

" INTERNATIONAL ENERGY COMPETITION - THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE EAST –
Hanane BOUTOUALA "

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY COMPETITION - THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE
EAST



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Abstract:

The issue of energy security is considered one of the complex political and economic issues that has acquired over time as a strategic resource of high value, and has become an important global issue and a pivotal driver of international relations in both peace and war. Accordingly, the study attempts to understand the geopolitical transformations that have changed the world's view of the importance of energy resources, especially oil and gas currently, for producers and consumers alike. The study also attempts to understand the dimensions of strategic thinking related to energy security and its supplies in the Middle East region, and the competition of major powers over it.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Energy, International Security, Middle East, International Competition

ملخص:

تُعد قضية أمن الطاقة من القضايا السياسية والاقتصادية المعقدة جدا، فقد باتت بمرور الزمن مورداً استراتيجياً ذا قيمة عالية، وأصبحت قضية عالمية معاصرة مهمة، ومحركاً محورياً للعلاقات الدولية في حالات السلم والحرب. وعليه، تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل التحولات الجيوسياسية التي غيّرت نظرة العالم لأهمية موارد الطاقة، وخاصة النفط والغاز حالياً، للمنتجين والمستهلكين على حد سواء. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى فهم أبعاد التفكير الاستراتيجي المتعلق بأمن الطاقة وإمداداتها في منطقة الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجغرافيا السياسية، الطاقة، الأمن الدولي، الشرق الأوسط، المنافسة الدولية

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Introduction:

The issue of energy security has become the most sensitive of the security concepts after it took a broad scientific position within the space of security and strategic studies. Natural resources have also remained an important part of global strategies, and have become a priority issue that all countries of the world give most of their attention when studying issues related to their economic security and national security. Economic and political experts, especially military experts, have unanimously agreed that there is no commodity capable of igniting conflicts and wars between countries currently more than oil. Oil plays a very important role in the global economy, as it is still the most beneficial and widely used energy source in the world despite the severe pressures surrounding its use. Given the increasing status of energy resources in general - and oil and gas in particular - in international relations, as the primary sources of energy in industrial civilization, and an important source of many elements of influence, power and hegemony, they were in the past decades and still are the most important axes of conflict between countries in the areas of their presence, and their importance will continue in the future, and the conflict over them will increase until alternative energy sources take their place.

Research problem:

- What are the world's prospects and stakes in the post-oil era?

To answer this question, the study set the following sub-questions:

- What is meant by the concept of energy security and what is the nature of the development that has occurred in the concept?

- What are the strategic options and alternatives available to countries to ensure their energy security after the depletion of fossil fuels?

- Importance and objectives of the study:

The importance of the study appears in its quest to understand the major transformations and developments that have changed from energy resource centers, especially oil - like other economic commodities as an economic resource - to the level of a strategic resource linked in its degree of complexity to international security and stability - for producers and consumers alike - laden with political, security and economic challenges.

Scientific methods used:

In addition to the descriptive analytical approach, the study relied on geopolitical approaches, It includes a breakdown of the origins of the relationship between the dilemma of achieving energy security and ensuring the security of its supplies, Based on realistic and theoretical data, it is evident in practices on the ground, starting from The ideas of its theorists that translate the policies and strategies of its systems and the interests of its decision-makers, such as "Alfred Mahan, Mackinder, Alexander Dugin, Berezni, and many others experienced in geopolitical and geostrategic theory

1- Concepts and definitions of energy security:

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Energy is considered the "blood" that runs in the veins of modern industries and the main nerve of the modern economy. At present, oil is a strategic resource with political dimensions due to its impact on the stability and security of countries. Today, it is considered that there is no raw material that has such strong and close relationships with geopolitics as oil (Colney, 2006, p. 3). It has become a geopolitical bet of great magnitude on the global level. The important role that oil plays in contemporary societies is what made the issue of energy security one of the most important economic and security issues, which led to an escalation in the importance of strategic resources in the levels of national and international security priorities.

The talk about the concept of energy security leads to the stage of the First World War, where the strategic dimension of energy supply security crystallized, as it came in the decision of Admiral Wincent Churchill, the first minister responsible for the British Navy, to switch to using imported oil instead of locally produced coal. This shift in "energy security" took on a strategic dimension in international relations, which led to the emergence of the energy security dimension as a national strategic issue. (Kamil Al-Khubronsky, 2007, p. 331)

As a prominent issue after the first oil shock in 1973, the concept of "energy security" emerged, as several countries sought to ensure the uninterrupted flow of their energy needs. However, at a later stage, it became necessary to clarify the concepts of energy independence and energy security. A country may not be independent in the field of energy, meaning that it depends completely or partially on other countries to secure its energy needs, which poses a threat to its economic security. Then, there was talk about the dependence of oil-exporting countries or "oil dependence."

