Energy security and pattern of regional conflicts in Eurasia: From a constructive framework of analysis

Nalin Kumar Mohapatra

Original article

Article history:
Received: 24 May 2017
Accepted: 17 November 2017
Published: 21 February 2018

Correspondence:
Nalin Kumar Mohapatra: nalin238@gmail.com

Peer review:
Double blind

Publisher:
Veruscript, Unit 41, Pall Mall Deposit, 124-128 Barby Road, London, W10 6BL, UK

Copyright:
© 2018 Mohapatra. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and its authors credited.

Keywords:
pipeline diplomacy; energy security; radicalism; resource conflict; societal security

Citation:

Link to this article:
https://www.veruscript.com/a/UQ2OTI/
Energy security and pattern of regional conflicts in Eurasia: From a constructive framework of analysis

Nalin Kumar Mohapatra

School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Mehrauli Road, New Delhi, 110067, India

Abstract

The term energy security is undergoing a sea change from a state-centric economic conception to a sociological one. The definitional aspect is undergoing a transformation because of the changing pattern of relations between “energy producing and consuming states” along with “transit states”. Eurasia is one such region where the broader definition of energy security can be applicable. The existence of historically rooted social conflicts like Chechnya, South Ossetia, Crimea, “simmering discontent” in Siberia and Far East, and primordial apprehensions between ethnic groups (Armenian and Azeri) in Nagorno Karabakh are providing a structural basis for the accentuation of regional conflicts. Most of these conflicts are taking place in Eurasia due to existence of natural resources like energy. Often competition over controlling transportation corridor is also generating societal tension. Some of these trajectories are putting this geopolitical space into a “cauldron.” Against this backdrop, Constructivism is emerging as a major theoretical approach to study the securitization processes in Eurasia.

Introduction

The Eurasian security structure, in general, and energy sector, in particular, is in a state of perpetual crisis. First, the prices of oil and gas fell drastically, which affected Eurasian energy economies adversely. Second, because of the fall in the energy prices, the energy-producing Eurasian states are facing multiple challenges ranging from geopolitical one to societal conflict. On the geopolitical front, there is a growing bonhomie among the three Caspian states, namely Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia. At the same time, Georgia is also making efforts to rebuild its relations with Iran in the energy spheres. Third, Russia is trying to have equal leverage with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is happening despite the fact that it shares a closer ethnic bondage with Armenia. Finally, at the social front as mentioned above, notwithstanding fluctuated energy prices, there is a growing ethno-religious conflict in this part of the world. As a result of which the securitisation processes in this geopolitical space are at stake. Ethno-religious conflicts currently taking place in Eurasia are to some extent replicating the scenario of Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, and South Sudan. The present article is an attempt to examine three broader issues confronting Eurasia over the years. These are the geopolitical nature of energy security in the context of this landmass, transportation of the same to the world market, often through transit


states, which in turn flare up identity issues in the form of radicalism as well as ethnic conflicts, and finally, its impact on the broader Eurasian regional security structure.\(^3\)

Ever since the discoveries of hydrocarbon reserves, what one witnesses in this geopolitical space is that there is an intensification of rivalries among great powers to tap the resources. This can be evident from First and Second World War. One may add here that a similar form of power rivalries is taking place in the post-1991 phase also. The rivalries often accentuating the societal conflict (both radicalism as well as inter-ethnic) in the Eurasian space as discussed above. In this background, one can find linkages between these two elements, that is, the structural factor which operates in a geopolitical prism and the pattern of identity relations manoeuvres at a socio-anthropological framework. Both these elements are closely linked to the conception of energy security.\(^4\) Some of these issues constitute the crux of the Constructivist approach of International Relations theory. Keeping the above-mentioned structural frameworks in mind, the present article confirms to following hypotheses. These are the following:

a) Asymmetric energy resource distribution among the social groups to a greater extent is heightening societal conflict in Eurasia.

b) Growing societal conflict based on resource distribution in Eurasia is putting a stress on the geopolitical structure of this region.

The present study adopts both historical and comparative methods to study energy security and its impact on societal conflict. Historical method is useful in determining the causes and sequences of societal conflict, as well as making a correlation with the resource distribution. The comparative method is able to identify the nature and pattern of societal conflict in Eurasia. The present research article is going to differ from earlier studies on following points. First, it gives a socio-anthropological perspective to the issue of energy security premised on Constructivism. Second, this article focuses on linking the geopolitics of energy security with identity politics, which is currently grappling the Eurasian region. Finally, it highlights the tenuous nature of the energy-societal conflict in a comparative perspective in the Eurasian region. The study extensively uses both existing theoretical and empirical literature on Constructivism, energy security, as well as proliferation of societal conflict prevailing in the Eurasian region.

**Constructivism and energy security: A theoretical construct**

As has been discussed over the years, the definitional aspect of energy security is undergoing a rapid change than it is generally understood in the purely economic terminology of demand and supply. On the other hand, social norms, identity and spaces, are also playing an equally important role in broadening the prisms of energy security. It is in this context that Constructivism is emerging as major approaches to study energy security.\(^5\) This approach in International Relations operates on the premise that “material world” is being largely shaped by the “perception of the

---


---
social actors” and “agreement” they arrived upon. As has been stated by Emmanuel Adler: “the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world.” The social actors play an equally important role in determining the “material world,” and their perception is largely being shaped by collective consciousnesses evolved over a period of time. It has been underlined that collective consciousnesses define the interaction as well as perception towards each other in the realm of “material world.” Keeping this in the background, it is necessary to understand who the social actors are, how they interact with each other, what is their perception to each other in the framework of “material world.” Since production and distribution elements are defined by the social structure, one has to envisage the role played by social groups in regulating these relations.

As has been observed by Jack Hirshleifer, social groups generally engage in two types of activities, namely “production” and “appropriation” in a complex industrial system. Hirshleifer uses a phrase called “combat power function” in determining the social structure. In this model, he argues that social groups use force to appropriate resources. His thesis on “combat power function” is quite appropriate to study social conflict in the resources-rich regions of Eurasia. Competition among various social groups to control and distribute natural resources like energy is accentuating the level of conflict. This in turn is having an adverse affect on both state and regional security. Studies also demonstrate that social framework is being increasingly used by groups to have dominant control over natural resources like energy. However, the problem arises while defining the nature of group identity.

As has been stated by Emmanuel Adler: “the analytics of continuing conflict,” Synthetic, 1988, 76 (2): 201–233. As social theorists often argue, “identity is constructed.”

The “constructed identity” is often interwoven with resource structure of a state. It is in this background that a state depending heavily on resources for deriving rent faces societal conflict. Often the leadership takes a minimal interest in providing public goods to the wider masses. In some other cases, the ruler allots public goods to a fewer social group to generate patrimonial loyalties. This in the long run puts a stress and strain on the political institutions as groups often mobilise themselves on the basis of social identity. Conflicts currently grappling Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Nigeria are a good example in this regard. The Nigerian Delta region of Nigeria, which is the epicentre of Nigeria’s oil industry, is also becoming the hub of social conflict. Often multinational

---


8 Adler, “Seizing the middle ground.” 322–323.


10 Broome, “Constructivism in international political economy.”


12 Ibid.

13 James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin in this regard have used two mechanisms to identify social groups and its implications for conflict. These are “rules of membership” and “set of characteristic.” Both of them argue that the notion of identity is broadly interwoven around these two categories. While the first one provides a basis for “membership,” the second category is focused on the mechanisms through which social groups will associate with the larger group. Along with these two processes, what brings identity into the forefront of political processes is that elite often manipulate and mobilise the local communities in the name of social identities to achieve their own narrower goals. As social theorists often argue, “identity is constructed.”

