

The Politics Behind the Oil and Gas Resources in Eurasia

Lorna Balie



1. Introduction

The main reason for political intervention in the Central Eurasian and the Middle East region is for the purpose of economic expansion and the amassing of oil and gas reserves that is of vital importance for growing industries and transportation. This had led to a race for control over energy reserves. Growing economies such as India and China have increasing energy needs to supply, sustain and expand their growing industries. In addition to economic growth, there are profits that can be gained from oil and gas pipelines, business contracts and tanker routes. The Caspian Sea is estimated to have 50 to 110 billion barrels of oil, and from 170 to 463 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Central Asia, (i.e. Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) stands above a black and “blue” (gas) gold: oil and gas reserves, with Turkmenistan being the world’s fourth largest gas producer after Russia, Iran and Qatar. It contains about 8.1 trillion cubic meters of gas, i.e. 4% of the world’s gas reserves.

Control over central Asia’s energy supplies dates back to the 1900s with the Britain Empire and Tsarist Russia. Britain and Russia competed for control over Afghanistan due to its geopolitical strategic point through proxy wars. Afghanistan was used back then by the British to invade Russian Turkestan, and also by Russia to invade colonial India. The goals today are the same, but different players have emerged, namely, the US along with Russia, China, India, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan due to the world’s multipolarity. Transnational oil corporations, such as Unocal and others have a stake in the matter as well. There is competition for control and influence of this region between the US and Russia. Russia is trying to maintain control of central Asia’s energy reserves and transit routes, whilst America tries to stop it by means of alternative oil and gas transit routes. However, this competition is of a polycentric nature, with oil and gas companies emerging from America, Russia, Asia, South America and Europe - everyone trying to gain a stake in the competition. Iran being the third largest producer of oil, has been sanctioned by western powers due to accusations of clandestine nuclear activity, but is also seen as an obstruction to US objectives of regional energy security (Abbas 2012: 2 - 6; 14 -15). There have been many detrimental consequences from this competition, namely, sanctions, wars resulting

in the loss of life and even forced regimes changes. People are being indirectly and directly harmed by these policies and actions with many human rights violations and even crimes against humanity. Russia and the U.S have been competing for power, influence and control over the central Eurasian region for its oil and gas reserves, ever since the Former Soviet Union had split up (Abbas 2012: 5-7; The Hindu 2012). The competition is not as explicit as before, but it is still has detrimental effects to the people caught in the middle.

The question this paper hopes to answer is how the big powers such as the US with its allies and Russia with its allies are competing and blocking the control over the energy rich resources in countries within the Middle East, and how this has led to conflict and war in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and potentially Iran? My main hypothesis is from a neo-realist and neo-liberal perspective that competing political and economic interests, as well as the threats against national security of mainly the US with its allies and Russia with its allies, are the cause of conflict and war in countries in the Middle East. This is because of these countries’ natural endowment of energy rich reserves and their strategic geopolitical position.

The explanatory hypothesis presented in this paper is that in order to meet national energy demands of the US for example, there was a need to gain access and control of cheap and abundant oil and gas resources. By controlling the production and transit of these energy resources, one is able to exert power over other actors demanding the same resources. Military intervention was used by these powers in some cases such as Afghanistan and Iraq under neo-liberal undertones which are more acceptable and gained support by the American public. “The War on Terrorism” and “freeing Iraqi people” from its oppressive dictatorships was statements made to rally support for military interventions in these countries. These actions have caused many conflicts and wars as well as human rights violations in the Middle East. These questions will be answered in the following order; firstly, power politics after the Cold-war period will be discussed; secondly, the importance of oil and gas; third, the politics behind the oil and gas pipeline projects; and finally, case studies of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and potential war in Iran.



2. Power Politics after the Cold-War

After demolishing the Berlin Wall in 1990 which marked the end of the Cold War, Russia and The U.S have been competing in a different style of war, that involves the acquisition and power over finite resources; that of oil and gas in Central Asia and the Middle East. The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) comprised of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan during 1922 and 1991. Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the oil and gas producing countries of the region and were released from the Soviet Union's grip and power, after the bloc's separation. Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union was the dominant power, and as the current capital of Russia, it still exerts influence over the region, and therefore has wide access to the oil and gas rich resources countries in the former soviet. Turkmenistan has tried gaining independence from Russia by diversifying its gas buyers. The TAPI (acronym for Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) pipeline has created the opportunity for Turkmenistan to do so. The U.S however, is trying to infiltrate the region to gain a stake in these resources, by trying to influence the former communist countries to become more westernized and liberalize their economies.

The strategy of the US after the collapse of the Soviet Union is to limit Russian, Chinese and Iranian control in the central Asian, and Middle East region. Projects

such as the IPI (Iran, Pakistan and India) pipeline would be a major blow to American national interests in the region if it were to succeed. The Heritage Foundation, a US-based research and educational institution, published a report in 2008 saying, "The Proposed Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline: An Unacceptable Risk to Regional Security", (Abbas 2012:24-25). The US is trying any means necessary to block Iran from growing in regional dominance. Russia's South Stream pipeline is also a threat to US national economic interests and will later be explained. The US is taking any measures necessary to maintain its dominance in the growing polycentric natured world. Oil and Gas resources have played an important role in influencing and exerting power.