DANIEL YERGIN, former head of the Energy Research Centre at the University of Cambridge, makes a famous statement to classify the dimension of energy (oil) in the international relations environment, speaking about the European market in the 1930s: Oil is 10 percent economics and 90 percent politics (PATT, 2012, p. 7), so that, in the event of any disturbance around this resource, it will impede the continuity of its supply flow, which will inevitably result in dire consequences for the national, regional and global economy, as well as the stability of the political, economic and social system of countries, all of whose components are closely linked to energy uses. In return, we find that the continuity of energy supplies is sufficient to spread and consolidate political, economic and social stability.

Many terms such as: "energy security", "security of supply" and security of demand are used in the same sense in English political writings "to indicate, during the period of economic development witnessed by the United States of America and Western Europe that followed the period of World War I, the concept of "energy security" was defined as the ability to secure sufficient quantities of energy - especially oil - in exchange for prices that helped to create a mobile and increasingly wealthy consumer society, and with this shift towards the east in consumption patterns.

There is a definition that says that energy security is the development of specific responses and coordination between countries, as well as the establishment of controls for cooperation in industrial in the event of a supply imbalance due to an emergency, energy policies, avoiding the harmful rush of those countries in the event of a shortage of oil supplies. The forms of cooperation, both announced and unannounced, reached the point of using the principle of threatening to use Force against those who declare the "oil weapon" by the exporters. (ZHANG, 2006, p. 2)

Global energy security has been linked to all international crises, no matter how large and important they are, such as the halt in production in Venezuela in 2002 and 2003, and in 2003 due to the invasion of Iraq, and even the events of so-called piracy in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea and

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the war in Somalia. The concept of national energy security also includes studying the situation of countries in terms of their national security requirements and territorial integrity, and studying the possibilities of some political, ethnic or sectarian groups seeking to secede in order to control energy sources or even control oil and gas transport supplies or to obtain political privileges and international protection, as is the case in South Sudan and Iraq.

2- Energy Security System:

The energy security system has pushed groups of countries to coordinate their political and security efforts and exchange information about the energy situation in the world and market conditions, and to follow up on the impact of any international crises. Countries have responded to solidarity among themselves to confront situations that they believe will pose threats to them, whether they are exporting countries, or on the one hand to their national security, whether they are industrialized consuming countries. A group of oil producing and exporting countries from developing countries established "OPEC" in 1960, a joint governmental organization, in order to look after their interests and organize production, export and pricing, transportation and consumption on the one hand, and on the other hand, the exporting countries were being swept away by global oil companies, in response to the policies of the oil companies that came to them. (Abdullah, 1994, p. 29)

The International Energy Forum also emerged, which sought to integrate information from producers and consumers and coordinate with the International Energy Agency to facilitate the flow of information to all parties and to maintain the stability of the economies of its countries from any potential international crises, which was formed in 1973 from 16 industrialized countries for the purpose of collective action to confront the oil crisis -- in addition to the Seven Sisters - which dominate the global oil industries. (Al-Sharaa, 2008, p. 4)

The repercussions of the various energy crises, such as the sudden and sharp rise or fall in energy prices, and the fluctuations and sharp rise in the prices of most commodities that accompanied them, have pushed energy consumers and producers in the world to avoid relying on short-term policies, and to adopt long-term policies to secure their energy supply, work to increase their efficiency in energy use, and diversify energy supply sources. It is noticeable that most consuming countries have doubts about how to secure energy more than ever before (RUEH, 2014, p. 12), since the oil crisis in the seventies. Exporting countries also have the same doubts about whether current demand is sufficient to meet the large investments needed to develop new capabilities in this field. Doubt haunts both parties, which makes it difficult for them to agree on how to manage an energy system like China and India, as well as a more secure system, especially with the change in the main consumers of energy, such as the problem of energy warming, and the growing concern about The negative effects of energy use on the environment, incentive programs for thermal energy, as concerns about climate change were one of the main reasons for proposing to find clean energy alternatives, in order to curb this phenomenon.

