

# ENERGY DIPLOMACY: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF US AND RUSSIAN STRATEGIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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## Introduction

Central to the discourse on energy security is the geostrategic significance of regions which are rich in oil and gas resources, notably the Middle East. This region serves as a competitive arena for major global powers, each vying for strategic advantage amidst a complex web of political, economic, and security interests.

Russian energy diplomacy in the Middle East is characterized by a multifaceted approach that combines traditional statecraft with energy resource management. Leveraging its status as one of the world's leading energy exporters, Russia has sought to cultivate strategic partnerships with key players in the region, including oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. Through bilateral agreements, investment deals, and energy infrastructure projects, Moscow has aimed to bolster its influence in the Middle East while simultaneously advancing its broader geopolitical objectives. Additionally, Russia's involvement in regional conflicts has provided opportunities to expand its energy footprint and establish military footholds near vital energy transit routes.

In contrast, US energy diplomacy in the Middle East has traditionally been shaped by a combination of economic interests, security considerations, and strategic alliances. As a major importer of Middle Eastern oil and a proponent of regional stability, the United States has sought to safeguard its energy security by fostering close ties with key Gulf Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Through diplomatic engagement, military cooperation, and economic partnerships, Washington has aimed to uphold its influence in the region while mitigating potential threats to global energy supplies, including geopolitical tensions and terrorist activities.

In this context, understanding the dynamics of Russian and US energy diplomacy in the Middle East is essential for comprehending the broader geopolitical landscape of the region and its implications for global energy security.

## Energy Diplomacy Strategies of the US and Russia

In an interconnected world where energy resources serve as the lifeblood of economies and societies, the practice of energy diplomacy has emerged as a crucial tool for nations to safeguard their interests, forge strategic partnerships, and navigate the complexities of the global energy landscape. The strategic importance of energy diplomacy lies in its ability to address a myriad of interconnected challenges spanning economic, environmental, and geopolitical realms. At its heart, energy diplomacy seeks to balance competing interests and mitigate risks inherent in the pursuit of energy security, while also fostering cooperation and collaboration among nations to address shared energy-related concerns.

The Middle East stands as one of the pivotal regions in global energy dynamics, characterized by its vast oil and gas reserves, intricate geopolitical landscapes, and the interplay of regional and international interests. Energy diplomacy in this region is not merely about transactions and trade deals but involves a delicate dance of politics, economics, and security concerns. In order to understand the complexities of energy diplomacy in the Middle East, it is also important to recognize the interests and strategies pursued by dominant powers such as the United States and Russia in the region.

In the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, energy diplomacy emerges as a key battleground where major powers vie for influence and strategic advantage. At the forefront of this arena are the United States and Russia, each pursuing distinct but intersecting objectives driven by their global strategies and energy interests.

To better understand why the Middle East has emerged as an arena for strategic competition, it is essential to understand the core U.S. interests in the region. Although U.S. policies are mutable and vary from administration to administration, these interests have remained constant and provide the basis for continued U.S. involvement and presence in the re-

gion. Elucidating what these U.S. interests are could also shed light on the strategic approaches that Russia and China have adopted and the types of actions that they have chosen to undertake in order to counter—and perhaps even undercut—U.S. influence in the Middle East. These enduring U.S. interests can be broken into four pillars: ensuring regional stability, maintaining access to and guaranteeing the free flow of oil for global markets, protecting allies and partners, and defending U.S. troops in the region. [7]

When talking about the energy diplomacy, we can say that for the United States, the Middle East holds a dual significance: as a crucial source of oil and as a strategic theater for maintaining global leadership. Recognizing the importance of both economic and military presence, the US has cultivated strong economic ties with oil-producing nations like Saudi Arabia while establishing strategic military bases across the region, such as Jubail in Saudi Arabia and Manama in Bahrain. This dual approach aims not only to ensure energy security but also to exert political influence and control over the volatile region. [1]

The US's energy strategy, exemplified by actions like the Iraq war, underscores its commitment to securing control over Middle Eastern oil reserves, thereby bolstering its geopolitical leverage and economic dominance. By wielding energy diplomacy as a tool, the US seeks to shape the political landscape of the region, mitigate threats such as OPEC's influence, and disrupt the economic foundations of terrorism. [4]

If we look at the historical background, we can see that US leadership positions included being the top global producer of both oil and natural gas, the top exporter of LNG, and the third-largest exporter of oil, as well as having the world's largest capital markets for investment and leading basic research of new energy science and technologies. [3]

The United States was also a leader in a reasonable amount of energy industry manufacturing, in areas including nuclear power equipment, oil and gas field services, electric vehicles, and turbines. It was also the leading country in emissions reductions, based on successful development of lower-emitting energy supplies and deploying new technologies. [3]

Meanwhile, Russia has been strategically maneuvering to reassert its influence in the Middle East, leveraging its energy resources as a diplomatic asset. With its vast oil and gas reserves, Russia aims

to carve out a significant role in the region's energy landscape, thereby challenging US hegemony and advancing its own geopolitical objectives.

