

RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Resource Wars' in the Post-Cold War Era: The Persian Gulf Oil, US, and the Iraq War

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'Resource Wars' in the Post-Cold War Era: The Persian Gulf Oil, US, and the Iraq War

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Abstract

This study focuses on the strategic region of the Persian Gulf and its oil resources, the US energy policy, and the Iraq War as a case in point. It refers to the importance of the Persian Gulf oil in the US policies and the US geopolitical practices to launch conflicts and wars in the post-Cold War era that scholars have categorized as "resource wars." Reviewing relevant studies has revealed that amongst the natural resources oil as the most vital commodity has always played a major role in wars and conflicts. These studies also emphasized that access to oil reservoirs in the Persian Gulf as well as control of these resources have been vital to the United States because it answers the country's domestic needs, supporting oil companies, and controlling its rivals to preserve its hegemonic leadership.

Keywords: Resource Wars; US geopolitical actions; the Persian Gulf area; Iraq War

1. Introduction

This study is an endeavour to show the relationship between the oil of the Persian Gulf, US policies towards this area and the Iraq War. It is traced through reviewing some important studies concerning resource wars, which have focused on the post-Cold War developments and their influence on the conflicts. In this respect, attention has been paid to the US geopolitical practice in this region and its relationship with the post-Cold War global rivalries. The role of oil resources, in particular in the Persian Gulf area, and in the outbreak of wars and conflicts are also examined via review of relevant studies on what has come to be categorized as "resource wars". To better illustrate the mentioned relationship, the Iraq War has been considered because of its specific features, as it occurred in an oil-rich country, in an oil-rich region as well as the fact that it has always been a suspicious issue, the significant role of oil in launching that war.

It would have been assumed that the end of the Cold War would be associated with a more peaceful, secure and stable world. It was a natural assumption because the role of superpowers to create wars and hostilities in the Cold War era in places such as Korea, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Central America had paled. In this respect, a "New World Order" was envisioned by President G. H. W. Bush when it was supposed that international problems would be resolvable via diplomatic activities and multilateral peacekeeping. On the contrary, the world in the post-Cold War era has faced many armed conflicts and in this respect has suffered the emergence of terrorism. Indeed, it seems that "the world has become even more dangerous" [1].

In a similar manner, Simon Dalby, referring to some global dangers such as bioterrorism, climate changes, radioactive fallout, and violence over resources, noted that "new threats stalk our world" [2]. For him, these dangers are urgent concerns that have emerged in the globalized era, and in the late 1990s, there was focus on these concerns with investigation into the role of resources in the violent conflicts which happened in the South. From this perspective, the role of the military in the extraction of the resources or in a direct struggle with rebel armed forces to manage and control such extraction implies interconnection between resources and violence. "These complicated connections between violence over local extraction and the international trade of these commodities are now often simply called 'resource wars'" [2].

This term, indeed, was a new term in the United States, and appeared in the early 1980s, and referred to sensed threats from the Soviet in terms of US access to the oil of the Middle East and the minerals of Africa [3]. Similar to this view, Peters believed that the term "resource wars" appeared in the United States in reference to the Soviets' threat which would deny the access of the United States to the oil of the Middle East and African minerals. This threat was conceived with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s [4]. It is important to note that, for Dalby, these wars are often not started between supplier countries and consumer sections. They were not even between North and South. From this view, those wars often broke out over conditions of export and a situation of exploitation. In fact, countries as the main actors in the

international system rarely fight with each other directly over these materials, although, in the case of oil, this general rule does not seem to be dominant among states. Clearly, oil, in a global scale, is a vital global commodity with its specific geography. It plays a key role in the global economy of the 21st century as an indispensable, vital and potable fuel for use in home heating, electricity generating, moving cars and ships, so that these needs have forced a necessity to control oil [2]. But, slightly different from Dalby and in contrast to Huntington's idea, Klare believes that regardless of differentiations amongst civilizations and identities at this time and in the contemporary age what is important is that most of the conflicts have their roots in resources. In his understanding, resources include diamond fields, gold and copper, old-growth timber, arable land, water, fish, and oil, which have caused many deadly struggles in some parts of the world [1].

From another perspective, some political analysts fundamentally believe that geographical elements are the most permanent, thus formation of foreign policy from this view, is strongly under the influence of such elements. It has also been noted by one well-known American geopolitician that "Geography is the most fundamental factor in the foreign policy of states because it is most permanent. Ministers come and go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed" [5]. Based on this idea, many strategic thoughts in the early 20th century had strong geopolitical dimension [6]. The natural resources, in this regard, have always been one of the most important geographical factors that have always been considered as a quantifiable and valuable indicator in the assessment of a state's power [7]. Concerning this concept, however, it is important to review some notable ideas about the important role of the energy resources, in particular oil and natural gas, in the outbreak of conflicts and wars, as well as reviewing relevant literature concerning the importance of specific geographical regions, in particular, the Persian Gulf, in the formation of the foreign policies of great countries towards this area and launching wars such as the Iraq War in this region.

