

RUSSIAN ENERGY IMPERIALISM: THE WORLD MAPPED ALONG THE GAS PIPELINES

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Energy imperialism refers to the use of natural resources for political purposes, i.e. weaponization of energy. At the state level, it means specific institutional structure, as the state building is predetermined by oil led developments. At the international level, it means international nets of energy dependency, centered around the mother state possessing oil, gas and other natural resources. In a paradox way, the so called Western world (Western Europe and North America) becomes increasingly dependent on the former colonies and Russia on energy supply. The paper examines issues of Russian energy imperialism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: energy security, colonialism, imperialism, petrostates, pipeline states, Russia, Soviet Union, EU.

What is empire and imperialism? Traditional understanding of empire from the period of classical (i.e. mostly French and British) colonialism provides us with an example of powerful center state with the political, economic, cultural and administrative domination in the overseas territories.

Yet, since the processes of de-colonization happening all over the world during 1940-1960 challenged this rigid definition. Some theorists argue the direct presence of the state-colonizer had been replaced by indirect economic, political, cultural and informational

dependence. The formerly colonized territories remain dependent in many aspects on external courses and on the so called “mother country”. The colonial empire exists as long as the dependency on the mother country exists, Ania Loomba says¹.

“Empire, then, is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence”². Henry F. Carey and Rafal Raciborski argues that „For the more ideological, a colony is any client state of a great power, whether its territory is acquired or not (...). We can assert that imperialism is a global system of domination that does not necessarily require colonies”³.

As R.Amsterdam argues, “A cursory glance at the literature of imperialism, you often see the comparison between a type of “hard” imperialism, as practiced by the British at their peak of power, and a “soft” imperialism as characterized by the Pax Americana. Instead of armed garrisons and a union jack upon which the sun never set, the Americans discovered that business ties, Hollywood, and backdoor influence peddling were a more efficient way to shape outcomes in foreign countries”⁴.

Jozsef Borocz and Melinda Kovacs in their study “Empire’s New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement” (2001) argue that the list of the European Union’s member states is being read as a catalogue of a major colonial powers of the period of the world capitalism: “As recently as two generations ago, nine of the fifteen states that constitute European Union today directly controlled 31 percent to 46 percent of the land surface of the world outside Europe and Antarctica”⁵. The author also points out to EU’s political power and influence.

EU, altogether with USA, are characterized by political influence and economic welfare. Yet, as Marshall Goldman⁶ points out, both the USA and EU are not self-sufficient in their energy resources. With the intense development of technologies and increased life standards, the current world powers the United States and the European Union are becoming increasingly dependent on imported oil and gas. It creates unequal relations and reverse dependency between so called Western

powers and the other countries, some of them former colonies. Exporting countries use their oil and gas resources to strengthen their political power and international influence.

The definitions of energy security are varying: some definitions accentuate energy supply and financial availability; some accentuate efficacy of energy distribution and consumption, some others focus on environmental issues; some focus of methodological issues of estimating and indexing energy security; it included also infrastructural issue. Important aspects in defining and understanding energy security are availability of resources, energy poverty, and energy imperialism⁷.

In a paradox way, the world leading powers, both the USA and EU, as pointed out by M. Goldman (2008), are not self-sufficient in their energy resources. Last years, there is growing attention to the new type of imperialism, i.e. energy imperialism – a form of the control of the foreign territories via controlled energy supply; energy colonialism means that independent states compromise their autonomy in exchange for stable energy supply. Some authors claim the new era of energy wars, return on energy resources colonialism, and geopolitics of energy (for more, see Klare, M. T. *Blood & Oil*, 2005⁸; *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, 2002⁹; *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy*, 2009¹⁰).

Up to now, Russian colonial and imperial ambitions (Russia's expansion to Siberia, Far North, Central Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe) remained largely unrecognized and marginalized within the dominant academic discourse. Imperialism and colonialism are immediately situated within the binary dichotomy of West and the rest and associated primarily with the domination of Western powers over the world. Russia's expansionist politics are not recognized as imperial and / or colonial for series of reasons.