3. The importance of oil and gas

Oil and gas is considered to be a vital energy resource in the world today. Natural gas is estimated to be around 22 to 29% of the world's energy supply by 2030, and will increase when more gas power plants are constructed. Oil is composed of a variety of substances that through processing, different products are formed, such as gasoline, diesel, kerosene, fuel, lubricant oil, paraffin wax and compost. These products are used for ink, plastic, oil, resins, pneumatics (applied to dentistry, construction and mining), rubber, matches, photo film and fertilizer (Guilhoto et al 2006: 2). With these products oil can provide heat for homes, power for industries and manufacturing, and fuel for transportation. It has created numerous jobs and almost half of the natural gas demand for energy comes from the electric power sector (Business and

Economics Research Advisor 2010; Oil and Gas UK 2013). There is however a limited abundance of energy reserves found all over the world. It has the capacity to be consumed for at least 60 more years. These energy reserves are found mainly in Russia, Iran, Qatar and Turkmenistan, respectively. Gas production will increase in Russia for 20 more years. Russia is the world's leading natural gas producer, and will stay in this position provided that it invests in infrastructure and in its gas fields. In the same light, Russia is also predicted to have the biggest increase in consumption of natural gas in the future. Likewise, the US is the world's largest consumer of natural gas as well as petroleum. The US meets its consumption demands through domestic production of natural gas as well as imports through mainly pipelines in continental trade. Unfortunately, gas production is highly dependent on pipelines and regional markets. The transit of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) via tankers is also extremely expensive (Business and Economics Research Advisor 2010; Paillard 2010). Any means of acquiring access to energy resources cheaply are in many countries' interest.

Gas production has however reached its peak in 2008. According to Longwell (2002:101), demand for oil and gas was expected to rise at 2% and 3% respectively during and after 2010 due to economic growth, especially in emerging economies, growing populations and electric power sectors. Sustaining the functions of existing developed economies such as the US is also a main reason for the increase in consumption. However, while demand is rising, production is slowly declining. For example, gas resources are slowly depleting in the North Sea region - the European Union's energy supply zone due to its consumption levels. Oil is the most important form of energy in Europe followed by natural gas and coal.

The European Commission's Second Strategy Energy Review of 2008 predicts that Europe will be dependent on oil and gas imports until 2020. As a result of this increasing levels of consumption and declining levels of production, it is estimated that only two-thirds of the continents' energy needs will be met until 2015 and only a quarter until 2025 (Paillard 2010). Looking at natural gas consumption, it is predicted to increase by 70% by 2025 from 92 trillion cubic feet to 156 trillion cubic feet by mainly the electric power sectors and emerging economies as previously mentioned. Industrial consumption for natural gas

is also predicted to rise from 8 trillion cubic feet in 2003 to 10.3 trillion cubic feet in 2025 (Business and Economics Research Advisor 2010). There have been technological advances in exploration for energy reserves, along with development. Discoveries of energy resources have been found in Africa, Central Asia, and other parts of the world by OPEC in the past which has increased energy supplies (Longwell 2002:104). The same explorations are being undertaken in order to find newly discovered energy reserves such as that in Turkmenistan. Many pipeline projects are underway to transfer newly discovered and existing energy resources.

4. Oil and Gas pipelines in Eurasia

Arguing from a neo-realist perspective, the decline of the supply and the rise of the consumption of energy reserves have led to international competition, conflict and cooperation to gain access to regions possessing energy rich supplies through international contracts, pipelines, tankers and transit routes. As a solution to this problem and potential crisis, Abbas (2012: 5) argues that below the Caspian Sea lay the largest reserves of fossil fuel that is estimated to be 50 to 110 billion barrels of oil and 170 to 463 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Within the Central Eurasian region, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan both could be situated above 130 billion barrels of oil, which is 3 times that of the United States. This could meet the present consumption demand if access and the infrastructure are in place.

TAPI

To ensure that these energy supplies are accessed and transferred there is currently one major pipeline project underway to transport this natural gas from and through Central Asia to South Asia, via TAPI which was proposed in the 1990s. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the pipeline project was signed in 1995 by Turkmenistan and Pakistan, but then put on hold in 1998 due to instability and political unrest in Afghanistan. When the Taliban government was removed by US forces in 2001 it opened up a new beginning for the project, and so a new agreement was signed involving the TAPI nations in 2002 (Palau 2012). In 2008, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India signed the gas sales purchase agreement (GPSA) in Avaza, Turkmenistan to build TAPI which is worth more than \$7.6 billion with the financial assistance of Asian Development Bank. It will be 2680km long and carry 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually.

