US-Energieinteressen in Zentralasien und dessen Konkurrenz mit Russland und China

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Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel spricht über den Platz strategischer Rohstoffe – Öl und Gas – in der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung des Landes, die Probleme und die Bedeutung der Diversifizierung des Gasexports, die politische und rechtliche Grundlage des Transports, die Vorteile einer ausgewogenen Außenpolitik in der Energiegeopolitik.
Schlüsselwörter: Energiegeopolitik, Energiequellen, insbesondere Öl, Gasressourcen, Pipelines, Exportdiversifizierung.

US energy interests in Central Asia and its competition with Russia and China

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Abstract: This article tells about the place of strategic raw – oil and gas – in the country’s economic development, problems and significance of gas export diversification, political and juridical basis of transportation, advantages of a balanced foreign policy in the energy geopolitics.
Keywords: energy geopolitics, energy sources, particularly oil, gas resources, pipelines, export diversification.

The United States is now at the center of the global energy system as a consumer, producer, and innovator, trying to maintain its status as a global energy leader.

Based on the data of the US Department of Energy leading Russian expert **B.Martsinkevich** writes that "in 2019, the country's oil reserves will be 6.42 billion tons, of which 3.13 billion tons will be accounted for by shale deposits"[1]. In fact, the oil industry accounts for 10 percent of the U.S. GDP and employs 10 million people in the industry. The USA is one of the biggest players fighting for its segment in the world oil market.

In the words of **D.Trump,** who was the president of the USA in 2017-2021, "energy is the most important resource of the United States, and in the future it will not only meet its national needs, but will begin to export shale oil and gas to the whole world in large quantities"[2].

Since the start of the so-called Slants revolution, oil production has increased from 7.9 million barrels per day in 2012 to 11.3 million barrels per day in August 2021[3]. The volume of consumption is equal to 20 million barrels per day. The US is behind only China in terms of oil import volume. It became a net exporter by 2019 for the first time since 1940, with export volumes of 2.2 million barrels per day[4].

Such an opportunity D. Trump has created a good opportunity to start a policy of sanctions against oil-producing countries that do not follow his lead. In particular, in the first year of his administration, he announced the withdrawal of the United States from the comprehensive joint plan on Iran's nuclear programs, which was considered "the greatest achievement of the former President Barack Obama in the international arena." In January 2019, President **Nicolas Maduro** imposed sanctions against the government of Venezuela, which is called the "main oil well of the planet" and has 300 billion barrels of oil reserves.

In addition, D. The Trump administration has withdrawn from many international agreements, including the Paris Climate Agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Open Skies Agreement. However, a large-scale crisis in the shale gas network, which has become unprofitable due to the drop in oil prices (*profitability cannot be achieved in the shale gas network unless the price of oil rises above $100 per barrel - L. Rahmatov*), forces the US to refrain from strengthening the sanctions policy.

Consequently, there are many light types of oil in the US territory, but it is not enough to fully satisfy the country's need for petroleum products, and there is always a need to import heavy types from abroad. Refineries in the north of the US have traditionally used Canadian heavy oil, while facilities in the south have traditionally used Venezuelan crude. Sanctions against Venezuela have cut off these companies from crude oil. The closest in chemical composition to the imported Venezuelan "Merey 16" was the Iranian "Iranian Heavy" variety. But due to Washington's sanctions, the US "black gold" market remains closed for Persian products.

Another variety that can be processed without significantly changing the entire technological chain is the Russian Urals brand. Although in the international arena, Washington considers Russia to be an energy rival, "by 2020, Russia will sell 196.9 million barrels of oil worth 8-8.5 billion dollars to the United States, and the country will become the third largest foreign player in the oil market after Canada and Mexico" in the United States a clear indication that pragmatic politics will always remain a priority[5].

For this reason, President D. Trump was very cautious in applying restrictive or discriminatory measures against Russia.

One of the advantages of the USA in the global energy field is that it is currently the only power center in the world that has been able to create a system of strategic oil reserves in order to ensure its security in emergency situations and provide uninterrupted supply of the American economy and consumers.

During the oil crisis in 1973, when OPEC members refused to sell raw materials to Israel because of Washington's support, the federal government, using the mood in the US society, managed to pass a decision in both houses of Congress to create a Strategic Petroleum Reserve at the expense of the state. On December 22, 1975, the "Energy Policy and Energy Conservation Act" was approved, which provides for the creation of a park of reservoirs for its storage in order to reduce dependence on oil imports.