One of the central reasons is that Russia has been seen as backward and semi-Orient by Western Europeans themselves; along with the territories of Central Eastern Europe, it was considered as Orient of the Europe (see M. Todorova¹¹, L. Wolf¹², M. Bakic Hayden¹³, Moore, 2006¹⁴ etc). As David Chioni Moore notes, "a notion,

expressed at various times by Russians and non Russians, that has long typed Russia as neither European nor Asiatic but as somehow in between, and particularly as more primitive than (Western) Europe,”¹⁵ and “Russian expansion into North areas and Central Asia was considered a “conquest of Orientals by Orientals, of cognate character by cognate character”¹⁶. After 1917, the Soviet Union proclaimed itself as anti-imperialist and supported anti-colonial liberation movements all over the world. Consequently, it was broadly believed that it is not possible to be victim of both, of Marxism and of colonialism. Thus, Russia’s colonial ambitions remained largely misrecognized before, during and after the Soviet period.

During the recent years, attention to Russia’s imperial ambitions and the so called “energy imperialism” is growing. Today, Russia possesses half of the world’s probable oil reserves and a third of the world’s proven natural gas reserves; making neighboring countries and EU dependant on energy supply, intentionally creating nets of dependence and using price and supply control to increase its own political influence.

Keith Smith in his book “Russian Energy Politics in the Baltics, Poland, and Ukraine: A New Stealth Imperialism?”¹⁷ argues that Russia is using its energy resources as the means of control in the foreign politics. Trying to maintain the sphere of influence over its former satellite states, Russia is interested in energy dependency of these countries. The energy dependency prevents, according to the author, normal development of free markets and liberal democracies in CEE. The author openly calls it Russian neo-colonial politics, or energy imperialism, in former socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe.

In his later book, “European Energy Security: Divide and Dominate. Center for Strategic and International Studies”¹⁸, Keith Smith makes a step further – he argues that Russia’s energy imperialism has expanded far beyond the limits of former Soviet Block. Now, he says, even EU is strongly dependant on Russia on energy supply, and EU leaders are inclined to the political compromises. According to K. Smith, Russia, due to aggressive energy politics, has more power than “Brussels, Berlin and Paris” altogether.

Another significant book for understanding “energy imperialism” is “Power, Energy, and the New Russian Imperialism” by Anita Orban (2008). The book does a great work illuminating Soviet Union’s / Russia’s imperial ambitions in Central and Eastern Europe and how they are implemented via energy politics during post 1990 period. Is energy supply an economic or political issue? The author argues that Russia is using its energy resources as a tool of political influence since the Cold War (or earlier), yet, Russia’s energy imperialism has been misrecognized for quite too long:

At the end of the 1970s, Moscow developed a plan to build six major pipelines connecting Urengoy, the world’s second largest gas field, with Europe. The United States opposed the plan, with Antony J. Blinken writing about fears in the National Security Council about Western Europe “subjecting itself to dangerous energy dependence and to dangerous political leverage by relying on the USSR to supply so much of its gas”¹⁹.

Ronald Reagan understood the vulnerability of monopoly tendencies in natural gas pipelines and tried to prevent USSR from building them to W. Europe. In 1984 he asked Thatcher to stop the English firm, John Brown Engineering, from selling Soviets the compressors they needed to move the gas through the pipeline from the Urengoy natural gas field in West Siberia to Germany, but the efforts failed and the pipeline was completed in 1985.²⁰

The international atmosphere was even more relaxed after the end of the Cold War, when “leaders on both sides of the Atlantic sought a strategic partnership with Russia, making it seem unnecessary, as well as just improper for the moment, to raise fears of Moscow’s power over the EU’s energy supply.” While nuclear and military powers were at the core of the Cold War period, so energy resources became Russia’s main weapon during post Cold War period.

The book provides a new, alternative map of Europe – where spheres of influence are not mapped along EU borders, NATO affiliation, or Shengen area; they are mapped along gas pipelines connecting main supplier, Russia, with main recipient, Western Europe, via transitional areas called Tier 1 (Belarus and Ukraine) and Tier 2 (Poland,

Slovakia, Hungary). The political fate of Tier 1 and Tier 2 is the most dramatic. As they have been art of USSR (Tier 1) or satellite states of USSR (Tier 2), their economies have been developed to serve the interests of empire.