Construction was expected to start in 2012 and operate in 2018. This pipeline will serve as a transit route for natural gas from Dauletbad gas fields, south Yolotan-Osman (145km) in Turkmenistan, through Herat and Kandahar in western Afghanistan (735 km) to Quetta and Multan in Pakistan (800km) and end in Fazilka in Northwestern India. Afghanistan withdrew from the project in March 2012 and instead settled on a transit fee of \$160 billion per annum. The US assumed that the war in Afghanistan would not be as protracted, making the TAPI pipeline more legitimate and providing a stable and secure environment for it to be constructed. The construction of the TAPI pipeline is currently put on hold due to the instability in the Afghan region (Escobar 2009; Abbas 2012, 5-7, 13; Washington's Blog 2012; The Hindu 2012).



TAPI Pipeline in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, September 18, 2015.

An important precondition for TAPI's construction is security. The challenge the construction of TAPI faces is the transit route of the pipeline which crosses through dangerous terrain and war-torn areas such as Kandahar in Afghanistan where the Taliban was formed and regularly launch attacks. It is classified to be extreme zone by the UN. The costs of reparation for each attack are high, and also the immeasurable loss of human life. The Taliban government was replaced with Hamid Karzai. Karzai promised to assign 7000 troops to secure and protect the construction of TAPI even though 7000 troops may not be effective. The pipeline would however benefit the war-torn country dramatically. Karzai also stated that, "Afghanistan is to resume its central role as a land bridge in this region" (Seiff 2010). Afghanistan isn't however the only option through which the TAPI can be constructed. Iran is a much more viable, cheaper and a safer transit

route. Iran opposes the construction of TAPI as it will weaken its influence and power in the region. However for political reasons, this option has been avoided which will be discussed later (Peimani 2011; Seiff 2010).

IP

Competing against TAPI and US interests was the IPI (Iran, Pakistan, India) pipeline which would have transported oil and gas from Iran to Pakistan and terminate in India. The US opposed India and Pakistan importation of Iranian gas as it is believed that Iran would use the revenues to finance its nuclear program. India was pressurized by the US through not selling its nuclear reactors to India. In addition, India wishes to develop its off shore gas fields in the Bay of Bengal and limit its dependence on foreign gas imports. Pakistan was also discouraged to partake in the IP plans. But only India withdrew from this project, and joined the US supported TAPI pipeline project.(Abbas 2012, 5-7,13; Dadwal 2011; Escobar 2009; Washington's Blog 2012; The Hindu 2012). The IP is currently under construction and Iran's section has been completed. The rest will be constructed and connected to Pakistan in 2014. Pakistan's domestic demand for energy is greater than its supply and is in need of gas imports for power generation. In order to deter Pakistan from the IP project, the US has offered funds to build a LNG re-gasification terminal to import gas from Qatar rather than Iran and import electricity from Tajikistan through Afghanistan. However, Tajikistan cannot meet those demands as Iran is assisting its government with its deficiencies. TAPI was therefore used to deter India and Pakistan from importing Iranian gas (Peimani 2011). With the exclusion of India in the IPI pipeline project, Iran and Pakistan have commenced with the Iran-Pakistan (IP) onshore gas pipeline and signed the final agreement of construction worth \$US 3.2 billion. Iran and India signed 2 agreements that included possible participation of India. The 900km pipeline will transport 750 MMcf/d of gas from Iran to Pakistan.

BTC

On the other hand, In 1997 The U.S and, with the help of Turkey has sponsored and proposed the oil pipeline, from Baku in Azerbaijan, through Tbilisi in Georgia to the Ceyhan port in Turkey. It is called the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and started pumping oil in May 2005. It was extremely expensive and difficult to build, but the government managed



to procure financing from agencies and banks. There were lots of political and business oppositions against the construction of this pipeline in both the Caspian states and the United States. The purpose of this pipeline was to undermine Russia's control and strategic dominance over central Asian gas and oil and claim a stake of the European gas market.

Nabucco

In addition, the US proposed that Turkmenistan build a natural gas pipeline, named Nabucco Pipeline running parallel to the BTC but originating from Ankara in Turkey and ending in Europe (from Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria). The US intends to connect the already existing and operational Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline to the proposed Nabucco pipeline (Abbas 2012, 7; Dawal 2011). The Turkish had ratified an agreement with the European Union in 2008 for its involvement of the construction of the Nabucco pipeline. It will cost around \$US10.6 billion and will extract gas from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Iraq. It will be 3,300Km long and will terminate in Baumgarten, Austria, transporting 31Bcm/a of gas. Turkmenistan is not willing to include Russia in this project either. Qatar and Turkey are planning to construct a connecting pipeline which will run through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria and hope to connect this Nabucco as well which Qatar will also supply gas to (Clancy 2010). This proposal may be hindered by the current civil war in Syria which will be discussed later.