14 14

15 This in the long run puts a stress and strain on the political institutions as groups often mobilise themselves on the basis of social identity. Conflicts currently grappling Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Nigeria are a good example in this regard. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which is the epicentre of Nigeria’s oil industry, is also becoming the hub of social conflict. Often multinational
oil conglomerates like Shell, Exxon Mobil along with the Nigerian government have exploited the rich resources of this part of the world. This led to the growing resentment from the local population, and the same was manifested through the formation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Along with MEND, another radical group came up known as Niger Delta Avengers indulging in militant activities. What one witness in the context of the Niger Delta region is the growing mobilisation of local population in the form of identity to capture the resources of this region. This met with strong resistance from the ruling elite. As a result of which there is a spurt of social turmoil in this part of the world. In addition to the Niger Delta region, the Lake Chad region, where oil is located, is also becoming a hotbed of insurgency and guerrilla warfare. Boko Haram, the dreaded terrorist organisation, has involved itself in the resource conflict and regularly attacks the oil installations. The Nigerian example demonstrates that energy resources play an important role in generating revenues for the bulk of the population. This radical group uses identity as a rallying point for capturing resources. As has been argued by Douglas Rogers, oil is closely intertwined with the socio-political structure and has a deeper influence on the politics of identity. To quote Rogers: “oil shapes human lives from sites of exploration and production to transport and consumption, from the tight links between oil and global finance.” Energy is becoming an important source of conflict because of its monetary value as well as scarce supplies to the global market. Because of scarcity, social groups often organise themselves to capture the resources by resorting to militant activities. This perpetuates a spate of violence often termed as “resource wars.”

Patrimonial and primordial alliances got the necessary bonding because of the scarcity, and an incentive exists to capture the same. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler’s path-breaking model of “Greed-Grievances” theory is also based on the above-mentioned proposition. This model highlights that social communities compete with each other to acquire resources in the name of rectifying historical injustice is exacerbating societal conflict. “Greed” and “Grievances” often perpetuate the “culture of violence” as outlined by Johan Galtung. Galtung argues that “survival needs” and “identity needs” go together and may accentuate societal insecurity. Constructivist like Alexander Wendt also emphasises on the nature of “societal interaction” as a factor which in turn “prolong” conflict.

The correlation between intensity of ethnic conflict and export potentiality of a primary commodity has also been highlighted by Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner. They cite the examples of African countries like Angola and Sierra Leone in this regard. In all these three conflicts, rebel organise themselves by plundering rich natural resources in their respective regions. Rebel groups resort to

---


22 Ibid.


the tactics of plundering resources or controlling pipelines to generate finance.\textsuperscript{25} Collier et al.\textsuperscript{26} further emphasise on the likelihood of conflicts that are more likely to occur in the transitional energy economies. This is because as Collier et al highlight there is no other scope for alternative development and resources often used for “financing radical activities”.

The above-mentioned theoretical proposition given by Collier et al could be structured in the context of the West Asian region where radical Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) forces are using capturing of resources like oil as a strategy to mobilise identity. As reported, most of the oil fields in the Kurdish parts of Iraq are under the sway of ISIS, and they use the oil money to finance their terrorist activities.\textsuperscript{27}

Energy is not only playing an important role in accentuating conflict but also shapes “duration” of a particular conflict. Conflicts in Angola, Colombia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria are example of this thesis highlighted by James Fearon. He observed that: “the availability and use by rebel groups of finances from contraband such as cocaine, precious gems, or opium ... helps to have a dependable source of finance and weapons.”\textsuperscript{28} Fearon’s proposition of correlating natural resources and conflict has been ably supported by a number of scholars in recent years. The same argument posits that external state and nonstate actors (oil industries) play a major role in supporting radicals. This happens when these radicals got an upper hand in the conflict in the longer run.\textsuperscript{29} Positioning resource conflicts in terms of social identity will give an objective analysis to study over the nature of conflict patterns.\textsuperscript{30}

Four inferences one can draw from the above discussed theoretical polemics having relevance to resource conflict in the Eurasian region are as follows:

a) The structural geopolitics of Eurasia to a great extent is shaped by demand and supply of energy resources.

b) Constructivist elements like identity, collective consciousness along with “greed and grievances” are interacting with “material force” like resources, thus, generating social strife as discussed by Adler above.

c) Taking advantage of the fluid social structure in Eurasia, non-state actors like radical and insurgent groups are operating in a proactive way to control flow of energy resources. Pipeline routes are often exacerbating identity conflict in Eurasia.\textsuperscript{31}

d) Using Fearon’s proposition, one can add that availability of abundant energy as well as existence of conflict zones in the vicinity of Eurasia like Afghanistan is contributing in exacerbating the “duration” of conflict.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 11–12.


\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
Mapping Eurasian energy structure and the evolvement of structural geopolitics

While correlating energy security of Eurasia, the Central Asia–Caspian region along with Siberia and Far East need closer attention. The “mutual interdependence” between energy producing and energy transit countries produce a complex geopolitics in this part of the world. This in turn shapes up the nature of societal security.\[^{33}\]

The fall of oil prices in the international market coupled with the collapse of the Soviet Union puts the energy sector of the Eurasian states into disorder in the beginning of 1990s. This factor along with lack of adequate exposure to technology, as well as regulating their energy relations with external markets, complicated the transition in the energy sector. The volatility in the energy sector during the Soviet era had an adverse effect on the social structure of this space. This happened because it brought into forefront some of the issues like identity, resource, and its distribution. One may add here that the historical experiences along with geopolitical compulsions are interacting with each other in shaping the identity geopolitics of Eurasia.\[^{34}\] It is interesting to note that the geopolitical configuration taking place in this space is largely due to the nature of the energy game. If one treats Eurasia as replication of post-Soviet space, than all the post-Soviet states in one way or another are playing a role in shaping the dynamic of energy politics.\[^{35}\] Though the Caspian states are producing oil and natural gas, still they are depending on other states for transporting the same to the destined countries. To illustrate the point further, Russia is still exporting the bulk of its energy to the European states through Ukraine. This brings in the role of transit states in the complex energy game.\[^{36}\]

During the Soviet period, energy played an important role in formulating country’s foreign policy. When the entire world plunged into a crisis mode because of the formation of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, Aleksei Kosygin, then Soviet Premier, stated that oil production went up to 30 million tons in 1940 to 450 million tons in 1974.\[^{37}\] Though the Soviet Union proudly proclaimed itself as a major exporter of crude, it is the same natural resource that contributed to its demise.\[^{38}\] Lack of adequate exposure to technology along with minimal interaction with external powers complicated the transition in the energy sector in the Eurasian states. Just after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1992, the Russian government has initiated a programme known as “Cash for share.”\[^{39}\] Azeri government, despite facing some thaws because of internal political turmoil, initiated development of “Chirag, Azeri, and Kapaz” oil fields. On the other hand, the Kazakh government took steps to develop the much hyped Tengiz oil field and also tried to diversify energy routes.\[^{40}\]