2. 'Resource Wars' and Conflict for Oil

Natural resources have always played a key role in conflicts and wars taking place. These struggles are often caused by the scarcity and immense value resources such as diamonds, copper, gold, water, timber, arable land, and oil [1]. Among them, the role of petroleum as a vital commodity for the industrial world, and due to its global influences has been most remarkable, and as Yergin [8] noted, the history of petroleum has always been associated with the history of struggle and war. Indeed, "petroleum is unique among the world's resources" [1]. There is this view that, the 21st century, similar to the previous century will be a "century of oil" and from this view, access to oil as a global resource has always included those issues that have formed battles [9]. In fact, the new resource wars in the world will be a significant problem in the future. It will be because of the oil supply crisis as a natural resource. It will occur because of the declining oil reservoirs as well as the unbalanced distribution of these resources in particular along the North-South axis [4].

Billon [3] believes that the natural resources have always been introduced as a crucial motive of conflicts and wars. He refers to the more important role of these resources in creating wars in the 1990s and argues that some interventions take place because of the lust for valuable resources. He also believes that, on the other hand, the political and economic vulnerabilities of dependent countries on resources are the main reason for the importance of resources in creating wars. In this respect, the geopolitical thinking in the west, concerning resources, has been established over an equally strong relationship amongst power, trade, and war which has been tied strongly to maritime navigation and overseas resources too. In the past, this geopolitical thought had been reflected in the view that "whoever commands the oceans commands the trade of the world, and whoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and whoever is master of that commands the world itself." With growing dependence of the western countries on imported materials during the 19th century, indeed, great western countries expanded their command over raw materials throughout the world. In this commentary, some classic geopolitical concepts such as "vital space" or *Lebensraum* for accessing further resources and Mackinder's "Heartland" in warning about the role of railways in control of resources are very important [3].

Oil is the most significant overseas resource, and Billon [3], showed the key role it played during World War I and World War II. The vulnerability of those resources at that time was also revealed so that during the Cold War, ultimately, it was focused "on the vulnerability of rising resource supply dependence" which required various strategies to secure the needed resources in the forms of military deployments, accumulation of resources, diplomatic activities, coup d'état, etc. [3]. In this respect, four important events have also been mentioned by Billon, which have influenced the oil strategies and history; the decolonization process, Suez crisis in 1956, the 1973 Arab oil embargo, and the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. He also mentioned two important events, the end of the Cold War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as events that increased the importance of energy security and vulnerability of these resources. Billon, on the other hand, indicates the necessity of energy security for the oil producer countries. For him, always one of the strategic

concerns for importing and exporting countries relates to geopolitics of energy security. In that regard, he also considers the natural resources revenues as a strong instrument to create wars in the post-Cold War era. This view is similar to Huntington's idea that oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf became money-rich and then weapons-rich, and then, several wars finally occurred between Arab and Israel [10].

Peters [4], however, in his work "Coercive Western Energy Security Strategies: 'Resource Wars' as a New Threat to Global Security," explains the conditions of the Cold War era concerning resource wars and believes that, in 1986, a list of 12 wars and skirmishes in the 20th century was presented indicating that all were started by clashes over access to resources, renewable or non-renewable. For him, the 1991 Gulf War was the first interstate war on a major scale in the post-Cold War era, which was fought to control the oil of the region. From his view, oil is the most important non-renewable resources. In particular, it is a vital commodity in the industrial countries, with industrialized economies, particularly in agriculture and transportation sectors. As evidence, he refers to demand rates of consumer countries and indicates that demand is growing significantly and will continue to do so especially in the forthcoming decades such that in accordance with the international energy agency's (IEA) request for oil between 1997 and 2020 which is anticipated to rise with a growth rate of 1.9% per year [4].

In this respect and according to an international group of petroleum specialists (Association for the Study of Peak Oil, ASPO), researchers will witness the peak of world supply of oil in early 2010, and as a consequence, the energy prices will grow, and ultimately the world will face economic upheaval. Peters examines in fact, the resources conflict from the South-North perspectives and argues that 67.3% of all proven oil reservoirs has been covered by the G-77 and OPEC, and Arab league covers nearly 60% of world oil reservoirs. On the other hand, the demands of the developing countries are growing too. It is expected to rise almost three-fold as fast as in the developed world. It is estimated that from 43% for today to 55% of total global consumption by 2020. Therefore, conflict between South and North will be built over the distribution of energy resources among the energy-producing states and the energy-consuming states. There is, indeed, this view that, wars are generally the result of a multifaceted combination of motives, and the most important motivation is the concerns that are related to access and control of resources [4]. It is interesting that Peters refers to two wars in the post-Cold War as "resource wars," which were the result of the US coercive strategy in order to protect energy supplies.