Nord Stream and South Stream

Russia still maintains its dominance in the region through its energy resources whereas the US wants Europe to shift its resource dependence away from Russia. Russia supplies Europe with energy through 3 main pipelines and they are planning to build two more running from Russia, namely Nord Stream and South Stream. The Nord Stream pipeline is already under construction which will run from Northwest Russia through the Baltic Sea ending in Germany, whereas the South Stream pipeline will run from Southwest Russia through the Black Sea through Bulgaria, Greece and Italy, with a branch to Hungary and Austria (Abbas 2012, 7). Europe's energy supply is highly dependent upon Russia's Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines, and Europe and Turkey's Nabucco pipeline. The Nord stream pipeline is an offshore pipeline which runs from Vyborg in Russian to Griefswald in Germany. The South Stream pipeline will transport 63 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia per year through the Black Sea to Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary and Austria and may be completed in 2015 (Abbas 2012, 8). South Stream is viewed as competition for Nabucco with regard to funding, market share, and press. Russia argues that there is limited gas supply for Nabucco, and that South Stream is safer and readily supplied. However, this will be the only pipeline that will have no direct contact or participation from Russia. It will thereby diversify Europe's natural gas suppliers and transit routes. The pipelines are to run parallel to each other and deliver 27.5 billion cubic meters of oil per year. It is estimated

to cost about Euro 15 – 16 Billion.

So essentially, its Russia's Nord stream and South stream competing with US sponsored TAPI, BTC and Nabucco, to gain profits from energy transit routes and oil and gas exportation to European countries. TAPI excludes both Russia and Iran. The US is involved in the pipeline projects which bypass China, Russia and Iran, thereby weakening Russia's control and influence over the flow of oil in the region. The US attempts to use different strategies such as western commercialism and the buyers reliance thereof (Abbas 2012, 6 - 8). The US wants access to the central Asian gas through the transit pipelines and Afghanistan is therefore of geopolitical significance to the US for obtaining access to the flow of oil and gas.

5. The war in Afghanistan

After the 9/11 Terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, which killed almost 3000 people, global peace and security was undermined in an unexpected way. These series of events threatened national and international security resulting in stricter security measures in the US and internationally. The US did not only take national defensive measures, but also international offensive measures which led to the "War on Terrorism". The war was fought in Afghanistan to eliminate Al-Qaeda - a Terrorist organizations believed to be responsible for planning, coordinating and carrying out the 9/11 attacks. The United States' military intervention in Afghanistan was pro-active self-defense and vengeance for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The UN general assembly and security council condemned these terrorist attacks, and viewed it as a threat to international peace and security through UNGA resolution 56/1 and UNSC Resolution 1386 (2001) . The UN however did not authorize the war in Afghanistan as it was not an act perpetrated by the state and it would intrude upon Afghanistan's sovereignty. The US argued that the UN's authorization was not necessary as the US intervention in Afghanistan was an act of self-defense and a national security concern. According to the United Nations Charter, any nation, such as the US who has signed and ratified the charter may resort to use self-defense through military force to protect itself, once all diplomatic means of resolving the issue is exhausted (United Nations Charter). The United States was authorized with a joint resolution by the US congress a few days after the attacks, on the 14th of September 2001 to

“use all and necessary appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11th, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons” (Grimmet 2007) to protect citizens at home and abroad. On the 20th September, the US urged the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden and the leaders of Al-Qaeda and also close down the terrorist camps. The Taliban government was willing to hand over Osama bin laden if any evidence that proved his involvement was presented. The US government refused to cooperate as their demands were not met and then sought to eliminate the Taliban government as it was believed that they harbored terrorist groups.



Afghan villagers gather near a house destroyed in an apparent drone strike in Logar Province on June 6, 2012. (Photo Credit: AP/Ihsanullah Majroh)

On the 21 October 2001, the US started its first military invasion in Afghanistan. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was given a mandate in Afghanistan in December 2001 by the United Nations Security Council to assist the government in bringing security in Kabul. After August 2003, the security was expanded around the area and passed on to NATO to bring about security, stability and peace-keeping which is still being violently contested by the Taliban and extremist forces. Amendments to the AUMF have therefore been proposed. However, the US has gone beyond its mandate, and has not only sought to fight those believed to be involved in 9/11 but also any terrorist group and insurgency. Opposition has arisen against this behavior and the

ambiguity of this mandate (Cronogue 2012:377).

I will argue these following sections from a neo-liberal and neo-realist perspective that the removal of the Taliban government was because of their disapproval and refusal to participate and construct the TAPI pipeline. While the Taliban government was in control it deployed forces to patrol the Turkmen-afghan border. The removal of the Taliban therefore opened up the possibility for the TAPI pipeline to be constructed. Former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai replaced the Taliban and the TAPI agreement for was approved and signed in 2002 – A few months after the US invasion. Soon after the removal of the Taliban government, the pipeline deal was signed. The US had other interests, besides the removal of terrorist organizations. Afghanistan is of geopolitical importance to the U.S as it lies between the Caucasus (an oil and gas rich region) and the nuclear powers, namely, China, Russia, Pakistan and India. It is not only of geopolitical importance but is resource rich containing “deposits of natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chrome, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc and iron ore, as well as precious and semiprecious stones”. Wars were fought in and over Afghanistan (Escobar 2009; Abbas 2012, 17).