There is a similarity in the geopolitical developments that took place in the post 1991 phase, as well as in the late 19th century happening, when oil was actually discovered in this part of the world. Scramble for resources, that is, energy, search for pipeline routes, and great power competition and intermittent societal conflict are some of the common trajectories what one can notice both then

\[^{38}\]Ibid.
\[^{40}\]Ibid.
and now.\textsuperscript{41} Each of these geo-energy complexes discussed above define the geopolitical structure of the respective regions. In the absence of a strong Centre what one witness is emergence of multiple actors staking a claim over energy. As has been underlined, the Russian hegemony in the energy sector took a U turn when in 1994 the Azeri government signed an historic agreement known as “Contract of the Century.”\textsuperscript{42} The signing of the agreement among energy conglomerates paved the way for Azerbaijan to chart out a new course of action for the country. In his opening remark, the then Azeri President Haider Aliyev made one important point, that is, “Oil has been used in the interests of the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{43} The point Aliyev wanted to underline is that Azeri oil contributed a lot to the development of the Soviet Union and the same can also be used for the development of Azerbaijan. Taking advantage of the murkier geopolitical situation, external powers, particularly Western countries and China, thought that these nascent energy-producing states can be cajoled into their sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{44} The accentuation of regional conflict in the Central Asian–Caspian states over the transportation of oil and gas has also perpetuated identity conflict. However, Russia in the beginning by using its traditional clout wanted that oil and gas from this region should pass through its territory. What one witness in the geopolitical front is that Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan (despite its policy of “permanent neutrality”) initiated a multi-vector policy, which to a great extent eroded Moscow’s “hegemonic position”.\textsuperscript{45} On the other hand, in its own domestic spheres — North Caucasus, Siberia, and Far East — Russia tried to consolidate its dominance in the energy sectors despite facing considerable challenge from radical groups, as well as external geopolitical players. This is true especially in the context of Chechnya and Dagestan.\textsuperscript{46}

Along with external geopolitical competition, the incessant internal conflict based on the mobilisation of identity among the competing social groups in the Eurasian region and the spillover effect of external conflicts like Afghanistan compounded the identity-based security threat to the energy structure of Eurasia. On the other hand, in the Siberia and Far East, South Ossetia, and Crimea, what one observes is that both geopolitics and identity are operating simultaneously in perpetuating geo-identity crisis. This to a significant extent affected the energy security.\textsuperscript{47}

**Energy security and nature of regional conflicts in Eurasia**

While looking at the notion of energy security and regional conflict in the context of Eurasia, one can draw three linkages. These are energy-producing regions of Eurasia; second, on whose territories the energy resources are being transported to the external market; and finally, how the societal actors perceive this structural framework of energy transportation and profit distribution.\textsuperscript{48} As has been observed in the context of Dagestan, the social groups based on tribal identity like “Avars, Dargin, and Lezgin” are competing with each other to capture scarce resources like energy from the Caspian Sea region. Apart from oil and gas sector, controlling the “all-weather”

\textsuperscript{41} Alec Rasizade, “The mythology of the munificent Caspian bonanza and its concomitant pipeline geopolitics,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 2000, 20 (1–2): 138–152, \url{http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634930220127937}.


\textsuperscript{43} “Azerbaijan: Contract of the century,” \url{http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/contract}.

\textsuperscript{44} Robert V. Barylski, “Russia, the West, and the Caspian energy hub,” *Middle East Journal*, 1995, 49 (2): 218–219, \url{http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328801}.


\textsuperscript{46} Mousavi, “Some notes on the Caspian energy”; Orzagaliyev, “Competition for pipeline export routes in the Caspian region.”


Makhachkala port, located on the Caspian shore, is also becoming a major bone of contention among these social groups. The recent change of leadership and the appointment of Sergei Melikov as the republican head, belonging to Lezgin clan, are a pointer in this direction. Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Melikov as republican head just to checkmate growing preponderance of Ramazan Abdulatipov who gave up his position. Abdulatipov has control over Dagestan economy and belongs to the Avar clan, which is considered to be much more powerful in Dagestan. As a result of which, the federal government found him difficult to manage. One may recall here that in 2014, Abdulatipov annoyed the federal administration when he gave a call to establish Dagestan Oil and Gas Company while addressing the republican Parliament. He stated that: “Dagestan has many oil and gas fields. However, this factor does not influence social-welfare of the population.”

Fearon’s model can also be employed to study the conflict pattern in the Eurasian region as the harnessing of resources like energy is one of the key contributing factors for current volatility in this geopolitical space. As the value of energy has not declined over the years (despite recent recession), it provides a structure to generate symbols what the constructivists posit. Though theoretical works link energy security with societal conflict in the energy-producing states, however, they have not identified about how energy transit states are facing social conflict over the years.

Eurasian region provides an answer to this issue in details. This space also can fill the gap in the available literature by highlighting the fact that the social conflict is also being partly aggravated due to resource scarcity and resource transit, which could be studied in the context of Crimea and South Ossetia.

One may recall here the fact that some of the regional conflicts which took place in the first half of the 1990s provided the necessary impetus to the geopolitical reconfiguration of this part of the world, be it the Chechen/Dagestani conflict or the impasse in the Nagorno Karabakh region. These regional conflicts in one way or the other can be traced back to the pipeline diplomacy, which some of the Eurasian states pursued in the post-1991 phase. It has been argued that the protracted conflict in Chechnya and the neighbouring republic of Dagestan located in the North Caucasus region of Russia are primarily due to energy resources. The distribution of resources and profit create fissures in the political structure and contributed to the accentuation of political violence.

The “capability” of actors and their “bargaining” with the institutional structures determine the stability of the political system. If there will be disequilibrium between political and social structures, it may also lead to conflict. The North Caucasus conflict zone can be put into this structural matrix as outlined by Michael Ross, James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin. They argue that the linkages between “oil production ... positively associated with civil war onset.”