In this respect, however, Singh refers to three wars in the Persian Gulf; two Iraq wars and the Afghanistan war that took place between two Iraq wars. He, in reference to the Afghanistan war, presents this question: "Is the NATO military presence in South-West Asia only to fight terrorism and introduce democracy or is there a hidden agenda like dominating the energy sources for the use of the west? Are they spending billions of dollars to maintain a large number of troops not only in Iraq but also in the neighborhood for political philanthropy, like establishing democracy, or is it an investment for energy security in the future?" [11]. Singh, with reference to some studies emphasizes that bypassing the National Oil Company of Iraq in support of free market of oil was the aim of neo-conservatives, as it would reduce the domination of OPEC and other oil producers over the international oil market. He refers to production and consumption of oil for the period 1970-2003, and emphasizes the US dependency on foreign oil. He also stresses three significant issues: a continuous decrease in oil production, growing oil consumption, and as a result constantly rising dependence upon foreign imported oil. This increasing dependence has been shown to grow from 12.15% in 1970 to 43.7% in 1990 and to 65.1% in 2003. From this point of view, as the oil reserves of the US, South-East Asia and North Sea are declining; all the major consumers' dependence is increasing, especially on the Persian Gulf oil because of their future needs. This increase for the US is from 2.3 million barrels per day (mbd) in 2003 to 4.2 mbd by 2020. He also refers to declining oil production in the US from 9.5 mbd in 1970 to 6.72 mbd in 1994 and to 5.72 mbd in 2003. There is also decline in Norway, UK, and Indonesia. Clearly, the oil reservoirs and productions of the Persian Gulf area will increasingly be vital for global energy security because the decreasing oil production and limited reservoirs in the OECD states [11].

Another commentator, Klare [12] discusses three main resources in his work: energy resources (oil and natural gas), water, and valuable timber and minerals, and refers to the importance of these vital materials in the outbreak of conflicts across the world. Klare reveals his own worry about these conflicts and believes that it is a necessary issue to find and plan ways to resolve the issue of the competition over natural resources, because controlling specific natural resources is a national security theme of many countries and "something worth fighting for." In this respect, he divides the reasons of conflicts after the Cold War to two periods and says that fighting in Central Africa, Kashmir, and the former Yugoslavia focused the global community on preventing ethnic conflict in the early 1990s, while in the next few years, violence in Africa occurred in the fight to control the copper mines, diamond fields, and farmlands. Concerning oil and gas, however, Klare pointed out the mechanism of supply and demand as the starting point of the pressure on

energy reserves. He believes that increasing the populations and expanding the economic activities caused increasing need for vital materials, and demands for these materials, especially oil and gas, has always risen. Based on this viewpoint, “as shortages of critical materials rise in frequency and severity, the competition for access to the remaining supplies of these commodities will grow more intense” [12]. He refers to a report of the US Department of Energy and declares that the world oil consumption will increase from about 77 mbd in 2000 to 110 mbd in 2020 (about 43%). In this condition, the world consumption will rise to approximately 670 billion barrels of oil only from 2000 till 2020. It means that it will include nearly two-thirds of the proven oil reservoirs of the world. In this respect, it seems that the production of petroleum will not be able to keep up with global demands and as a result the world will face an unbalanced global supply and demand [12].

2.1. “Resource wars” in the Persian Gulf region

The relationship between conflicts and specific geographical regions is a significant matter which has been considered by various scholars. Billon [3] in this respect and in explaining *Lebensraum* and *Heartland* as two geopolitical terms, argues that with the growth of industrialization and rising demand for materials in 19th century, western powers had more control over the kinds of raw materials than the rest of the world. This demand led to the formation of the Prussian strategy which was based on a resource access provided via vital spaces or *lebensraum*. This vital space referred to Friedrich Ratzel’s idea, which used a biological analogy, and compared states with organisms. In this respect, states are formed by the interaction between people and their territory. In this condition, conflicts would be inevitable when states need to grow to survive. From this view, Germany, indeed, was especially vulnerable since it had high population growth and was bordered by numerous states. Based on this reason, German territorial expansion was therefore a matter of self-defense [13]. From this perspective, Billon [3] also refers to the term *Heartland* or that region that includes some parts of East Europe and Central Asia. In this area, according to Sir Helford Mackinder, there was a huge space of enormous human and natural resources, as well as this region that would be covered by a network of railways [14].