One can argue that the war in Afghanistan was not only aimed at removing terrorist groups. Contrary to the US aims of the “War on Terror”, terrorism had significantly increased in Afghanistan since the foreign military presence, as shown by the Global terrorism database (2012). In addition, Afghan civilians were threatened and killed by NATO forces who were supposed to protect them. Finally, security in the region has not improved. The US as well as other foreign forces has a network of military bases located in Afghanistan.

“One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south”

The US has spent about \$5.4 trillion in Afghanistan and the situation has not stabilized or improved after more than a decade of struggle. According to Abbas (2012), the construction of TAPI is the main reason the US invaded Afghanistan. The assistant secretary

of state Richard Boucher said in 2007: “One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south” (Abbas 2012). The US’s reconstruction projects such as the TAPI pipeline in the Afghanistan is viewed by the US as an opportunity for regional cooperation between rival states and seeks more economic interdependence among regional powers, raising the cost of conflict. Afghanistan will therefore serve as a transit area for the TAPI pipeline. The route will be located in the south running from Herat towards Nimruz and the Hemand provinces, where the Taliban, and Pashtun guerrillas, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras are located. The US is also building a new military mega-base for US troops in Dasht-e-Margo, close to Taliban and guerilla forces in order to stabilize and secure the region for the construction of the pipeline.

The Afghan Minister of Commerce and Industry Wahidullah Shahrani said the 5000 – 7000 security force personnel will be deployed along the pipeline route. Afghanistan will procure \$160 billion in transit fees from the pipelines that will eventually be built; however construction is highly dependent on the security in the region (Escobar 2009; Abbas 2012:19 - 21).

Russia has supported the war in Afghanistan by providing material benefits, as well as air space and territory as a transit area for the west to infiltrate Afghanistan. This is contrary to its official military doctrine – western military in former soviet countries as threats. One advantage was the elimination of the Taliban government which has been the cause of much instability in the region, which could have spread throughout the region. However, one negative aspect of NATO presence and the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan for Russia is the proliferation of drug trafficking from Afghanistan into Russia (Trenin 2010: 17). At the commence of the TAPI pipeline dream, Russia had opposed the construction of it due to tight competition for oil and gas resources in the region, however, it later sort to engage in the project. Turkmenistan blocked Russia’s involvement in the project due to negative prior experiences, and Turkmenistan is still trying to acquire independence from Russia and access the European market (Abbas 2012:19 – 21). Similar to the US invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq was in a similar predicament 2 years later.

6. The war in Iraq

The US Congress passed a joint resolution (H.J. Res. 114) in October 2002, for the use of military force against the Iraqi regime, ruled by Saddam Hussein, as it was perceived as a threat to not only US, but to international peace and security. Hussein's regime was accused of possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and also host and supporter of terrorist organizations. This was after former-president, Bush urged the UN to take action against Iraq by enforcing the Treaty of the Non-proliferation of Nuclear weapons of 1 July 1968. The UN Security Council responded by passing Resolution 1441 in November 2002 urging Iraq which specified a more thorough inspection of its weapons. It ordered Iraq to deliver a declaration on the status of their WMD program with dire consequences if they did not comply. Iraq had violated 16 UNSC resolutions; it has been in-transparent about its development of WMD programs, and supported international terrorism. Bush demanded that the UN fulfill its duties in the charter and that Iraq removes its WMD. The US perceived Iraq as a threat to its interests and allies. Iraq has a reputation of developing and possessing WMD which it used against its own people as well as Iran. It is also listed in the State department's annual list of countries supporting terrorist attacks. The US also advocated a change of Saddam Hussein's regime to a democratic one which is only possible through military action. Critics of US invasion of Iraq stated that it should have exhausted all means of diplomacy before heading into Afghanistan. It should have waited for feedback from UN inspectors' WMD programs in Iraq's reports. Once the reports have been completed and the accusations were found to be true the US military intervention could have been warranted. However, the invasion took place before any verification could be made. The UN inspectors suggested that if more time were given it would have been a good investment in peace (Prados 2003).

On the 17th March 2003, Bush offered an ultimatum in which Hussein and his sons could leave Iraq in the next 48 hours. On the 19th March, air strikes were employed against the Iraqi government officials. By the 15th of April the US occupied major Iraqi cities. The combat operations were ordered to end as there were no WMD found. By June 30th 2007, 3572 US troops and 7202 Iraqi Security Force members had died in the operation (Bowman 2007; Prados 2003). There was a major loss of life due to the false claim of WMD. Russia

on the other hand had first opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and proposed for nonmilitary means in confronting the issue of WMDs in Iraq. However, Russia changed its position a few months later, and helped legitimize the US intervention through the UN. It also did not want the US to leave before achieving stability. After the new Iraq government had been put in place, Russia reestablished ties with Baghdad. Russian oil companies benefited from contracts under Saddam Hussein. After the war Russia considers Iraq to be an important country due to energy resources and its geopolitical position (Trenin 2010: 7-8).

“..Iraq invasion along with plans to exploit the oil reserves, were discussed by government ministers and oil companies long before the war had begun.”

