Would geopolitical confrontation or international/regional collaboration prevail in future cross-border energy and infrastructure projects?

CHANGING BALANCES

Energy is a fundamental requirement for civilization at any level and it will maintain its importance as the world exists. Developed countries, which owe their wealthiness to their domination on the areas which have energy resources and countries which control energy resources and transfer lines, will still be called ‘super power’ in the near future. Actually, energy sources became the base of the political confrontations dating from it had a commercial value. In some cases, the reasons concealed in so much that political reasons cannot be reached. The reason for both the 1st and 2nd World War was energy politics particularly the oil and coal. Apart from that, having local conflicts, diplomatic pressures, micro-nationalist separatist movements and terror events occurred around energy production sites and transfer lines cannot be a coincidence.

Actually, reasonable insight of countries’ behaviors on energy resources lies behind the security perspective. An extensive understanding of energy security contains both perceptions and perspectives of nation-states as well as objective indicators. A proper aspect of such perceptions is their attainments to dynamically impress each other. If the position or practices of a country are perceived as a threat to energy security, the other countries may start to respond in the manner that is also detected as threatening, causing another round of threatening responses. The circumstances may get into a zero-sum game, by the energy security of some nations being achieved at the expense of other nations. In the end, these developments result in a lack of confidence, damaged and sometimes disrupted cooperation, increased tensions, or even conflicts over energy resources and infrastructure.

Energy resources conflict risk has a significant place on the global security agenda. The extreme form of such confrontation is a resource war. The fear of resource wars has increasingly grown
in recent years, especially yielded by the rise of the new consumers (China, India) of globally tradable energy resources, concerns over insufficient capacity to meet the increasing demand for oil, rising oil prices, and a series of high-profile controversy involving Russian gas supply to Europe.

It is difficult to resolve the arguments about the future probability of oil conflicts. The risk of resource wars indeed depends on non-energy factors such as the capacity of international and bilateral regimes and institutions; in the meantime the structure of global oil production, trade, and usage are undoubtedly major factors determining such risks. In addition to this, there are several forms of confrontations involving energy resources that are only a bit distressing than the resource wars.

First of all the energy resources, especially oil, have played an important role in past inter-state confrontations, sometimes comprising armed conflicts. Second one is that energy resources and infrastructure have formed inter-state relations, yielding collaboration or confrontation, or more widely, a mixture of both. Lastly, increasingly strained supplies of energy resources justify the growing deployment of military overseas to protect oil infrastructure against perceived threats and chaos.

Energy resources (specifically oil and gas) do not only shape inter-state relations, but they may also affect internal security issues, especially in poorer countries that face nation-building difficulties. Current inter-ethnic infights in Iraq, considerably related to oil, are most prominent, but energy resources steer internal tensions in many other countries. Governance and institutions as well as key international actors assign whether the political challenges of allocating revenues from the production of oil and gas will lead to instability and conflict. (GEA Writing Team, 2012, pg. 368-369)

Actually, supplier countries need a market and conversely demanders need a source. At the end of the day, they need to cooperate like Russia and EU. This is not about just petroleum and gas - i.e. Russia is one of the biggest nuclear energy technology suppliers in the world and Turkish-Russian cooperation (nuclear power plant establishment in Akkuyu) in this case can be a good example. Enhancing stabilization and cooperation except for geological confrontation and ‘conflicts over conflicts’ can be achieved by standing shoulder to shoulder and with the
arrangements organized by the international organizations. It actually seems not possible in the short term; however both the current international organizations and new structures which may be built in the future may lead us to move collaboratively. (Gallagher K.S. & Holdren J.P., 2004)

International collaboration on energy and infrastructure projects and energy policies may have a number of focuses. Some of them may be information/data collection and share, educations, trainings and technical exchanges, cooperation in energy technology research and development, financing the deployment of energy options with cross border benefits, implementing energy efficiency or air pollution reduction projects; increasing joint ventures in commercial-scale energy production and distribution, licensing agreements for energy technology, joint strategic reserve creation and sharing arrangements in the shortage, joint development and coordination of regulatory and other policies. These activities can be handled either government to government, firm to firm, NGO to NGO or university to university or cross sectoral partnerships. Most probably these may not take a step with total harmonization but it can be ruled regionally such as European Union practices.

Tough competition for the energy resources, inadequacy of energy resources and having no reliable alternatives to exhausting fossil fuels influences all countries deeply. Conflicting each other and creating more wars over energy resources does not help the future. The sustainable and alternative energy resources can be examined collaboratively rather than investing the war economy. Technology is developing and the balance in the world is changing. There is no super power anymore; the countries are getting closer day by day. Energy is much more than natural resources, it is also fed by the technology. There may no longer be wars for the natural resources in the future. Both for the world peace and the nature, investment to renewables, sustainability and low or free carbon energy is inevitable. Enhancing the harmony and collaboration is the key factor on this path. Developing technology both diversifies the energy resources and makes us dependent to much more energy. The unique alternative is collaboration!

**References**

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