To mention significant regions, Billon [3] refers to the Persian Gulf area and stresses its resources as a main reason for tensions and conflicts. He noted that “while the Persian Gulf area has received most attention as prominent terrain for resource wars due to foreign oil supply interests, tensions and civil unrest in the region also testify in part to the problems of the historical trajectories as well as political economy and governance of resource-dependent countries” [3]. In this respect, Peters [4], similar to Billon stresses the importance of the Persian Gulf region too. He, in addition, refers to the Caspian Sea and Africa and Latin America as the regions that are very important in the strategies of great powerful countries such as USA. For him, about 80% of total world reservoirs are held by states that are labeled as “developed countries.” Those are great powers in the international order which are strongly dependent to this kind of resources, and for this reason, those regions that possessed vast reserves of oil and gas are very significant in the strategies of the world’s powerful countries [4].

Klare [12], however, argues that with the end of the Cold War the condition has been completely changed. At that time, in the United States, for instance, some specific regions such as the Persian Gulf area, the Caspian Sea basin and the South China Sea have become more significant for the Pentagon, while, some other areas such as Central and Southern Europe and the Far East, have lost their strategic significance. In this respect also, Klare [12], with reference to US policies argues that, after the Cold War, securing access to vital material has become a main theme in US security planning. He recalls President Clinton’s attempts to obtain additional oil from Nigeria and the Caspian states. Manifesting the importance of the Persian Gulf area, Klare noted that “President Jimmy Carter declared in 1980 that any attempt by hostile powers to cut off the flow of Persian Gulf oil would be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, which the United States would repel by any means necessary, including military force. Subsequent presidents have made similar statements, and substantial US forces are now permanently deployed in the Persian Gulf to enforce this policy” [12].

It seems to be slightly related to oil reserves in the region of North America, which has been extremely consumed and that region has burnt almost three-quarters of its oil resources [15]. Thus, the US anxiety about energy resources of the Persian Gulf as its national interests is understandable. A numerical view of the situation of oil import in the US can show the importance of the US concern, as well as the reason for its presence in the Persian Gulf region; in fact, the reality is that, “The United States is more dependent on foreign oil than ever before. America imported 12.9 mbd in 2004, or about 63% of the total consumption of roughly 20.5 mbd. That is up from 35% from 1973, and the share of imported oil is projected to rise to close to 70% by 2020, with the United States becoming increasingly dependent on Persian Gulf supply. The US imports from

the Persian Gulf are expected to rise from 2.5 mbd (22% of total US oil imports) in 2003 to 4.2 mbd (62%) by 2020, according to forecasts by the US Department of Energy" [16].

Concerning the importance of the Persian Gulf area also, Singh [11] mentions two reasons to show that the Persian Gulf oil will remain vital for stability of the world oil market. First is the large production because the Persian Gulf region is both the major producer and major exporter of oil and oil products. According to him, the Persian Gulf production in 2003 has been about 972.5 million tons; it means that 25.2% of world oil production is in the Persian Gulf. It has also been the exporter of 609 million tons of oil and 96.5 million tons of oil products. In fact, it shows that the Persian Gulf area has exported totally 704.5 million tons of oil and oil products, constituting approximately 20.6% of world oil consumption and a main part of oil products available in the world energy market. For this reason, any decline in export of oil from this region – even 1.5 mbd – will destabilize the world's energy market. According to Singh, the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf region – 725.2 bnbls – constitute 63% of the world oil reservoirs. On the other hand, the natural gas reserves in the Persian Gulf are also important so that the Persian Gulf possesses about 70 trillion cubic meters (tcm). In a comparative manner, in North America and North Sea, it is only 7.5 tcm and 4.3 tcm, namely, less than gas reserves of Qatar. He refers to the importance of this area for the US and western countries thus: "No wonder the OECD, especially the US-led coalition, is keen to retain control over the huge oil and gas reserves of the Gulf region" [11].

From another perspective, Peters [17] explains the relationship between oil reserves and great powers policies. He mentions Iran and the Persian Gulf region as one of the most important vital interests of western countries in the world. He introduces a "diversity of initiatives" that have been taken by the western oil-dependent states, including diplomatic efforts, diversifying energy suppliers, stockpiling of strategic resources, and the search of "Geopolitics of energy." He refers to the first coup d'état related to western oil interests against the Mosaddegh regime in Iran by British and US in 1953, as well as a military assault on Egypt in the Suez crisis in 1956, which was perpetuated by Britain, France, and Israel. Peters, similar to Klare, refers to the changing of US policy and says that since the 1973 oil crisis, the security of energy supply has been a major concern of US foreign policy. For him, based on the "Carter Doctrine," the Persian Gulf is a region of "vital interests" to the United States and after the Cold War this country would not agree to any geopolitical changes in the petroleum system of the West. He also believes that, the 1991 war, in fact, was because of the control of oil. He considered other US measures and noted that the National Energy Policy (NEP) published by the Bush administration in 2001 stressed that the Persian Gulf remained a region vital to US interests.