3- The strategic and security dimension of the international conflict over energy:

As the possession of oil proved during the First World War that whoever possesses oil possesses power, the major powers throughout history have been moving due to formations that undermine national sovereignty, a complex set of economic and geostrategic motives, which made oil one of the components of international oil policies, and an essential element in the strategies of countries and a fuel for conflicts between the countries to which they belong on the one hand and the countries that have oil reserves on the other hand.

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Natural resources have remained an important part of global security and economic strategies, due to the great competition between major powers and countries with emerging economies - with large energy consumption - over energy resources, which are considered one of the most important sources of risks, conflict and violence. The economy has become a weapon in the service of state power, such that there is no politician who is not concerned with the matter, starting from the early geopolitical thinkers such as Ratzel, Mackinder, Brzezinski and others, and reaching contemporary thinkers who do not place natural resources in a strategic position.

The major industrialized countries have closely linked their energy resources strategy with their geopolitical goals. Before the outbreak of World War II, the geographic axis of oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico was the world's largest, and then gradually moved after the war to the Middle East region, to tighten their grip on their wealth through long-term concessions and agreements to consolidate their previous gains during World War II (for the United States and Britain), so that region remained exposed to challenges from the global oil and gas.

Today's new map of the geography of oil and natural gas sites is the oil-producing regions in the Middle East on the one hand, with Russia, the oil and gas producer, on the other hand, interacting with each other in the production, export and supply processes, and forming a vast strip extending from the countries of Africa, the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and Russian Siberia to the Far East, (RUEH, 2014) noting that these regions contain 67 percent of the world's oil reserves and 73 percent of the world's natural gas reserves. Some Chinese scientists have called it the "heart of oil strip", and they believe that global oil demand will come mainly from two parts surrounding this strip: one of them is the "inner crescent region of oil demand", which includes East Asia, Southeast Asia and its southern sector in addition to the European continent, noting that Britain and Japan are located on its edge, and the other is the "external crescent region of oil demand," which includes North America and the African regions located south of the Sahara in addition to Oceania. The two aforementioned regions constitute a new picture of the geography of oil and gas resources at the global level.

4- The geopolitical dimension of the international conflict over energy resources:

The competition over these energy resources within the framework of what is called "geopolitical competition", which is a type of competition between countries over lands, natural resources, vital geographical features such as ports, public rivers, strategic bases, straits, geomorphological sites and other outlets, such as the international competition over the Caspian Sea, the Malacca Strait, the Red Sea and others, as these straits occupy significant geopolitical importance in the field of energy.

Since the end of the Cold War, many political and strategic experts have addressed the issue of developing a vision that defines the parameters of the contemporary strategic environment, in a world that is witnessing new geopolitical blocs. Attention has turned to the beauty of the conflict between the North and the South, where most of the conflicts and disputes take place. It is the region that opens up a field for humanitarian intervention and development aid. With the growing power of some countries in the South - which were considered backward - in the field of strategic military and economic competition, such as China and India, they have been placed in the path of the West. With the expansion of the West and the divergence of security visions and interests between its units, calls have emerged to embody multipolarism in contrast to the view that makes the United States the sole pole state against all international units (BRIZENSKI, 1998).

Thus, international competition has shifted from its political-military framework to an economic competition framework, by searching for means and mechanisms to support and strengthen

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the state's economy at the expense of weaker countries. Accordingly, we find that most of the conflicts and armed conflicts in the world take place in underdeveloped countries that possess energy resources and natural wealth, mostly between major powers, to control and control resource sites and influence. Also, "the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea" are among the most prominent areas of international competition over energy. They have become, in the words of Professor Brzezinski, "the great chessboard" between America, the world's superpower, Europe, Russia and China, as these countries have major interests in the region represented in the flow of oil and gas in an important way on the global level and to their countries in particular, and each party in the quartet is weaving military relations with local governments and supplying them with weapons.