With regard to energy resources, Iraq holds the world's second largest reserves for oil and is the second largest oil producer of OPEC. About 11% in the world's total with 112 billion barrels of oil reserves. 17 to 80 oil fields have been developed, the main ones being Kirkuk in the north and Rumaila in the south. Iraq also has undeveloped natural gas reserves. The Department of Energy reports state that Iraq is the best prospect for long-term petroleum. To demonstrate its potential, the US is able to produce 10 barrels of oil per day while Iraq can produce about several thousands. After Saddam Hussein was removed and his regime had changed, Iraq's oil production had increased after the brief disruption during the fighting. The damage to wells, facilities and refineries slowed down production. The democratically elected president, Jalal Talabani hoped to stabilize the northern region with the presence of the oil fields and export pipelines. With the new president, revenue allocation is being negotiated. However, production depends highly on security (Kumins 2005:1-5). Hussein had nationalized oil and gas in 1972. The main reason for the US invasion of Iraq was to liberalize the oil and gas market to foreign states and oil and gas companies. Due to the US national interests mainly security for the nation, the economy, and to power up industries, the US relies heavily on oil and gas imports from the middle east, free access to the gulf's oil and the free access to Gulf's exports to world markets while being military prepared for any disruptions in access to low cost oil. These states do not lower oil prices nor are investments



Syrian government forces patrolling in the central city of Homs (2013). Essential to the government's resurgence has been its well-armed military. Long trained for a traditional land war with Israel, it has become increasingly adept at fighting an insurgency. (Photo Credit: AFP/Getty Images)

made to improve and expand infrastructure to increase oil production to keep up with international demand. Iraq is the main oil producing country, exporting oil and gas to the US. The US is facing shortages and high prices for energy. Americans are also vulnerable to the fluctuation in energy prices. Bignell (2011) states that the Iraq invasion along with plans to exploit the oil reserves, were discussed by government ministers and oil companies long before the war had begun. In November 2002 Deals were made with British energy companies to get a share in the oil reserve as a reward for supporting the invasion. The British Petroleum (BP) company was invited by the foreign office to discuss oil opportunities once Iraqi regime has changed. 1000 documents were found under the Freedom of Information. A 20 year contract was signed during the Iraqi invasion regarding half of Iraq's oil reserves which can produce 60 billion barrels of oil which can make \$658 million per annum from the south filed of Rumaila. Critics of the invasion state that the US main intention for invading Iraq was to procure cheap oil. Governments made clandestine deals with oil companies to gain cheap access to oil. With regard to Iraq, the war was clandestinely based on access and exploitation to Iraq oil fields and natural gas. The US' accusation IRAQ holding of Weapons of Mass destruction proved to be false, yet there are still US military bases close to and surrounding the oil rich regions. The next country which is of geopolitical and strategic importance with oil and gas resources is

Syria.

7. The civil war in Syria

The civil war in Syria began in March 2011, with public protesting for the release of child prisoners who had criticized the government with statements painted on walls. Freedom of speech and media is prohibited under Syria's authoritarian regime ruled by Bashar Al-Assad. It had been in a state of emergency for 48 years. The government forces tried to suppress these protests by beating, shooting and arresting protestors. Naval ships and army tanks were deployed against Syrian citizens as well. The child prisoners were eventually granted amnesty, but the violent retaliation had escalated from the side of the Syrian protestors and the side of the military forces. This led to an intractable civil war. A human rights and humanitarian crisis had emerged with systematic acts of brutality. The Human Rights Council and Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) launched an investigative mission into the situation and called the attacks a crime against humanity. The protestors and activists organized themselves in Istanbul in August 2011 and formed the Syrian National Council (SNC). International communities were shocked when news spread about the atrocities, but were reluctant to intervene as it did in Libya (BBC 2012; ICRtoP 2012). There were fears of the violence flooding over to neighboring borders such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Russia and China opposed any sort of foreign intervention in the conflict and argued that it would undermine the legitimacy of

Assad's government (Bloomberg 2011). Disregarding the international community's agreement to take responsibility to protect civilians if their state fails to do so, especially in cases when systematic and widespread acts of violence are taking place. The United Nations initiative, the Right to Protect (R2P) gives other nations the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state in order to protect its citizens, collectively and in a timely manner. Navi Pillay says the Syrians are in urgent need of protection. The Security Council failed to reach a consensus because of different stances. Russia and China vetoed against the Resolutions on Syria arguing against international intervention as it would undermine Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and says that the situation does not pose a threat to international security and peace. It also used the failure of RtoP in Libya with Resolution 1973 to argue its point. Russia and China however did condemn the violence in Syria and threatened Syria with sanctions if the situation worsened. Russia then introduced a draft resolution condemning the violence in Syria, but prohibited any kind of military intervention. The US and its allies argued this draft resolution was not aggressive enough. The League of Arab states introduced the resolution advocating Assad's removal from power and replace him with the unity government. The resolution included an end to the violence, the release of prisoners and access for the UN, NGOs and human rights monitors. This resolution was supported by the US and its allies, France and the UK. However it was once again vetoed by Russia and China. Kofi Annan tried to implement a six-point proposal to reach a settlement for the crisis. The Security Council finally agreed on this proposal and Ban-Ki Moon was pleased with the Council's unity and progress.