Some of these theoretical postulates highlighting linkages between energy and conflict as discussed above can be applied to Eurasia also. In this regard, Chechnya can be considered an apt example.
where resource competition, pipeline routes, and societal conflicts go side by side in accentuating regional conflict.57

Chechnya crisis and the imperatives of energy distribution

The Chechnya crisis is one ideal example where identity, resource distribution, conflict are correlated with each other, thus, creating a new kind of conflict structure in the region. In the post-1991 phase, taking advantage of weak federal structure’s control over the peripheries along with growing demand for resource control by radical groups are some of the factors heightening the insecurity for the region. The roots of the problem can be traced back to the Tsarist era, which contributed to the development of energy infrastructures in the North Caucasian Republic. Even after the demise of the Soviet Union and despite the slowdown of the energy industry, Chechen republic used to produce huge quantities of oil.58 In addition to the production of official oil, what one observes from the information given by Russian scholar Valery Tishkov is that oil exploration used to be a “small scale industry for most of the Chechens.” This statement of Tishkov can be understood from the fact that there was rampant illegal oil production and it fell down drastically.59 Despite sabotage of the oil sector by the insurgents, Chechnya because of its location can be considered as the lynchpin of the Caspian energy structure. This gives the Chechen radicals an upper hand in ensuring bargaining with the Centre. Moscow wanted to ensure a perennial control over the flow of oil from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossisk. The Conflict in Chechnya is considered as an impediment in ensuring the perennial hegemony over the above-mentioned route from Russia. Sharp increases in the energy price in the international market after remaining under slump also forced then Russian President Boris Yeltsin to reach an agreement with the radicals. This strategy of Russia aimed at ensuring smooth flow of Central Asian and Caucasian oil.60 Breakthrough between the Chechen rebels and Moscow took place when both the sides signed the “Provisional Peace Treaty” in 1997. The treaty envisaged for protection of energy installations, as well as pipeline routes. Some of these measures provided Russia an opportunity to bring this region under its sphere of influence. The signing of the agreement also reinforced the significance of the Baku–Novorossisk oil pipeline as this pipeline passes through Chechnya.61 Moscow in order to give a greater teething to its control over Chechen oil industry also appointed his own man Salambek Hajjiiev the former energy minister to head the Chechen government.62 Though Yeltsin took utmost care to reach out to the rebels, however, the Chechen rebels attacked neighbouring region of Dagestan. This contributed to the escalation of conflicts also known as “Second Chechen War”. The geopolitical crisis in Chechnya took place in the background of the acceleration of the prices of oil in the international market, mounting American interest in the Baku–Tiblisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, as well as increasing isolation of Russia from the Caspian region following the West’s growing penetration.63 Chechen rebels carried out same measures as they did during the first phase of war to scuttle the Russian pipeline network. Attack on Dagestan was carried out by the Chechen rebels to dislodge the energy infrastructure. This has had an impact on Russia’s

62 Meier, “What does Russia see in Chechnya? Oil.”
position in the Caspian region. After the end of Second Chechen War and with the support of Russian military, the Russian energy conglomerates like LukOil, Transneft, and Gazprom wrested control over the energy resources of Chechnya, as well as pipeline routes. A special law was passed by the State Duma under which these oil majors took steps to create their own security agencies. This helped them to protect their energy interests. Despite a lull in oil prices in the last few years, there is a growing interest in Chechen energy from all quarters. The Chechen republican President Ramzan Kadyrov, considered to be a staunch ally of Putin, has lamented the growing indifference shown by Moscow in utilising the natural resources. Distribution of revenue between Moscow and Grozny is in fact one of the major bones of contention. The Chechen authority is taking advantage of the fall in oil prices and showing interest in purchasing the stakes from a Rosneft refinery in the Chechen republic. The republican leadership of late is also accusing Rosneft that it is not carrying out the further development of energy sectors in the region. The demand of local authorities in handing down the energy assets has been subjected to large-scale debates and controversies. As reported in Russian newspaper Kommersant, Rosneft agreed to sell its asset worth 11.8 billion rouble producing around 300 thousand oil per year. In addition to the geopolitical entanglement, what is making the situation of Grozny quite murkier is the growing penetration of ISIS radicals in this region. The recent West Asian crisis is also having an impact on the situation in Chechnya.

The Chechnya conflict in the context of energy security can be studied in the prism of “greed” to capture resources and “grievances” as discussed by Paul Collier et al, to demonstrate historical injustice. The militants are mobilising masses towards radicalism using above mentioned means. Besides this, the lucrative oil market is also becoming the major bone of contention between Moscow and Grozny. What appears in the case of Chechnya is that location of conflicting zones adjacent to Grozny is also fuelling the crisis. The Afghan conflict and growing radicalisation in the Central Asian and Caspian region are some of the external elements accentuating the crisis of Chechnya.

Unlike Chechnya, where radicalism, energy production, and transit routes propelled the Chechnya conflict, in South Ossetia, on the other hand, identity conflict is rooted in collective consciousness among the stakeholders. Its location as a transit point for transportation of energy along with North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s expansionism has perpetuated the Ossetian energy conflict.

South Ossetia, “normative identity,” and the politics of energy pipeline

What one can infer from the South Ossetian conflict is that destabilisation of a transit region will also have an impact on the overall energy security of Eurasia. At the hindsight, it appears that South Ossetia got de facto independence after the intervention by Russia in 2008. However, the real reason for conflict in South Ossetia can be attributed to the operationalisation of BTC. The

pipeline also dented Russia’s role as a key energy supplier to the European Union (EU). The South Ossetian crisis also brought the issue of Eurasian geopolitics at the centre stage in which external geopolitical players got an opportunity to play a critical role. At the same time, it also redrew the geopolitical map of this part of the world between Russian bloc and the Western camp led by the United States, as the latter has a growing strategic interest in this part of the world.

As mentioned above, the accentuation of the geopolitical crisis closed down both the BTC pipeline routes and the Baku–Supsa pipeline for a few days. This impacted the energy security of the European countries. The South Ossetian crisis also demonstrated the vulnerability of the alternative pipeline routes bypassing Russia. Second, it also forced the Caspian states like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to reorient their foreign policy toward Russia in a more conciliatory note. Though the conflict ended long, the pipeline routes are still facing problem due to the conflicting legal status of this region. South Ossetian authority has also objected to the Baku–Supsa pipeline stating that it is crossing into their territories. This is generating apprehension in the mind of the operators of this pipeline route regarding its feasibility.

Like the BTC and Baku–Supsa pipeline, which faced operational problem due to geopolitical developments in recent years, the Gazprom-operated gas pipeline connecting with Armenia and passing through South Ossetia and Abkhazia is also facing threats. This is happening as Georgia is employing a retaliatory tactics.

Despite more than 9 years have been passed the situation in this part of the world has not improved much. In July 2017 as reported, Russia took control over a crucial link in the Baku–Supsa pipeline corridor. This was resented by Georgia, which accused Russia of “provocation.” Analysts are of the opinion that this disruption was carried out basically to obstruct flow of energy to Europe. This, along with issue of transit fees, is one of the major bones of contention between British Petroleum, the major operator of this route, and the South Ossetian authority, who are demanding higher transit fees. South Ossetian conflict is a good example of how identity mobilisation, pipeline diplomacy, and competition among the powers to secure a space for themselves go on simultaneously in a complex geopolitical game. Both Russia and Georgian authorities are manipulating the identity issues to have dominance in this part of the world.

