituri area from the Democratic Republic of the Congo frontier with Uganda and Rwanda. Angola was a long time in civil war. The dictatorships from Equatorial Guinea or Sao Tome and Principe are sustained by transnational companies. The secessionist movement survived in Eastern Nigeria due to Ibo population.

Experts consider that the powerful international companies aim at a complex strategy in Africa. This includes: the introduction of hydrocarbon resources into world economy circuits; markets’ liberalization; encouraging the stable political regimes and solving the local conflicts by negotiations in the framework of African Union and UN.

Generally, the Anglo-American companies dominate the continent. These companies are sometimes in competition with the French ones and counter the extension of Chinese influence, especially in Sudan.

### 3. Conclusions

Hydrocarbons competition appears to dominate the beginning of the millennium with a special focus on the states from Gulf, Caspian Basin, Eastern and Western Siberia, Western Africa, South-East Asia, etc. The fact that disputes and conflicts are concentrated in those areas is interesting.

For that matter, the closest link between energy resources and conflict derives from two of their essential characteristics: the vital importance for economic and military nations’ power and the unequal geographic distribution.

The problem of energy resources’ exhaustion and energy security prevails the agenda of international actors. The hydrocarbons competition in the contemporary world remains yet an important source of crises and conflicts. It has a peculiar role in polarization and/or catalysis of forces as long as the demand rises more quickly than the supply, and major hydrocarbon reserves are placed in areas characterized by profound political-economic unbalances and instability.

Still, if the economic competition on world oil and natural gases market will function on clear competition rules, the starting of political-military crises and conflicts will not be a matter-of-course.

Additionally, in the energy field, the major actors must take into consideration the challenges of globalization process, the numerous local or regional disputes and conflicts, any dysfunction or vulnerability from one side of the world (of a energy source) affecting the consumers from the hole world.

Probably, the most adequate solution in the actual epoch is the democratization and securitization of sources with preponderant non-military means. Also, interdependence, not energy independence, may be the most viable way to solve out the rising consumption of energy resources.

### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> GILPIN, Robert, **The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century**, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> DUFOUR, Jean-Louis, **The International Crises**, Corint Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 181-184.

<sup>3</sup> FRUNZETI, Teodor; Vladimir Zodian (coord.), **2005 World. Politic and Military Encyclopedia**, CTEA Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 354.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, pp. 258-260.

<sup>5</sup> UN, *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)*, [www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil).



<sup>6</sup> Energy Information Administration, *Country Analysis Brief - China*, [www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/China/Full.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/China/Full.html).

[crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict\\_search&l=1&t=1&c\\_country=49](http://crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=49).

<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch*, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org).

<sup>8</sup> World Factbook 2007, [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook).

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