A resolution was passed by the General Assembly condemning the Syrian government's treatment of its citizens; however it had no impact because of legalities. The Syrian envoy declared the international actions as a "Diplomatic war" as Russia along with its allies abstained from voting. The second General Assembly passed a resolution with regard to a peace plan created by the Arab league which included allowing observers into the country. A third resolution was passed by the General Assembly to deal with these human rights abuses in the international criminal courts (ICC) so that those who are responsible do not go unpunished (ICRtoP 2012).

Looking deeper, one can see that the members of

the Security Council were not acting in the interests of the Syrian people, but rather their own political and economic interests. Those against international intervention argued on the basis of not interfering with the sovereignty of the states, versus those arguing for the prevention and prohibition of systematic human rights violations. Russia has had a close relationship with the Syrian government, with military and energy interests, and Syria being its main Middle Eastern ally. Syria is of geopolitical importance when it comes to the transit of oil and gas in the region with 2 pipelines, namely, Kirkuk-Baniyas and the Iraq-Iran pipeline. The Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline is close to Russia's last naval base in the former Soviet Union, at Port Tartus along the Syrian coast. The Kirkuk-Baniyas is currently closed but will soon operate. The Iran-Iraq pipeline is located in the north of Syria which runs along the Turkish border. Russia is also known to export arms to Syria and was believed to be supporting the Syrian regime with arms which explains Russia's opposition to any type of sanctions against Syria. Another important reason why Syria is of strategic importance is because of its location close to the Levantine basin – a newly discovered off shore gas field close to Lebanon, Israel and Cyprus. It is claimed to contain 8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The European Union and Russia is competing for investments in this region. Russia secured a deal with Turkey for the construction of the South Stream pipeline which will transport gas from Russia to Europe. Europe depends on Russia for 50% of its oil and gas resources. The development of these pipelines is highly dependent on the stability of Syria. These projects and present pipelines are at risk of bombings, fire arm, and military force. It will directly affect its neighbors; Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan. I argue that this is the reason behind Russia's opposition against international intervention and military forces. If



NATO were to intervene in Syria it would be in conflict with Russia's interests. NATO has however established a radar station in the south of Turkey, while Russia has a radar station south of Damascus (Worldview from off the Strip 2012). Regarding the political interests of the US government, there is no coincidence to the regime changes in the Middle East and North Africa. Syria is argued (Washington's Blog 2012) to be one of the targets for a regime change as it weakens its close allies power in the region, namely Iran and Russia. Similar to the regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, Syria did not cooperate with Western interests regarding energy. Assad also posed a threat to US and its allies, Turkey and Israel regarding the flow of energy in the region (Washington's Blog 2012). In addition, prior to the escalation of war and the world exposure to Syria's human rights violations, the US had been a close ally to Syria for the 'War on Terror'. The US had sent suspects linked to terrorist groups for serious questioning and even torture. The US interrogators worked with the Syrian torturers. This behavior is contrary to US arguments for the promotion of human rights in Syria (Hasan 2012). There are also other players in this political game that hope to win a stake in the matter, namely Qatar. Qatar is clandestinely supporting rebel groups in Syria with weapons, and hopes to achieve its own agenda - the construction of its pipeline to transport natural gas from the South Pars through Jordan and Syria to Turkey. Jordan will receive free gas because of it allowing Syrian rebel forces to train and launch attacks from its territory (Editorial Dept 2013). Syria therefore is a key role in power politics in the Middle East region. Whoever has influence and control over Syria is able to have access and procure oil and gas resources despite any political instability. Iran seems to be the next target on the list as it does not cooperate with the west either.

8. The potential for war in Iran

Iran has been sanctioned and accused of pursuing nuclear programs which could eventually lead to the development of a nuclear bomb. The US argues that this is a threat to international security and peace and against the agreement under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, Iran argues that this is not the case. It is not pursuing a nuclear program for destructive purposes such as nuclear weapons, but in the contrary, it is using its nuclear energy for electricity and medical purposes. This debate worsened since November 2011. In August 2012, the International atomic energy agency (IAEA) reported that Iran installed nuclear

centrifuges to produce nuclear fuel. It also cleared ground to conduct nuclear experiments. Israel feeling, threatened urged the international community to put pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear capabilities to enrich Uranium, even urging the United States to take military action. UN inspectors reported that Iran was increasing its Uranium enrichment after installing the centrifuges of which its products will be sufficient for a bomb. International sanctions were imposed on Iran effecting its finance, metal and natural gas sectors and gravely affecting its economy resulting in a decrease of value of its currency (The New York Times 2013).