The pattern of the international conflict over oil was decided according to the geographical map of energy resources. Looking at oil from a distance in the history of international politics, we find that oil has become the focus of competition between countries in order to support their power and seek hegemony and expansion. The major countries gradually began to search for how to control energy sources and influence. During the years of World War II, sharp differences arose between Britain and the United States over oil sources in the Middle East. Some members of the British government strongly opposed the United States' intervention in Middle Eastern oil, claiming that oil was the last and largest property left to them by the war. However, President Roosevelt, in February 1944, suggested to Britain that "Gulf oil be owned by Britain, Iraqi oil and Kuwaiti oil be divided equally between the two parties, while Saudi oil is owned by America alone." (WILLIAMS, 2008, p. 484)

5- The conflict between the world's oil producing countries and the consuming countries, and the international oil companies:

There is no doubt that the conflict over natural resources to achieve "energy security" varies according to the position of the country in the energy equation. There are producing countries that see energy security as the continuation of the flow of their oil exports to consuming countries, and consuming countries see "energy security" as "ensuring their access to energy supplies at the lowest cost." The governments of the major industrial countries have intervened through their foreign policies, and sometimes by military force, in order to obtain oil concessions, either by occupation or by a type of foreign protection or intervention and influence of foreign oil companies, driven by their powerful governments, and quickly spread the companies in the Middle East - being the hottest production and export region of this type of war (Ibrahim, 2010, p. 75) - and in Africa and elsewhere, in search of economic wealth and benefits. Strategy. Among the forms of conflict between producing and consuming countries, we mention the following:

a- -The impact of multinational oil companies' exploitation and monopoly

A small group of companies - known as the Seven Sisters - mostly owned by the United States of America, have controlled the exploitation and monopoly of global oil to the maximum extent of exploitation to achieve their own interests and the vital interests of the countries to which they belong, without regard to the requirements and interests of the peoples, the legitimate owners of this depleting wealth. There was no balance between the power possessed by these countries and the power of the giant international oil companies, supported by their countries, operating under their protection and possessed under their patronage. It has controlled and monopolized all aspects of the oil industry, research and exploration, drilling and prospecting, extraction and production, refining, transportation and distribution, and chemicals. As a result, it has controlled the semi-sea oil regions of the world to the last stage, which is the stage of the petrochemical industry. This allows it to control the level of production and, ultimately, the price, which enabled it to supply Western economies with cheap oil from the Middle East, complementing and supporting the American Marshall Plan to rebuild the European economy after World War II. (Klare, 2002, p. 30)

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On the other hand, we find the conflict between consumers over energy sources, such that we can imagine an international scene in which political and military allies turn into competing opponents. Whenever there is a severe shortage between the level of supply and demand for oil and resources, the degree of conflicts between consumers over resources increases. Here, the competition is intense, reaching the point where some actors secretly sabotage the facilities of some countries by inciting separatists, mobilizing organized crime gangs, or forming terrorist groups, or working to cause political coups or even resorting to physical liquidations, to weaken the economies of some countries from maneuvering. It is also possible to resort to destroying demand by raising prices beyond the capacity of the economies of countries, which prompts them to withdraw from the market. (CSURGAI, 2006, p. 17)

7- The impact of international energy organizations on the economy and international security:

After the major oil producing and exporting countries became fed up with the monopolistic practices of the global oil companies, and in order to struggle and confront the "cartel" and exploitation by the oil companies since the beginning of the history of its industry, a group of oil exporting countries that dominate the oil market organized themselves into an organization also called "OPEC", so OPEC worked to strengthen itself in the face of those countries, and to increase its ability to monitor the supply of oil in the international market, and decided to double prices, so it was the first to use oil as an effective weapon on a global scale against Western countries in 1973, and to punish Washington in response to its policies in the region towards the Zionist entity, so it caused a strong shock to the stability of the Western and global economy (Starikov, 2012).

These decisions led to great concern in the consumer countries, in which the developed countries rushed to take measures to disrupt this model to stop the draining of the wealth of the developing countries, so the consumer countries gathered among themselves to confront and declare war against the exporting countries, and they also tried to reduce the volume of consumption to put pressure on the price, as it was necessary to reduce the volume of consumption to put pressure on the price, and the exporting countries are responsible for the high rates of inflation and the cracking of the international monetary system, and that the new price of oil is not all due to this rise, and that the producing countries themselves will not escape these consequences.

The Western world realized that oil is an economic weapon that is more important and influential than the largest military weapons in developed countries. At a time when the energy crisis was at its most severe, Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, called on oil-consuming countries (such as the Common Market countries, Norway, Japan, and Canada) to hold a conference in Washington on February 11, 1974. The conferences included a program that included rationalizing energy consumption and searching for alternative sources to oil, projects in distributing energy during emergencies, developing research into new energy sources, and establishing an international system for financial cooperation to confront rising prices.