"The US strategic oil reserve is the largest artificial oil reserve in the world. Its volume was 590.8 million barrels as of January 21, 2022.[6]. "The warehouses have the capacity to store a total of 714 million barrels of oil"[7]. After Russia's oil imports were suspended in March due to the conflict in Ukraine, it was decided to release 1 million barrels per day from this reserve for the next six months, totaling 180 million barrels[8].

Such a large volume aimed at filling the market can have a significant impact on oil futures trading. The Ministry of Energy transfers the profit from its periodic sale and later purchase at a low price to the Ministry of Finance, and these funds are directed to the implementation of the state's priority policy.

Current President J. Biden said that he will use these revenues to finance the program of modernization of US infrastructure. Therefore, US strategic oil reserves not only serve as a reliable guarantee of energy security in the country, but are also a lever capable of regulating global oil prices.

This effective tool was used in 1991 by President George W. Bush during Operation Desert Storm, which derailed the order of oil production in Iraq and Kuwait, Jr. J. Bush, in August 2005, when a quarter of the country's oil infrastructure was destroyed due to the devastating Hurricane Katrina, President B. Obama also decided to use it in 2011 when the oil supply was disrupted due to the war in Libya.

Another puzzling issue is that the White House administration, which for many years was more confused about how to lower oil prices on the world market, is now seriously thinking about how to raise prices as an exporting country. The main ideology during D. Trump's administration - "Making America great again", that is, Americans' interests are "first of all" (America First) [9] and J. Biden's ideas of "Making America a normal country again"[10] certainly required effective energy policy.

The advancement of US energy interests in the world will not fail to affect the Central Asian region as well. In this sense, it is possible to completely agree with the views of Dr. Lee Joo-yeon of the Graduate School of International Studies, Hanyang University, South Korea, who said "In 2021, J. Biden has stepped up his pressure on China since he was elected president. Most likely, China also prefers to respond to the United States and is strengthening cooperation with Russia. In this way, the Central Asian region will become a space for the promotion of partnership and cooperation between China and Russia"[11].

Leading expert on Russian, Eurasian and international energy policy of the "Heritage" Foundation, director-founder of the Center for Energy, Natural Resources and Geopolitics A.Cohen's opinion that the USA, which also has incomparable resources of natural gas, "wants to abandon gas imports and play the role of a major player in the global and regional gas markets, including Europe", is becoming a reality now.[12]

The US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has approved a plan to build dozens of terminals to allow the export of compressed gas. Historically speaking, “the United States is the first founder of the transportation of gas in compressed form through the oceans. In 1959, the first shipment of compressed methane was sent from Louisiana to Great Britain[13].

According to Shell analysts, "the United States will increase its supply of compressed gas to 24 million tons in 2021 and will become one of the world's largest exporters in 2022"[14]. Although it is impossible to squeeze Russia out of the most attractive European gas market in the world in the short term, Washington managed to politicize the Russian-European energy relations, prevent them from forming an energy alliance, and "break the gap" because of Ukraine.

In our opinion, another Russian expert **G. Trofimchuk's** view that "the strengthening of the energy cooperation of the United States in Europe is important because when it tries to divide China-Russia, it can do this task by strengthening the mutual relations between the United States and the European Union"[15] fully expresses the strategy of Washington.

If we look at the recent past, on May 4, 2006, at the Vilnius conference, the concept of "energy weapons" was first raised at a high level. US Vice President **D.Cheney** spoke about democratic transformations in the countries of the former Union and criticized Russia for its abuses in the trade of energy resources: "If oil and gas become a weapon of intimidation or blackmail, as a result of which supply becomes a game or an attempt is made to monopolize transportation, you cannot protect your legitimate interests[16].

On November 27, 2006, the chairman of the US Senate Committee on International Relations **R. Lugar** even made a proposal to involve the NATO military bloc in solving energy-related issues. The senator said, "Russia's suspension of gas supplies to Ukraine has shown that the energy flow can be used to achieve political goals and confirms the dependence of importing countries on suppliers." For this reason, he put forward the proposal to add the words *"applying countermeasures against attempts to use energy weapons against member states of the organization..."* to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty[17]. However, there is no consensus on this point, and we also believe that using military blocs to solve carbon trading is inappropriate.

After these statements, the Russian company "Gazprom" is faced with a policy of constant restraint in international arenas[18].

Of course, energy problems between the EU members and Russia are a constant issue[19]. However, after these statements, the Russian company "Gazprom" is faced with a policy of constant restraint in international arenas[20].