Nowa Huta, meaning ‘new steelworks’, was founded in 1949 as a steel plant and a workers town (later part becoming part of Krakow). The reasons for constructing the town and the plant were ideological, as coal had to be transported from Silesia and iron ore from the Soviet Union; the products were shipped to other parts of Poland. It is broadly believed that construction of the plant and the town was a “punishment for the regions weak vote in the 1946 referendum,” to “remake Krakow into proletarian city”²¹ and to “facilitate the diffusion of the working class into Krakow”²². It not only helped to create social class loyal to political regime, but also incorporated Polish economy into All Union structures. Similarly, Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant in Lithuania, producing far beyond the needs of Lithuanian Republic, was started to build in 1974 in order to incorporate national republic into the larger economic structures of the Soviet Union²³. Trapped into the nets of economic and energy dependency, countries of Tier 1 and Tier 2 experience difficulties while trying to escape the Russian political influence and become full-fledged members of the Western alliance.

The strong factor predetermining Russia’s policies in Central European countries was their partnership with NATO and USA. Right after 1990, Russia tried to turn Central Europe into a neutral and demilitarized buffer zone between itself and the West⁽¹⁾. And just later on, Russia started to oppose their accession to NATO and EU, and responded with “energy politics” towards the American negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic to host the US missile shield.

The countries of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 (Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, etc.) were never a silent side in the process. Margarita M. Balmaceda (2008)²⁴ is focusing on Russia’s energy based neocolonial

(1) In a February 1992, a document entitled “The Transformed Russia in the New World”, Andrei Kozyrev highlighted the basic pillars of the new Russian foreign policy and listed Russian interests in various regions, but he did not mention Central Europe once (Orban, 2008: 31).

politics in the Central and Eastern Europe. She developed her research on the basic premises of colonial studies – i.e. colonial countries are not *tabula rasa*, but rather active agents in accepting, incorporating and interpreting the enforced political and economic structures. M. M. Balmaceda is focusing not on the external factors, i.e. Russia's energy politics in CEE, but on internal factors – how local economic and political agents, i.e. intermediaries, participate in the energy security politics, and in the decision-making processes.

As the research of Lithuanian public discourse has revealed, the energy security in Lithuania is associated not with ecological, environmental or economic risks, but primarily with the issues of political independence and the fear of Russian energy imperialism. As it has been revealed (see Baločkaitė, Rinkevičius²⁵), Lithuanian media portrayed energy issues as political issues – over 60 percent of the publications are interviewing and quoting politicians, while environmentalists and academic researchers altogether constitute merely 7 percent. The content of the publications is also highly politicized – 37 percent of the publications focus primarily on the political aspects of energy security, while technical issues constitute 31 percent, economics constitute 13 percent, environmental issues – 13 percent and social issues – 2 percent. Ecology and environmental issues are marginalized and reduced to insignificant. The dominant thematic lines of the publications are of political dependence, subordination, being a peripheral actor in energy politics, being unable to influence the decision-making, confronting interests of Russia and EU, etc.²⁶

Traditionally, colonialism and imperialism are associated with Western colonial domination over the world or with US imperialism; the significant component of both is alleged cultural superiority and advanced technological development, while colonial territories were passive suppliers of markets, cheap labor force and natural resources. “Compared to those of other industrialized nations, – Michael Rywkin says, – traditional Russian exports have been composed of raw materials. In ancient times they were unprocessed timber and non-tanned pelts. Later grain and fish eggs were added. Currently they are predominantly gas and oil (little or no machinery, industrial products,

or consumer goods)”²⁷. This is one of the reasons why Russian energy imperialism remained misrecognized for quite long. “Only 10 years ago it was often heard from many well-known American scholars that “Russia is no longer a great power.” That statement was premature. We now hear that Russia “has again emerged as a global power,” – M. Rywkin says²⁸.