Trenin argues (2010:12) that Iran's nuclear goals are part of its plan to restore its power in the region. Informed Russians are aware of Iran's nuclear aspirations, and that it is not only meant for peaceful purposes. Iran has a few allies in the region, besides Syria, which is currently in an unstable situation. Russia and China are not completely committed allies either. Iran is threatened by the US as it is in the middle of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the gulf in the south, surrounded by US military bases. In addition, Pakistan and Israel possess nuclear weapons. Possessing nuclear weapons deters any powerful state from intervening as shown in the case of North Korea. Russia has been in support of non-aggressive sanctions against Iran for its nuclear activity. Russia believes that Iran cannot be deterred from pursuing its nuclear aspirations, but rather its security dilemma should be acknowledged. If Iran's security and technological advancement is guaranteed it could relinquish its nuclear activities. Iran is at loggerheads with the US. Russia is however supporting Iran and supplying it with arms during international sanctions. It is of geopolitical, strategic and resource importance to Russia (Trenin 2010:12-16). Russia together with Iran controls 20% of the world's oil reserves and 50% of its gas reserves (Escobar 2009). Iran holds the world's second largest gas reserves – over “93 billion barrels of oil and 4.17 million barrels per day in 2009”. Iran exports mainly to the European Union which is 18% of Iran's energy exports. The Turkmenistan-Iran gas pipeline was the first pipeline to emanate from central Asia built in 2007. Iran signed a huge deal worth \$120 billion with China in 2004, supplying China with about 10 million tons of liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) for 25 years. This gives China's state oil company the opportunity to explore and drill for oil and gas reserves in Iran. Iran intends to sell gas to Europe which will compete with the US owned Nabucco pipeline (Abbas 2012, 8; Independent Media Review Analysis 2006).

According to Peimani (2011), Iran is the world's third largest consumer of gas and oil, and therefore imports these resources because their demand exceeds their supply. Oil is Iran's main energy source. Iran and the United Arab Emirates are the regions (Middle East regions) largest producers of natural gas (Business and Economics Research Advisor 2010; Washington's Blog 2012). Due to Iran's possession and control over its oil and gas resources, and its growing nuclear capabilities, it is a power in its own right. Iran has even attempted to block off the Strait of Hormuz of which 20% of the world's oil and gas exports are transported. It therefore has the power to stop energy supplies control oil and gas prices. President Mahmoed Ahmadinejad warned the West that crude oil has not yet reached its true value. Iran's leaders has made many threats regarding the distribution of oil from the Persian Gulf if any move were to be made against it. The US has pointed out the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of Iran's position, such as pressure from the international community and its dependency of foreign energy supplies. It imports oil and gas in order to meet domestic demands, and the costs of these imports could be raised with international pressure (Berman 2006; Sedghi 2012).

With regard to TAPI, Iran prefers to be used as an energy transit route to transfer natural gas to the south of Iran instead of using other countries, such as Afghanistan. Iran opposes the construction of the TAPI pipeline as it will weaken its influence and power in the Central and south Asian region (Seiff 2010). The US and Europe is attempting to lower international dependency on Iranian gas exports for economic and political reasons. The pipeline route was purposely planned to cut through the unstable, insecure and riskier region of Afghanistan over the secure and cost-effective, less technical option of Iran. The TAPI project is therefore more political than one first realizes. It therefore is possible, that the current isolation and accusations against Iran will eventually result in another military

intervention by the US in Iran, based on the argument of world threatening nuclear activities. This possibility follows from previous cases of arguments similar to those used for the US invasion of Iraq. Russia will be a determinant factor in this potential war depending on its interests and commitment to ties with Iran.

9. Conclusion

One can clearly notice a trend of the US, accusing Central Asian and Middle Eastern governments of supporting terrorist organizations and possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction. Illegal wars were declared on some countries along with sudden and violent regime changes. The US opposed regimes and persons who opposed their economic and political interests. If not directly, then indirectly eliminating them through supporting an opposition. Anything that stood in their way of achieving national goals was threatened on an international platform rallying domestic and international support to back-up their military and non-military actions. The US was using the Middle Eastern countries to obtain control of the coveted energy resources while competing and sometimes cooperating with Russia. Russia fights backs in a more diplomatic way, through its veto power in the UN Security Council holding onto its symbolic and economic power in the former soviet and Middle East region. One can see the detrimental effects of the power politics between the US and Russia such as war, tortures, arrests, refugees, death and in some cases crimes against humanity. Control over the oil and gas resources has led to conflict, war and many innocent deaths. This unfortunately, is not likely to end until fear and security issues are resolved. One recommendation is for public awareness of clandestine national agendas that are not transparent. If people are informed of strategies governments are using to manipulate and promote their interests there would be stronger unifying pressure from the public, especially those in more democratic countries who have access to information. This will influence governments behavior which if not monitored could leave citizens from several countries at a loss from the scourge of war. Once people are informed, governments would have more incentive to change their behavior if only for a vote.

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By Lorna Balie

Lorna Balie did her Bachelors in Political Science, Philosophy and Economics from the University of Stellenbosch. She completed her Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies at the European Peace University in Austria where her thesis focused on the impact of peace education on youth in South Africa. Lorna is currently a doctoral candidate in Education at the Centre for International Teacher Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.