Alexander Wendt’s notion that “identity” and “interaction” sharpen the conflict pattern in a social structure can also be applied to the Ossetian conflict. One can also paraphrase “material forces” as used by Adler, in the context of energy security to map out the South Ossetian conflict, which will give better meaning to the context. Though South Ossetia has attained a de facto independence
from Georgia and not recognised by any major external powers, still one envisage the role of energy in accentuating the crisis.\textsuperscript{82}

Along the South Ossetian crisis, which has a deeper impact on the energy security of Eurasia, the conflict in Crimea also put a strain on energy security of Eurasia. Like the South Ossetia crisis, it appears as identity crisis, but the roots of the problem can be traced back to energy issues.\textsuperscript{83}

**Energy security, transit geopolitics, and the Crimean crisis**

The geopolitical structure of Eurasia, which remained lull for a considerable time (especially after the South Ossetia crisis), flared up again when the issue of Crimea came to the forefront. Crimea crisis demonstrated that despite best efforts of external powers to squeeze Russia in Eurasian energy diplomacy, still it has the ability to bounce back. Because of its geographical location, Moscow plays an important role in regulating the flow of energy to the external market. This is more so in the context of the EU. It is the EU countries who suffered most as a significant amount of energy used to transport through the Black Sea on whose coast Crimea is located.\textsuperscript{84} The geopolitical undercurrents that took place in Eurasia following the accession of Crimea by Moscow underscore two strategic points. These are the following: Russia gained a preponderance over substantial energy wealth located on the coast of the Black Sea; and second, it (Crimea) acts as a strategic “chokepoint” for the transportation of energy to Europe. This gives Moscow an advantage in the energy transit routes.\textsuperscript{85} As reported in local newspapers just after the takeover of Crimea by the Russian authority, the first thing the Crimean authority did was handing over of Chornomornaftogaz to Kremlin. This Crimean gas company was responsible for exploration of energy fields located on Black Sea coast. As per the data given by “Draft Energy Strategy to 2030” prepared under Ukrainian government, the Black Sea Coast is having around 4–13 trillion cubic meter of gas and has the potentiality to produce around 7 to 9 bcm per annum for upto 2030. In addition to the conventional energy sources, this region has the capability to produce around 300 MW of electricity along with Shale gas.\textsuperscript{86} This incident has had a devastating impact on the energy production potentiality of Ukraine. It has been reported that Chornomornaftogaz, the Crimean gas conglomerates, produced a record amount of gas of 1.84 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2015. In addition to this, new places were explored to produce the same.\textsuperscript{87} Prior to accession, the Ukrainian regime signed a number of agreements with energy giants like foreign energy industries like Exxon Mobile, Eni, and French energy conglomerate Électricité de France (edf). This could have helped Kiev to achieve a relative self sufficiency in energy and to reduce their energy dependence on Russia. In addition to this measure, with the active support from EU’s pet project, known as “Project of Common Interests” commenced in March 2009, Kiev tried to import energy from Azerbaijan through the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{88}

The biggest causality because of the Crimea crisis is, however, the Russian dream project of connecting Europe through the South Stream Pipeline. As agreed, the parties to the contract

\textsuperscript{82} Nalbandov, “Living with security dilemmas.”


\textsuperscript{85} Ibid; Teper, “Official Russian identity discourse in light of the annexation of Crimea.”


worked out to deliver 63 bcm of gas to the European countries. However, because of the development in and around the Black Sea region, the European Commission agreed to annul the contract. This was done as part of sanctions imposed by EU on Russia. Though the official view was that due to technical problem, this project could not materialise. Even the alternative pipeline route, the Turkish Stream, also went into jeopardy after the Russia–Turkish clash. After normalcy returned between these two neighbours, there is an optimistic scenario for early completion of the project. Gazprom, being one of the principal partners of this project, is taking extra efforts for early completion of this project. This is because the US Senate is proposing stricter sanctions, which may hit the proposed route. Nevertheless, as reported by the Ukrainian energy agency, Naftogaz agreed to transport 282 bcm cubic meters of Russian gas to the European countries through which it will earn some transit fees. The pattern of interaction between Russia and Ukraine over natural gas to some extent justifies the liberal theorists’ proposition that: “greater trade promotes international peace” because of “mutual compulsions.” Though political elite from both the countries are trying to ease conflict because of mutual compulsions, however, irritants are still there. This can be observed from the fact that Kiev is interested to take the matter to the international fora for seeking arbitration and compensation for the illegal takeover of the energy sector.

Despite the formal incorporation to Russia, Crimea is facing a lot of irritants in recent years. The efforts to diversify its energy resources by constructing thermal power plants have not been materialised due to sanctions as they are not able to get technology. In August 2017, EU put some additional sanctions on these two plants and barred technical giants like Siemens in entering into any kind of “technical collaboration.” This is exacerbating energy crisis of this region.

Like Ossetia, Russia also did the same thing in Crimea as its policy makers used identity vector for achieving its larger geopolitical goals. The accession of Crimea to its territorial jurisdiction provided an opportunity for Russia in achieving three larger geopolitical goals. These are controlling Sevastopol Naval base, ensuring dominance over the energy corridor, and finally harnessing the energy of Crimea.

What one witnesses in the Eurasian geographical zone is the aftermath of the Crimea crisis, which is the reappearance of some form of ethno-nationalistic conflict having direct impact on energy security. Another important energy complex of Russia, that is, Siberia and Far East, also provide a good example of how energy exploration and energy transit may pose a challenge to the regional security of Eurasia. Despite the fact that protracted ethno-nationalistic conflicts are not happening...
in the Siberian and Far East, still one witness different forms of identity mobilisation. Sharing of oil revenues with the local communities, environmental impact of pipeline routes, which are being constructed are some of the crucial issues impacting on the security of Siberia and Far East.  

Energy exploration, energy transit, and the “dialectics of identity” in Siberia and Far East

Siberia (both Eastern and Western) and Far East in recent years are emerging as major regions for production of oil and gas. While looking at the Siberian–Far East energy complexes, three issues require closer attention: first, energy production and its export to external market; second, the issue of energy profit sharing and indigenous right, and third, the case of illegal Chinese migrants and growing radicalisation (especially in the Eastern Siberia) and its impact on identity question.

The growing demand for energy in the East Asian countries, influx of foreign capitals in the energy sector, and strategic location propelled Russia to rethink its policy towards Siberia and Far East. Exploration of energy and construction of pipeline routes has also impacted both society and environment. Understanding the complexity of the problem, the Russian administration undertook a number of initiatives aimed at reorganising administrative structures in this part of the world. Through these administrative units, Moscow thought it will ensure better control over Siberia and the resources.

Study of indigenous tribal groups of the Siberia and Far East is quite pertinent in the context of energy security because they represent a cultural symbol through which certain kinds of images and actions can be evolved in the policy-making processes. Using ecological catastrophe as a metaphor, these indigenous groups located in Siberia and the Far East are mobilising both against the Central and regional units of administration and against the oil companies who are operating in this part of the world. However, one may underline here that unlike in Chechnya or in Kazakhstan, these groups have not entered into any kind of armed struggle to address their grievances. The above-mentioned “greed” and “grievances” model can also be employed to study the nature of social mobilisation. As per a statistic, there are around “41 indigenous groups” which are located in this part of Russia. The lifestyle and the occupational pattern of these groups suffered most because of the excessive harnessing of natural resources. This is happening despite the fact that in the post-Soviet phase, both Central and the respective regional governments introduced number of legislations aimed at protecting the rights of the indigenous population. In recent years, however, there is a growing concern among the indigenous population of Siberia and Far East regarding the construction of pipeline projects, large-scale energy exploration which is having an impact on the lifestyle of the indigenous people, their food habits, and local ecology.