The conferences agreed on the points proposed by Kissinger, and from this conference emerged, nine months after its convening (late 1974), the regulatory mechanism for this policy, which was called the International Energy Agency (I.E.A.), and includes the countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization except France. Since its inception until today, this agency has had a long hand in marginalizing the role of OPEC and its influence in the global energy market. Oil has not only played a role in stirring up conflicts between countries, but has also led to conflicts between oil companies and countries, especially the American ones, which called for the intervention of military forces to protect "vital oil reserves" in different parts of the world.

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8- The impact of oil nationalizations on the political orientations of major countries:

Alexander Primakov says: "The oil-producing countries - for historical reasons, including the differences in their social systems - remained for a period of time vulnerable to exploitation without any significant resistance on their part...", from a strategic perspective, countries possess wealth controlled by colonial powers, the most important and main criterion becomes liberation from colonialism and the restoration of full and complete national sovereignty and control over their natural resources (Primakov, 1984, p. 28).

This trend was followed by the nationalization of many oil countries for many foreign companies operating in the field of energy in the Middle East region, and this helped these monopolies to become richer than before, especially after subjecting these companies to paying taxes that they were exempt from paying, examples of which include the Standard Oil of California company operating in Iraq and Iran in 1933, and it was also obligated to amend the oil concession agreements, and sign the agreements related to the capital of these companies. Similar to Argentina in 1938, Venezuela in 1957, and other developing countries that nationalized their oil, the former Iranian President Mohammad Mossadek nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951. It was the largest move towards British control throughout the twentieth century (Ghazi, 2002, p. 3), and it was the spark for the rest of the oil countries in the region, although these monopolistic companies were able to cancel the nationalization decision after three years, through the American-British intervention, in addition to the role played by the American intelligence, so the nationalization took over from the Suez Canal.

In general, decisions to nationalize oil historically come in a move to regain individual and collective control over their natural resources - particularly through the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, based on a set of resolutions and recommendations issued by the United Nations General Assembly, which established the general legal framework that enables countries and peoples to use their natural resources freely (Yazdin, 2006, p. 28). The oil companies were strongly involved in the sixties and early seventies, and with such decisions, and this movement certainly began with the oil shock of 1973, it had negative reactions and all the measures that accompanied it, whether in the political and economic circles of the major countries, or the global companies, where these parties, which were very committed to preserving their interests, relied on attempts to guarantee the benefits they enjoyed in the previous stage, as a result of the developments that contributed to the revolution of the global oil arena.

Conclusion:

The concept of energy security has undergone several transformations based on the transformations that have affected the parties of the energy equation, between consumers and producers, and the emergence of other parties that have an impact on its concept, such as countries that transit energy supplies by land and countries with sovereignty over strategic sea straits, in addition to the roles of international organizations involved in energy affairs, those that work to protect the rights of producing suppliers, and others that work to protect consumers from major countries. There is also another party with a significant impact in establishing the concept of energy security in its dimension, the major global companies operating in the field of energy, due to their commercial influence, namely the companies.

- 1- All these transformations and divergent trends that have affected producing countries across the world require reconsidering the traditional concept of energy security from the point of view of producers, focusing on the security of supply and demand in sufficient quantities and reasonable prices. Many consumers have tried, in the Academics, through their studies and

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writings, have isolated the issue of energy security from the security-political framework to the purely economic framework, but what is apparent through the intense competition and conflicts between the giant companies operating in the field of energy and supported by the evils of their countries, and the security fragmentation in energy-exporting countries resulting from internal conflicts or external aggression, unambiguously rejects these assumptions.

- 2- As a very influential and powerful energy factor, and it was not that influential before, and what emerged will be the economic future dependent on it, is gas, it seems that the failure of renewable energies to absorb the volume of global consumption of it currently, makes fossil energies remain at the top of the list of alternative energies, as gas has actually become the main energy material in the twenty-first century, whether in terms of the energy alternative to the decline in global oil reserves or in terms of clean energy, and therefore control over the gas reserve areas in the world is considered by the old and modern powers the basis of the international conflict in its regional manifestations, especially in the Middle East region, which contains the largest reserves, in addition to those recently discovered in the waters of the Mediterranean Basin, and it has become an arena of international competition and conflict.
- 3- The issue of energy supply security through the sea lanes and straits in the Middle East region has become one of the threats facing it, whether from the regional neighboring countries or the aspirations of the major countries and their vital interests linked to their global strategies. It highlights differences in the balance of power in the Middle East region, especially between the Arab homeland in its regional neighborhood and the balance of international powers surrounding their military bases around the entire Arab region.

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