Klare [12], however, believes that all analyses about conflicts over resources should begin with showing all substantial deposits of oil and gas in the unstable regions. In this respect, he introduces the Persian Gulf, South China Sea, Caspian Sea basin, Chad, Angola, Algeria, Indonesia, Colombia, Sudan, Nigeria, and Venezuela as the most important zones. In agreement with other authors, he believes that the Persian Gulf is the most important area because of its vast energy reservoirs. For him, there is a relationship between energy resources and political instability and unrest in those regions. Klare argues that "About four-fifths of the world's known petroleum reserves lie in politically unstable or contested areas" [12]. He also refers to quarrels concerning ownership of resources in offshore areas as an important issue. The five coastal states of the Caspian Sea, for instance, do not agree on a common view for dividing up its offshore resource zones, and there are similar disputes even in some parts of the Persian Gulf, the Timor Sea, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Guinea. In this respect, authors also refer to other resources such as water in the Middle East and minerals in Africa. The rival groups in Angola and Sierra Leone for instance, are battling to control the lucrative diamond fields; there are the conflicts over diamonds and copper in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.); and in some parts of Southeast Asia, a variety of groups are skirmishing to get valuable timber land. But, among all kinds of natural resources, energy resources are the most important natural resources that play a major role in both regional and global contests in the world.

2.2. The international competitions

As has been stressed by Huntington, it seems obvious that "the principal conflicts of interests involving the United States and the major powers are likely to be over economic issues" [18], and more obviously in this context, the energy reserves have the main role in economic and industrial activities throughout the world. Competition between powerful countries to access oil reservoirs, however, could be discussed from two dimensions: first, internal demands for internal consumption within every country, and second, control of oil flows to gain hegemonic objectives. With the end of the Cold War, as Klare [12] noted, some geographical changes happened concerning the US strategic assumptions and other major oil consumers throughout the world, so that the Persian Gulf and Central Asia became more important than others. This shifting in strategic geography, according to Klare, was because of the emerging importance of economic competition instead of

ideological rivalries in international relations, and in this respect, the vital resources and protecting suppliers of these resources, as well as competition to get access to these resources, especially oil and natural gas, became very important. He also mentions that global energy consumption is rising. Thus, the world will face greater competition, because the great powers now take into account the safety of energy flow as a noteworthy national anxiety and they know that global consumption is increasing at the rate about 2.0% annually, and ultimately the world will face acute energy shortage, especially in the consumer countries. In this respect, he suggests finding a way to peacefully resolve the competition over natural resources as an urgent necessity, because he believes that the number of competitors and level of demand is rising, and this matter is a national security concern.

International competition, indeed, is one of several security elements that affect the continuation of oil flow from the Persian Gulf region to the world markets. It is important to note that, the competition in the Middle East started among British, German, French, and Turkish governments and businessmen around the late 19th century. It was continued after World War I until the presence of the British and then the Americans in the Persian Gulf region until the Cold War era. During the Cold War era, the competitors were divided into the NATO and Warsaw Pacts, and after the Cold War, countries such as Russia, France, and China came to the region to compete with the United States and Britain to access oil reservoirs. They also tried investing in countries of this region and continue to do so to the present time [19]. In fact, as has been mentioned. There is an extensive competition between the large consumers to access natural resources particularly energy resources and studying the geopolitics of energy and resource wars could not be done without studying the competitors. For this reason, Klare [12] mentions China, Japan, and European powers as the great energy importers and in this respect obviously the stability of supplies is their main concern. Klare also argues that, "Russia is placing greater foreign policy emphasis on energy-producing areas of Central Asia. Although Moscow continues to worry about developments on its western frontiers in the areas facing NATO, it has devoted considerable resources to strengthening its military presence in the south, in the Caucasus (including Chechnya and Dagestan), and among the former Soviet Central Asian republics" [12].

China is also another important competitor, so Klare believes that, Chinese military focus has been changed from the northern Chinese border with Russia to the western borders in Xinjiang, where has been identified as a potential source of oil. It has also been focused on offshore areas of the South and East China Seas. For him, Japan, on the other hand, is following China to get access to these seas and therefore it has improved its own ability to operate in that area. There is this view that, generally, the countries which of the pacific region are the serious markets in future and particularly China and India will be great consumers in the oil competitions sphere [20]. Moreover, some other countries such as Malaysia, Brazil, Thailand, Israel, and Turkey are also concerned about safe access to adequate supplies of oil and gas because of their rising energy consumption rates. Generally, however, Klare [12] believes that after the Cold War, the United States remained as the only superpower associated with a set of smaller power centres including Western Europe, Japan, Russia, and China. This idea views a highest position for the US in the international competition against others in lower positions on the one hand, and also views US as responsible to secure free flows of oil towards the western world on the other.