The Federal government under President Vladimir Putin to augment the economic development of this region brought out a number of measures. These are socio-economic development of this part of the world, which will facilitate harnessing of energy and at the same time exporting the same to...

101 Yakovileva, “Land, oil and indigenous people of the North.”
earn revenues. The underdevelopment of this part of the world bordering China and Japan considered a long-term security threat. It is in this context President Putin further called for greater interaction of “core and peripheries” to ensure a balanced economic development. As he stated further:

“The region is using its natural competitive advantages, including transit corridors, very ineffectively ... All of these things pose a serious threat to our political and economic positions in the Asia-Pacific region, and to Russia’s national security, without exaggeration”.

Putin administration enunciated a number of programmes aiming at boosting the socio-economic development of the Far East region along with infrastructural development. The federal government created a new body known as “State Commission for the Far East” for governing this part of Russia. Similarly, it enacted a programme known as “Economic and Social Development of the Far East and Trans-Baikal for the Period- 2013” in 2007.

Like Energy Strategy 2020, the Russian government has brought out a blueprint known as Energy Policy 2030. Aimed at bringing a sea change both at the domestic spheres and at energy relations, the latter report called for the creation of new pipeline routes so that energy can reach the destined market. In this regard, the report focussed on constructing the much awaited Eastern Siberia and Pacific Ocean Pipeline (ESPO). As the report adds:

“Development of oil and gas complexes in the eastern regions of the country (the continental shelf of Sakhalin, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Magadan and Irkutsk Regions and the Krasnoyarsk Territory) and construction of appropriate industrial, transport and social infrastructure will lead to energy self-sufficiency of the stated regions as well as diversification of the Russian hydrocarbons export destinations at the expense of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region”.

Excessive energy exploration in the Siberia and Far East has its own pitfalls. For instance, the construction and completion of the ESPO project helped Moscow to earn huge amount of foreign exchange at the same time, put the indigenous community in a disadvantageous position. As majority of them are engaged in traditional occupation like hunting and fishing, the emergence of extractive industries in this part of the world is also having an impact on their livelihood. At the beginning of the construction of the ESPO pipeline, apprehensions were raised about the environmental impact of this route, particularly through Lake Baikal. Because of environmental concerns, the route was diverted and passed through Yakutia, where already an industrial complex was in existence. Realising the gravity of the situation, the indigenous people in collaboration with the civil society group formed an organisation called Nash Dom Yakutia (Our home Yakutia). This civil society group filed a petition in a local court against the ESPO project and subsequently won the case. During the construction of the ESPO pipeline, number of open house meeting took place among the stakeholders of the project, namely the oil firms, the regional administration, and the indigenous population to assess the environmental impact of this project. Rosneft, the major partner in the construction of the pipeline, also provided incentives to the

---


106 Ibid.


108 Ibid.

Cambridge J. Eurasian Stud. | 2018 | 2: #UQ2OTI | https://doi.org/10.22261/CJES.UQ2OTI

The indigenous groups located in the Far Eastern region are also equally affected by the exploration of energy. It may be noted that some of the oil fields like Sakhalin-I and Sakhalin-II located in this part of the world cater to the foreign market. One may recall here that way back in 2005, the indigenous people of Sakhalin under the banner of Sakhalin Association of Indigenous Peoples carried out a series of protests over the destruction of the environment in this world due to oil exploration. Because of the growing protests from the indigenous groups, the federal government suspended the construction of a pipeline project carried out by Shell citing environmental reasons in 2007.\footnote{“Indigenous peoples in Sakhalin, Russia, campaign against oil extraction, 2005–2007,” https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/indigenous-peoples-sakhalin-russia-campaign-against-oil-extraction-2005–2007; S. M. Mironov and G. E. Burbulis, Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation 2006 report, On the State of Legislation in the Russian Federation (Moscow, 2008), http://archiv.council.gov.ru/files/download/report2006/23.pdf: 65–67.}

The exploration of energy in Siberia and Far East has also contributed to the change of the demographic map in this part of the world. What is worrying the Russian authorities is that because of increasing cooperation between Russia and China, large number of Chinese workers are coming and settling in this region. This is generating a lot of resentment among the local population because Chinese workers are taking most of the jobs. As a consequence, the local population is not getting enough opportunity. When the ESPO pipeline project (Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean oil pipeline) was under construction, a large chunk of Chinese got the job in the project and some of them even trained by Trasneft. This generated resentment among the local population of Siberia.\footnote{Maria Repnikova and Harley Balzer, Chinese Migration to Russia: Missed Opportunities, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., 7 July 2011, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/No3_ChineseMigtoRussia.pdf: 28.} The Chinese migration to Siberia and Far East can be considered in the context of growing bonhomie between these two countries in the energy sphere. As has been argued after facing economic sanctions following the Ukrainian fiasco, Moscow is heavily depending on Beijing for economic bailout. This is providing an opportunity to the latter in dominating and controlling the market. Taking advantage of the precarious situation, many Chinese are intruding illegally into the neighbouring regions. In 2016, the Governor of Novosibirsk Vladimir Gorodetsky banned foreigners from working in energy industries. This was done to protect the jobs for the local population.\footnote{Repnikova and Balzer, Chinese Migration to Russia; “Migrants banned: Siberian region bars foreign workers from many key jobs,” 16 August 2016, http://siberiantimes.com/other/others/news/10708-migrants-banned-siberian-region-bars-foreign-workers-from-many-key-jobs/.} The “Combat Power Function” model as outlined by Hirshleifer as highlighted above can be employed to study the nature of bargaining between the social structure and agencies of energy conglomerates in the Siberian and Far Eastern regions of Russia. Similarly, Galtung’s model of “culture of violence” as discussed in the beginning can also be a useful tool to locate the nature of the grievances that exist among the stakeholders in this part of Russia. The Siberian and Far East energy complex outline three important elements relevant to the study of social structure. These are nature of social control of natural resources which is contributing to the assertion of the indigenous community; second, emergence of “Meta Russian identity” while interacting with the Chinese, who are intruding to this part of the world and finally growing radicalisation that is taking place, may have an impact on energy structure as well as social relations.\footnote{Natasa Kuhrt, “The Russian Far East in Russia’s Asia policy: Dual integration or double periphery?”, Europe-Asia Studies, 2012, 64 (3): 478–480, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09668136.2012.661926; Yakovleva, “Oil pipeline construction in Eastern Siberia.”}

One noteworthy inference one can draw from Siberian and Far Eastern region is that though there is a sense of disquiet among the ethnic groups, it has not turned into a violent one. However, the way the Central Asians are migrating and existence of radical groups like Tabligh Jamaat and Hizbut Tahrir are quite active in some parts of Krasnoyarsk Krai located in the Eastern Siberia will...
make the situation quite volatile in the near future. Thus, radicalism may be another faultline in the social structure of Siberia. In future, because of the existence of conflict zones in Eurasia, the situation may turn volatile.\(^\text{114}\)

The Siberian and Far East conflict demonstrated the entanglement between geopolitical alliances and identity questions in which energy resources play a critical role. Similar such conflict is taking place in the Nagorno Karabakh region where conflicts between two ethnic communities Armenian and Azeri are transforming into a conflict between two states. The incessant conflict between these two communities in turn affects the energy pipelines passing through this region.\(^\text{115}\)