Russia reemerged as a petrostate, i.e. the country is heavily dependent on revenues from existing oil and gas reserves. Petrostates are structurally different from other countries in the advanced and developing worlds, especially the agricultural or manufacturing exporters, as their institutions, during the process of state building, have been shaped by oil-led developments²⁹. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia’s foreign policy is based not on military capacities, but on *weaponization of energy*.³⁰

“Empire, then, is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence”³¹. Today, pipelines are replacing the former trade and commodity chains of colonial period. The world mapped along the pipelines. The new centers are the petrostates, having direct control over the oil / gas territories. Further around them, there are pipelinestates, i.e. the territories with main oil / gas logistics like pipe lines, tank ships, secure refineries and storage. And finally, there are client states, i.e. oil and gas markets, subordinated for the energy imperialism. This is how imperial structure is created.

Here, to paraphrase famous aphorism by Carl von Clausewitz⁽²⁾, economic is the continuation of policy by other means. Beyond the indirect impact of weaponized energy politics, pipeline networks also guarantee military presence of the petrostate. As Christina Y. Lin (2009) observes, “the pipelines are excellent platforms for sensors of various kinds of radars, hydro-acoustic systems and sonars to act as eyes and ears for monitoring the system as well as intelligence surveillance”³².

(2) “War is the continuation of policy by other means”.

Jozsef Borocz speaks about the development of “colonial empires established and administered from Western Europe. The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the expansion, intensification and previously unimaginable integration of (those) imperial into a truly global system of imperial capitalism”³³. While the commodity colonialism of the XIXth century was serving the interest of and administered from Western Europe, the energy imperialism is controlled from Moscow.

As M. Goldman portrayed in “Putin, power and the New Russia Petrostate”, he was privy to visit Gazprom’s dispatching centre headquarters in Moscow, and witnessed the map covering 100-foot wall of a room with a spiderweb-like maze of natural gas pipelines reaching from East Siberia west to the Atlantic Ocean and from the Arctic ocean south to the Caspian and Black Seas. With a flick of a switch these dispatchers could freeze entire countries and have indeed done so in the past with former Soviet Union republics and most recently with Ukraine in January, 2009.³⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Traditionally, colonial and imperial politics are associated with the Western capitalist development and territorial expansion. Western colonialism distorted the development of colonial territories by making them dependent on their colonizers in many aspects (education, information, language, economy, etc.).

The recent developments revealed that Western countries, technologically advanced and characterized with high level of consumption, become coming increasingly dependent on the energy supply from less developed states with the resources based economies, so called petrostates. As the institution building in petrostates was largely shaped by the oil led developments, the petrostates are characterized by specific institutional arrangements, high level of corruption and poor democratic practices.

The energy dependence has heavy political consequences; the petrostates increasingly use their price and supply strategies as tools in

their foreign politics. This weaponization of energy leads to the emergence of the so called energy imperialism, where Western powers find themselves not only dependant on energy supply, but also politically pressured.

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SANTRAUKA

RUSIJOS ENERGETINIS IMPERIALIZMAS: PASAULIS, NUŽYMĖTAS DUJOTIEKIO VAMZDŽIAIS

Reikšminiai žodžiai: energetinis saugumas, petrovalstybės, imperializmas, Rusija, Sovietų Sąjunga, Europos Sąjunga.

Energetinis imperializmas – tai natūraliųjų ir gamtinių išteklių panaudojimas politiniams tikslams, t. y. natūralieji ištekliai paverčiami ginklu. Valstybės vidaus reikaluose, kai valstybės bei jos institucijų formavimasis yra glaudžiai susijęs su natūraliaisiais ištekliais, dėl to dažniausiai susidaro specifinė institucinė, nelanksti, nedemokratiška, pusiau feodalinė valdymo

struktūra. Tarptautinėje politikoje atsiranda tarptautiniai energetinės priklausomybės tinklai, kurie formuojasi aplink motininę valstybę, t. y. valstybę, kurios teritorijoje randama naftos, dujų bei kitų gamtinių išteklių. Paradoksalu, kad Vakarų šalys (Vakarų Europa ir Šiaurės Amerika) tampa vis labiau priklausomos nuo Rusijos ir nuo kai kurių savo buvusių kolonijų tiek energetiniu, tiek politiniu aspektais.