From yet another perspective from Bromley who considers the control of oil as "the centre of gravity of US economic hegemony." According to Bromley, Controlling oil resources is defined regarding the US permanent strategy, meaning "unilateral military supremacy" [21]. For him, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are a part of the US global strategy to control the international system. He refers to the Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review as well as the importance of the Persian Gulf oil and noted that "such a strategy is considered most important given the growing competition with other regions, especially the challenge posed by China and the ever-increasing importance of Middle Eastern oil. The USA is using its unquestioned military dominance to underscore its much less impressive economic position. As hegemonic leadership erodes, regional powers will seek to assert their interests and economic rivalries beckon. In this context, preventing the emergence of a "peer competitor" – that is, China – and gaining a stranglehold over the lifeblood of the world economy – Gulf oil – can be seen as core objectives for the US state" [21]. In addition, Bromley stresses that, domination of the United States over the world oil industry, totally depends on the geopolitical and military commitments of the United States. In this respect, the US can provide a communal service to other countries to improve its international hegemony as well as it will control the economies of potential rivals on the opposite side [21]. In a similar manner, Harvey [22] stresses that most important oilfields are located in the Middle East area and it is the main provider of oil in the world. For him, it is also important that "the United States is increasingly dependent upon foreign imports," and nowadays access to oil of the Middle East is a fundamental security concern for the US and for the global economy as well. But similar to Bromley, Harvey stresses the relationship between the US hegemony and oil. He considers the US presence

in the Middle East as a move to rule over the global economy for the next 50 years via controlling “the global oil spigot” [22]. Explaining international competitions, Harvey noted that “ Europe and Japan, as well as East and South-East Asia (now crucially including China) are heavily dependent on [Persian] Gulf oil, and these are regional configurations of political-economic power that now pose a challenge to US global hegemony in the worlds of production and finance” [22].

Flint, however, considering a classic geopolitical theory refers to the importance of the Central Asian region in the international rivalries. He introduces Mackinder who identified a German threat and also emphasized the control of the Heartland, as a means to control the world. For Flint, Mackinder “feared that Germany was utilizing the “new” railway technology to mobilize resources in Eurasia and challenge Great Britain” [23]. In fact, he showed a connection between “transportation technology” and “physical geography” [24]. This geographical and geostrategic region includes the region known as Eurasia which according to Brzezinski [25] is geopolitically axial. This region comprises about 75% of the total world’s people. It includes nearly 60% of the world’s Gross National Product (GNP), as well as the vast amount of the world’s proven energy resources. In this respect, Flint [23], also considers Central Asia and the Caucasus as a new emerging area which, in the wake of the Iraqi crisis, has been inverted to a new centre to compete between the United States and Russia. For him, “At the heart of the new standoff are rich oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea basin, which may hold 100 billion barrels of oil alone. Washington has already a firm foothold in the local hydrocarbon industry, with US and joint US-British companies controlling 27% of Caspian oil reserves and 40% of its gas reserves” [23]. These economic rivalries have been associated with the military presence and the establishment of the military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. It means that there is a strong relationship between energy resources of this area and the war on terrorism. As Flint noted, “for the United States, its increased presence in the region is couched in terms of the war on terrorism, with access to oil and gas underlying the concern” [23]. Generally, these discussions indicate the important position of geographical regions especially those with vast energy reserves, as the main goals of the US and other powerful countries.

2.3. Iraq war as a ‘resource war’?

Klare [1] claims that according to the history of US intervention in the region of the Persian Gulf, the statements of American statesmen concerning the lack of any relationship between US interest in Iraq and oil cannot be true. Soon after World War II the US need to import oil converted oil into a foreign policy issue. From that time, the US has become dependent on external suppliers far more seriously. Oil, simultaneously, has become a vital resource for American prosperity, and from this view, accessing oil reservoirs must be preserved at any cost, even using military force. For him, the Bush administration recognized a large increase in oil production and an enhancement in the climate of security as two main goals in its oil policy toward the oil-producing countries in the Persian Gulf. It is important to note that the conjunction between these two goals in the region appeared in Iraq. It was more than two decades that the foreign investment in terms of the expansion of new infrastructure and explorations had been hampered by the Iraqi government, the result of Saddam Hussein’s role in destabilizing the region. In addition, pressures of the international community to maintain economic sanctions against Iraq had frustrated the US desire to increase the oil production in Iraq. For Klare, indeed, “no real improvement in either the security environment or regional production levels would be possible so long as Saddam remained in power” [1].