**Energy transit, identity politics, and Nagorno Karabakh conflict**

The security architecture of Eurasia crumbled again when the age-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan re-surfaced in the month of April 2016 over Nagorno Karabakh. Though the war between these two countries came to an end within four days, it demonstrated that this war will affect the flow of the oil and gas to the external market.\(^\text{116}\)

One may highlight here that though the disputed region does not have much energy resources, but due to its location, this space plays an important role in flowing of energy into the Western countries. Just before the operationalisation of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline connecting Shah Deniz gas field, the conflict erupted in April. This pipeline route was also part of the much hyped Southern Gas field.\(^\text{117}\)

Analysts are of the opinion that had the four days war would have continued for a few more days, than this could have a serious dent on Eurasian energy scenario. For instance, this conflict would have disrupted the flow of oil and gas to destined European markets through the BTC pipeline and the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum (BTE, gas) pipeline. Even adjoining states like Georgia and Turkey suffered a serious supply crisis in addition to the transit revenue they are receiving as part of the project. This is in addition to the financial loss the respective partners of these projects accrued. Interestingly, some of these pipeline routes are operating nearer to the conflict zones.\(^\text{118}\)

The apparent threat to the pipeline system was evident when the Nagorno Karabakh government (supported by Armenia) declared that they will hit the pipeline system of the Azerbaijan by missiles.\(^\text{119}\) After a brief lull, the conflict has again erupted when in July 2017 two civilians got killed because of firing by Armenian forces. One may add here that this issue may spark further volatility in the region.\(^\text{120}\)

The April 2016 conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh is not a new one. Experts are of the opinion that BTC pipeline route since its operationalisation is facing lot of challenges. Though the genesis of the Nagorno Karabakh can be traced back to history, the vol-

---


atility of the conflict has been accentuated in more recent years (especially after 1991) because of the need for harnessing more energy resources by external players. In the aftermath of independence, the then Azeri President Abulfe Elchibey took an active interest in the development of Azeri energy industry and negotiated with foreign partners. Even some American energy conglomerates signed contract with Elchibey to develop the lucrative oil fields of the country. However, the efforts to diversify energy resources of the country came to a halt when the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh exploded and subsequent coup in Azeri politics, which brought Haider Aliyev to power.\textsuperscript{121} It may be underlined here that Elchibey during his term as President even considered an alternative pipeline to Turkey through Armenia. However, the pipeline passing through Armenia could not materialise due to conflict in Nagorno Karabakh.\textsuperscript{122} The policy of diversification of energy linkages pursued by Elchibey has had its impact on relations with Russia. Russia the “historical player” of this part of the world ousted from regional energy deliberation of the neighbouring Caspian and Central Asian states. In retaliation, it imposed so-called “energy whip” and stopped exporting Baku’s oil through the old Soviet pipeline system.\textsuperscript{123} The ethnic conflict has also provided an opportunity to the external powers to flex their muscle in this region.\textsuperscript{124} The Azeri political elite has also realised the extent of threat the ethnic conflict might pose to country’s energy diplomacy? As has been observed, Haider Aliyev pursued a multivectoral energy policy, that is, engaging with both Russia and West. To achieve some of the above mentioned objectives, Baku even supported the two pipeline projects. One going to the Eastern direction, that is, Novorossisk, and the other one to Supsa.\textsuperscript{125}

The protracted conflict as reported has had a devastating effect on the oil and gas distribution network and reduced flow of energy to the intended market. One may add here that though the price of crude at the international market is low still April 2016, crisis in this region has an impact on the financial coffers of Baku.\textsuperscript{126}

Though the four days war halted in April 2016, the “tinder box” may flare up again. If the same happens, then there will be a catastrophic impact on oil pipeline in future, as well as energy infrastructure of the whole of Eurasia. This was disclosed by the Azeri foreign minister. He stated that war erupted to “stall the operation of two major pipelines namely Trans Adrian and Trans Anatolia.” Incidentally, both the pipelines were going in the European direction.\textsuperscript{127} Whatever may be the outcome of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, one thing is certain that identity conflict is obstructing the operationalisation of future pipeline projects in this part of the world. The “structural” and “cultural” notion of violence as eulogised by Johan Galtung above can be applied in the context of Nagorno Karabakh to map out the nature of conflict that is taking place in this part of the world. Though the situation in and around Nagorno Karabakh is quite stable, but in future, the same may escalate again. One important factor that provides the Azeri people an upper hand in the conflict situation with Armenia is the possession of energy. Because of energy resources, Azerbaijan is able to bargain effectively with the Western world. This to a great extent is shaping Azerbaijan’s relations with external powers and putting Armenia on the back foot.\textsuperscript{128}

Three important inferences one can draw from the Nagorno Karabakh conflict relevant to societal conflict of Eurasia, namely, competition among the external powers, which directly or indirectly

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Blank, “Energy and security in Transcaucasia,” 13–14.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Kaldor, “Oil and conflict.”
\end{itemize}
accentuate the conflict in this region; second, location of Nagorno Karabakh is to a greater extent influencing the transportation of energy resources as well as the pattern of conflict in this region. Finally, it appears that the prolonging of identity conflict in this part of the world depends on significance of Azeri energy in the global market.\textsuperscript{129}

In addition to the volatile regional conflict, what one witness over the years in the Eurasian space is that there are “simmering discontents” what one witnesses over the years. Some of these conflicts are sporadic, and some others are rooted in history as happening in Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{130}

**Energy resources and proliferation of radicalism in Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan which is considered to be relatively a stable country in the Central Asian region is also showing the spurt in terrorism and social discontent in recent years. Despite widespread radicalisation in 1990s and in the beginning of 2000 in Central Asia, Kazakhstan was relatively free. However, in recent years, Kazakhstan is becoming the hub of radicalism, and as pointed by Kazakh scholars, there is a growing “wave of radicalism” in Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{131} The terrorist attack in the energy-rich region of Aktobe in July 2016 and the subsequent one just one month after in the former capital of the country demonstrate the fact that the terrorist groups are interested in crippling the financial and energy activities of the country, thus, jeopardising the security of the country.\textsuperscript{132}

Radical activities that took place both in Almaty and Aktobe in 2016 is a reminder of the incident that took place way back in 2011. Taking advantage of social unrest, the terrorists belonging to the *Jund al-Khilafah* carried out their nefarious activities in Aktobe.\textsuperscript{133} Over the years, this oil-rich region is becoming the hotbed of radicalism because of its location (closer to the North Caucasus region), and the plummeting recession in the energy sector has also contributed to social alienation of significant number of population. Growing social alienation (as discussed in the Galtung’s framework) as well as with the active support of radical forces from abroad, these terrorist groups (followers of the radical *salafist* ideology) are gaining preponderance in the Kazakh social structure.\textsuperscript{134} For example, a recent report by the Kazakh government highlights despite prohibition by government number of students following radical’s diktat is growing.\textsuperscript{135} Like other oil economies of post-Soviet space, the Astana’s economy is also in deep shamble. The World Bank in its report stated that the inflation figure for 2016 is 10.76%, and economic growth has also slowed down considerably.\textsuperscript{136}

Even if the oil prices will be high and Kazakh economy will stabilize, however, the moot question that remains is that how the growing radicalisation will help energy sector to flourish in the near future.