On the other hand, the fact that China's energy relations with Russia, which is in the vortex of sanctions, is strengthening, actively entering the hydrocarbon reserve systems of Central Asia and the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, and creating strategic infrastructure networks, seriously worries the USA. In particular, the Russia-China-Iran energy geopolitical nation emerging in Eurasia will be a serious blow to Washington's strategic interests.

In 2016, during the visit of the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, it was agreed to sign a strategic pact with Iran. On March 27, 2021, an agreement "on political, strategic and economic cooperation" for 25 years was signed between the two countries in Tehran.

According to the agreement, China will invest 400 billion US dollars in Iran's economy, 150 billion of which will be spent on the energy sector, modernization of aging oil industry, oil wells and refineries, and other infrastructure.

This plan will make Iran, whose economy has been weakened by sanctions, a country that supplies China with an uninterrupted and very large amount of cheap oil at the most favorable rates.

According to well-known analyst **M.Kaylan,** "This agreement will change the balance of strategic power and threaten Western energy policy"[21].

In our view, this agreement will reduce the strength and impact of the US sanctions aimed at isolating Iran, and further loosen its weakened position in the Middle East, Central and South Asia with a swift withdrawal from Afghanistan. This confirms that "from January 2021 to April 2022, a total of 338 million barrels of oil worth 22 billion US dollars were exported to China"[22].

Therefore, former US President D.Trump, In the last period of career tried to unite the Arab countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which oppose Iran, around Israel, which is a "stronghold" in the region.

It seems that Washington's interest in the energy resources of the Caspian region has decreased at a time when the "shale revolution" is taking place in the USA itself, and the country is maximally satisfying its domestic needs.

According to experts, in the last twenty years, the "Afghan principle" has been a priority in the US approach to Central Asia.

President of the USA in 2009-2017 B. During his time, Obama also made a lot of efforts to remove the obstacles in front of the "Nabucco" and "Southern Gas Corridor" projects. In his administration, a special representative for the distribution and transit of energy resources in Eurasia worked, former US ambassador to Azerbaijan, head of the Atlantic Council **R. Morningstar** was directly involved in the creation of the political and energy strategy of the United States in relation to Central Asia.

"The new strategy for Central Asia in 2019-2025" covering all areas of cooperation in 2020, when D. Trump ends his term of office, is based on the principle of supporting sovereignty and economic prosperity[23]. It is possible to agree with the opinion of international expert G. Trofimchuk said in an interview with "Farsnews" news agency that "under President Joe Biden, the subject of Central Asia is becoming more relevant as a zone of special interests of the United States"[24].

In our opinion, the US understands well the importance of hydrocarbons of the Caspian region not only in the international energy market, but also its strategic role in strengthening the stability and economic development of producing and transiting countries.

Based on these, the following conclusions can be advanced:

1. President J. Biden's idea of "turning America into a normal state again" cannot be realized without an effective energy policy in the country. Therefore, the USA will continue its traditional policy of providing its domestic market with guaranteed and reliable oil and gas resources.

2. The United States will steadily increase its natural gas supplies to the global and regional gas markets, including Europe, focusing on pushing Russian companies out of this market, its traditional competitor, and will build dozens of terminals that will allow the export of compressed gas. With a wealth of experience in state regulation of energy, Washington expands its participation in this game not directly, but through the services of the world's leading fuel and oil companies.

3. In the medium term, due to the global energy competition, the US competition with Moscow and Beijing will reach a new stage of tension. The conflicts of these power centers in this regard can take a dangerous shape in the Central Asian space, which is a region adjacent to both Russia and China. In response to Washington's actions, China and Russia will continue to actively promote partnership and cooperation in our region.

4. The US understands well the importance of hydrocarbons of the Caspian region not only in the international energy market, but also its strategic role in strengthening the stability and economic development of producing and transiting countries. Therefore, in the future, Washington's main focus and strategic interests will be focused on not creating a Russia-China-Iran energy alliance, not introducing Iran to the European market, and not pulling Central Asia into this energy trio. At the same time, sanctions against Russia create "privileged loopholes" in order not to negatively affect large US companies involved in the production of Caspian oil.

5. The United States will do its utmost to prevent Uzbekistan from joining various interstate associations in Central Asia, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, and will strengthen its efforts to ensure economic integration in the region around official Tashkent. It supports the economic development of the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia by maximizing the expansion of their markets for the supply of hydrocarbon resources.

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