Clark [26] refers to resources and economics as causes of fundamental conflicts in contemporary warfare. For him, these interlaced conflicts also engage international currencies. He views the US military operations against Iraq in relation to petrodollar recycling. It was related to challenging the supremacy of the US dollar as oil transaction currency from an alternative one. For Clark, it is clear that the Iraq War more than terrorism and weapons of mass destruction was to gain strategic control over the energy reserves of Iraq. It was to preserve the US dollar position as monopoly currency in the international oil market. “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” indeed, had been designed to change the Iraqi government by installing a pro-US administration in Iraq, and it was what the Bush administration had considered when coming to office in 2001. The intention of the Bush administration concerning toppling Saddam was also to establish US bases in the region before the beginning of the global peak oil. In this respect, according to Clark, reconverting Iraq back to petrodollar helped to control OPEC to provide using Euro instead of Dollar as oil transaction currency. This is related to an announcement by Saddam on September 2000 to refuse accepting Dollar for exporting the oil, and replacing it with the Euro as acceptable currency in oil transactions. By and large, Clark views the necessity of keeping the US economic supremacy and its global dominance at any cost as the main goal of the invasion of Iraq.

Russell [27], however, believes in the importance of the Persian Gulf because of its role in stability of oil price in the world oil markets, although, concurring with other commentators he views oil as the most

important issue and the core of most discussions concerning the US strategy and its vital interests in the Persian Gulf area. However, in contrast to some ideas about the role of accessing oil in using force by the Bush administration against Iraq emphasizes keeping a reasonable price. He, of course, refers to the necessity of accessing oil reservoirs as one of the US vital strategic interests in the Middle East. He, indeed, does not reject the importance of oil in the use of military force by the US in the Iraq War to maintain control of free flows of oil to the international markets, but in this respect, he emphasizes more the stability of oil price. Concerning dominance of OPEC over the oil market, Singh [11] refers to the role of neo-conservatives in the Bush administration and believes that neo-cons preferred bypassing the Iraqi National Oil Company to strengthen the oil free market, as well as reduce OPEC's and other producers' dominance over the international oil market. For him, according to a report in *The Independent*, the US is preparing a law that gives to some oil companies – including BP, Shell and Exxon – 30-year contracts to take out Iraqi oil reserves.

Singh [11] refers to the first Iraq War objectives and indicates that at that time liberation of Kuwait and restoring the oil fields of Kuwait, as a friendly state for the US, was considered the first objective of the war. This objective was apparently also declared by President G. H. W. Bush in his speech [28]. Although there is this view that the second Iraq War in 2003 was to continue an inconclusive end to the first Iraq War in 1991 [29], Klare [30] states that the US invasion of Iraq was a normal extension of the Carter Doctrine. For him, President Carter stressed accessing the oilfields of the Persian Gulf as an essential issue to the health and survival of the US economy. From this view, therefore, any effort to obstruct such access could be considered an attack on US vital interests and would be met by military force or any other means. According to Klare, to employ this policy, the rapid deployment joint task force (RDJTF) was established by Carter as a lasting US naval presence in the Persian Gulf area. For him, indeed, in contrast to many US policies, which were related to the Cold War, the Carter Doctrine was continuing to govern US foreign policy, and, therefore, the 2003 Iraq War could be viewed from this perspective [30].

In another work *Bush-Cheney Energy Strategy: Procuring the Rest of the World's Oil*, Klare [30] argues that increasing the flow of oil from producers abroad to America's market was the top foreign policy of President Bush in 2001. For him, the US believed that Iraq possessed 10% of the oil reserves in the world and could acquire another 10% in Kuwait by seizing that state. With the seizure of Kuwait, military forces of Iraq would close in on another 25% oil reserve located in eastern Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Saddam was a serious threat to these countries as US-friendly states as well as to control of a large amount of the world's energy reserves. Klare [30] argues that in 2002, it had been understood that the containment policy to eliminate Saddam Hussein's threat was not enough, and in this respect, more forceful action was needed. For him, although "officials told the public that oil had nothing to do with the motives for the March 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. In a January briefing by an unnamed senior defence official on US plans for protecting Iraqi oil fields in the event of war, the Pentagon leadership revealed that a senior official, who presumably was Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, indicated that the Bush administration sought to capture Iraq's oilfields intact to provide a source of revenue for the reconstruction of the country" [31].