\textsuperscript{130} “Kazakh ruler’s post-oil overhaul falters as succession looms,” 8 July 2016, http://kazworld.info/?p=57327.


future? The spillover effect of North Caucasus and growing menace of radical ISIS will have a devastating impact on energy industries of Kazakhstan. This will deter foreign investors to invest in the energy business. One may recall here that Chevron has planned to invest to the tune of 36 billion dollars along with Exxon Mobile in the Tengiz oil field. This is happening despite the fact that there is a slump in international energy market. 137 Any disturbances in and around the Aktobe region will have an impact on energy security as well as pipelines. As reported, large numbers of Kazakh youths are also joining the dreaded terrorist organisation, ISIS. In the longer run, growing radicalism in Kazakhstan will have a detrimental impact on security of Eurasia. 138 The direct linkages between oil and radicalism manifested in Kazakhstan when the National Security Forces of the country arrested radicals for stealing oil in the energy-rich region in the month of December 2016. These radicals are operating under the patronage of Salafist ideology. The Security agency revealed that they have confiscated several oil tankers taken over by radicals. This demonstrates that there is a parallel between Chechnya, Dagestan model, and the Kazakhstan model. This is not for the first time radicals were arrested for siphoning of oil. Even in 2014, the security forces arrested some radicals for illegal activities. 139

Though the situation in Kazakhstan is not as volatile as it is in Chechnya and Dagestan, however, going by the pattern of radical activists in West Asia and North Caucasus, in future, the fundamentalists may attempt to take control over oil installations of Kazakhstan, which will finance their illegal activities. Volatility in Afghanistan and other Central Asian states may have a repercussion on Kazakhstan’s overall security, in general, and energy security, in particular. 140

A closer look at the pattern of regional conflicts as discussed above demonstrate that each of these conflicts are interrelated where local players (energy producing and energy transit countries) along with external state and nonstate actors are interacting with each other. This in turn shapes the structure of this geopolitical space. The broader geopolitical structure at the external front is also interacting with the faultlines in the social structures of Eurasia, which in turn impinging security of this geographical zone. These patterns of interactions have a direct or indirect bearing on both energy security, as well as radicalism. 141

Conclusion

Evaluating both the theoretical prisms of energy security and its implications on societal security, what is the inferences one can draw having relevance to the Eurasian security? In this regard, one can draw a parallel among three elements, namely, energy security, resource distribution, and societal conflict in Eurasia and as happening in other resources-rich regions of the world as discussed above. The continuous interaction between “material forces” and “social forces” as highlighted by Adler and Wendt provide the basis for examining the structural geopolitics, as well as persistent societal conflict in Eurasia. The perpetuation of societal conflict in Chechnya, Dagestan, and “simmering discontent” in Siberia and Far East demonstrates the above-mentioned logic. Most of these conflicts are operating in the framework of “greed” and “grievances” as outlined by Paul Collier et al 142 to “capture resources.” In Chechnya, one of the moot points of persistent conflict is the control over oil sector. When the federal authority took measures to

---


142 Collier, Hoefler and Rohner, “Beyond greed and grievance.”
control the Chechen oil sector, this angered the local radicals. Even the pro-Moscow Chechen leaders are also thinking of acquiring energy resources for restoring republican prestige. Acquiring of oil industries from Rosneft by Chechnya republican authority as discussed is an indicator of this trend. Radical groups of Kazakhstan taking their cue from extremists of West Asia as well as neighbouring Chechnya are resorting to violent activities to ensure preponderance in the lucrative energy sector. In the Far East and Siberia also indigenous social groups are clamouring for benefits from energy industry at the same time, quite conscious of protection of their preponderance over the energy sector. However, unlike Chechnya, in Dagestan and in Western part of Kazakhstan, there is no such violent conflict in the Siberia and Far East. This may be due to nonexistence of any conflict zones in and around this part of Russia. Despite volatility in energy prices, conflict will prolong in Eurasia because as has been argued by James Fearon and David D. Latin, access to oil resources put the “rebels” in an advantageous position as they can obtain arms as well as mobilise people in the name of identity. Similarly, because of energy profit, there is a greater “interaction” among the rebel groups in the conflict zones of Eurasia. This, in turn, accentuates societal conflict as has been eulogised by Alexander Wendt. These three above-mentioned case studies along with Dagestan proved the first hypothesis that clamour for resources like energy and asymmetric distribution of the same among different social groups are one of the principal factors for accentuating social conflict in Eurasia.

Since the base of structural geopolitics in the context of Eurasia is energy, external powers took a keen interest in having a stake in the energy resources. This, in turn, contributed to the geopolitical fissures in this part of the world as they competed with each other. Operation of multiple pipeline routes often through ethnically volatile and strategically located regions accentuated the societal conflicts in Eurasia. Accentuation of conflict in South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh, and Crimea as discussed above can be partly attributed to the interaction between these two elements, namely the geopolitical vector and mobilisation of social identity. As the present study highlights how operationalisation of new pipeline routes generated geopolitical dissonance in the three regions. This geopolitical discord often mirrored in the social turmoil in the form of ethnic conflict. For instance, it has been argued that the commencement of BTC pipeline route in 2005 to a significant extent contributed to the escalation of conflict in both South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh. When the South Ossetian conflict erupted, the BTC pipeline was nonoperational for few days, thus, affecting the European energy security. The Ossetian identity politics, thus, impacted the functioning of the BTC pipeline. In recent years, as discussed above, Georgia is also disrupting the pipeline operated by Gazprom, which is delivering gas to Armenia. The impasse in flow of oil and gas through South Ossetia can be attributed to long-rooted “historical memories” and also collective consciousness, which is influencing directly or indirectly the present day pipeline diplomacy. The Nagorno Karabakh conflict in 2016 attributed to the opening of two new pipeline routes, namely Tran Anatolia and Trans Adrian as discussed in the beginning. This demonstrates that societal conflicts in and around pipeline routes invariably connected with the geopolitics of energy security. A similar situation is prevailing in Siberia where the ESPO pipeline route is in operation. Growing discontent among the indigenous tribes and their grievances can be structured in the Galtung’s framework of “culture of violence.” The above-mentioned description confirms to the second hypothesis where it has been argued that societal conflict is impacting the geopolitical structure of Eurasia.

The structural security of Eurasia is in a state of perpetual limbo largely due to competition among state and non-state actors to capture resources like energy. It is in this backdrop Constructivist approach is quite useful to analyse the complex energy structure of Eurasia. Similarly, the historical and comparative methods helped to get a holistic perspective about the nature of the conflict in this historical landmass.

---

Acknowledgements

The author expresses his gratitude to Professor Devendra Kaushik (retd) Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and two anonymous reviewers for constructive suggestions along with the editorial staff of the Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies.

Funding sources

None.

Competing interests

Nalin Kumar Mohapatra declares that he has no conflict of interest.