Iseri [32], however, attempts to establish a strong relation between energy resources and US hegemony in an examination of US behaviour. He refers to the US grand strategy and believes that, the grand strategy comprises two parts; peacetime and wartime strategies. He refers to oil reserves as an important element in the US grand strategy. Iseri generally, believes that because the USA imports oil from the energy markets, any threat to these energy markets will be regarded as a threat to the US interests. Therefore, the US grand strategy needs to be ready to respond to any such threat. On the other hand, with the end of the Clinton presidency, George W. Bush took office with a complex of people that had good experience in the oil industry as his cabinet, with people such as Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, etc. indeed, "oil and geopolitics were back at centre stage in Washington" [32]. He also believes that according to the National Energy Policy Report (NEPR) of May 2001, which was assigned by Cheney, as a complete review over the US energy policy, energy security was determined as a top priority in US foreign policy.

In this respect, and according to Iseri, although the Middle East is an unstable area, the cheapest source of oil in the world is still found in this region. Thus, to secure the supply of oil from the Middle East to world markets governmental intervention has been determined as a requirement. Iseri believes that because of the vast undeveloped oil reserves in Iraq, even bigger than Saudi Arabia reserves, that country became an important objective for Cheney and the Bush administration, and on the basis of this viewpoint, "the Iraqi oil reserves were too large and too valuable to be left to the control of Iraqi state-owned companies, hence, a regime change in Iraq was required" [32]. Yazdani and Hussain [33] in this context believe that the Iraqi oil revenues are even deposited in the US controlled "Development Fund for Iraq," so that the Iraqi government cannot use it without the permission of the US. In this respect, Billon [3], compares two countries North Korea and Iraq with each other, with both being suspected of involvement in the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction. He refers to what has been said by the US deputy secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz as: "The most important difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically, we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil" [3]. He, implicitly, considers energy resources as an important factor in the US objectives in the Iraq War in 2003.

Another author, Bromley [21] refers to the NEP document that emphasizes the priority of energy security in the US foreign policy. This is, for him, 'the Cheney Report of 2001' recommended by Cheney and endorsed by President Bush. He also establishes a close relation between Iraq's oil and the role of Saudi Arabia in the region. It means that "regime change in Baghdad might provide an opportunity to integrate Iraq's oil into international markets and to strengthen the US position in the Gulf order" [21]. It is, in fact, provided through raising Iraq's reserves and reducing the central role of Saudi Arabia in this region. This view is similar to Renner's [34] idea: "The Bush energy policy is predicted on growing consumption of oil, preferably cheap oil. Given rising depletion of the US oilfields, most of that oil will have to come from abroad, and indeed primarily from the [Persian] Gulf region. Controlling Iraqi oil would allow the United States to reduce Saudi influence over oil policy and give Washington enormous leverage over the world oil market" [34].

Mercille [35], however, divides the American objectives about Iraqi oil into two internal and international oil demands. In reference to the US imports information he noted that "the US could live without Iraqi oil and it must be seen as a secondary motivation behind the invasion." He emphasizes that "the main reason for intervention is control over world supply and not American consumption" and the US "will seek to control the region containing two-thirds of energy resources in order to exert leverage over industrial rivals and regulate the smooth functioning of the world economy." He also explains the geopolitical logic dimension refers to strategy of 'divide and conquer' which is done by the US to control the Persian Gulf oil through dividing the control of these resources "among several rulers to prevent the emergence of rival hegemonies in the region." In fact, Mercille believes that based on geopolitical logic the reason for these policies is to maintain 'American credibility' and its status across the world. Mercille in his work, *The radical geopolitics of US foreign policy: the 2003 Iraq War* also, generally, identifies three motivations for the US intervention in the Middle East which are related to oil: "to make profits from oil, to consume the oil, and to establish control over oil." It means that the profits the American oil companies, the US domestic consumption, and controlling the oil flows for the global aims could be brought up as the main reasons for the Iraq War [35].

3. Conclusion

Studying "resource wars" shows that the "natural resources" have always been regarded as one important cause for conflicts and wars. With the end of the Cold War, economic competitions have emerged instead of ideological rivalries and conflicts especially among great powers concentrated on economic issues. There is this view that amongst natural resources, oil has been most important factor in conflicts and rivalries due to needs of industrial countries to consume this vital commodity. Growth of demand for oil on the one hand and scarcity of this non-renewable natural resource on the other hand have led to attention being paid to specific geographical regions. The Persian Gulf area has always been perceived as the most important region with its large reservoirs of the world's oil. Therefore, this strategic region has become the centre of competition among the great powers to get access to the oil resources of the region which have been the cause of many resource wars such as Gulf War of 1991. The United States of America as the largest oil consumer in the world has understandably paid close attention to this area because of its oil needs, supporting its own economy and influencing the oil flow to control its rivals as well as preserving its hegemonic leadership in world order. These have led to the necessity of the US military presence in this area since the beginning of the Cold War. The Carter Doctrine explicitly declared the importance of the US military presence in this region to control this area. This policy was continued through outbreak of the Iraq War which can be called a resource war.

Authors' Contributions

Both authors contributed more or less equally to this work.

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