Actually, after the Cold War, Russia has been in a period of economic transformation and its influence on the international stage was not as strong as before. As a country in transition and an energy superpower, Russia's rich oil and gas resources and its huge export potential has been the objective material basis of its energy strategy development and implementation of a complete energy diplomacy. By drawing the world's major national energy strategy development experience and absorbing a variety of factors at home and abroad, the Russian government gradually formed its own unique energy strategy.

Russia's energy strategy, articulated in documents like the Energy Strategy 2020, emphasizes the maximization of national interests through energy diplomacy. As the country undergoes economic transformation, energy exports serve as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, enabling Russia to strengthen ties with Middle Eastern nations and expand its sphere of influence. [5] By drawing on global energy trends and engaging in strategic partnerships, Russia seeks to counterbalance US dominance in the region and assert itself as a major player in shaping Middle Eastern affairs.

While the United States and Russia pursue divergent energy strategies in the Middle East, their actions reflect a shared objective: to maintain and enhance their respective positions of power on the global stage. Whether through military presence and economic partnerships for the US or energy diplomacy and strategic alliances for Russia, both powers are deeply invested in shaping the political and economic dynamics of the region.

The United States' approach to energy diplomacy in the Middle East is characterized by a deepening of its long-standing global strategy, which integrates political, economic, military, and diplomatic efforts in a coherent framework. This systematic approach has enabled the US to wield considerable influence in the region, leveraging its economic power and military presence to advance its geopolitical interests.

Under the leadership of President George W. Bush, initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Initiative and the manipulation of oil dollars played a crucial role in consolidating US control over capital flows in the region. Military interventions, notably

the invasion of Iraq, further solidified America's grip on Middle Eastern oil interests, laying the groundwork for its dominance in the energy sector. [6]

The diversification of US energy policies has provided flexibility in its diplomatic maneuvering, allowing for tailored approaches to different geopolitical challenges. High-level visits by US leaders, such as President Bush's tour of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in 2008 and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's engagements in the region in 2009, underscore the importance accorded to Middle Eastern affairs. Additionally, the appointment of envoys like George Mitchell reflects the US commitment to resolving regional crises through diplomatic channels. [2]

In contrast, Russia's energy diplomacy in the Middle East reflects a nuanced approach aimed at safeguarding its economic interests and narrowing the gap with major oil-producing countries. Recognizing the limitations of its military capabilities, Russia has pursued a relatively independent policy from the US and the EU, focusing on energy cooperation as a means to bolster its influence in the region.

While Russian leaders have undertaken diplomatic initiatives, such as President Vladimir Putin's visit to the Middle East in 2007 and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's engagements in 2008, their impact has been overshadowed by US dominance in key areas such as oil production and currency manipulation. Despite its efforts to assert itself in the region, Russia's special interests, particularly its alignment with Iran, have constrained its ability to challenge US hegemony effectively. [11]

Russia also supports those energy projects that allow it either to control or to divert the export flows of Middle Eastern gas from the EU in order to secure its interests in the European gas market. For example, Russia offered several times to assist Iran and Pakistan with the construction of the so-called Peace Pipeline. This project would guarantee that a huge share of Iranian natural gas will be sold to South Asia and further on to China but not to Europe. In 2016, during the Baku summit of the presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran, Putin called for closer cooperation and coordination in the oil and gas sphere. [10]

Another economic driver of Russia's post-2012 involvement in the Middle East is related to its ambitions in the international gas market. The region plays an important role in the implementation of 'The Energy Strategy of Russia until 2030', a go-

vernment policy paper adopted by the Russian authorities in 2009. [8]

Coordinating with gas producing countries such as Algeria, Qatar and Iran has been considered by the authorities for years. Russia tried to approach them at the bilateral level and by offering to establish regional OPEC-like organizations. Thus, in the late 2000s it promoted the idea of creating the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, the Gas Troika, and the International Alliance of National Non-governmental Gas Organizations.

### **Divergent Paths, Converging Interests**

Both the United States and Russia share a mutual goal: to diminish OPEC's influence on global oil prices. Given their significant reliance on imported energy, the United States is particularly keen on securing oil at lower prices. However, OPEC's hegemony, especially the sway wielded by oil-producing nations in the Middle East over production levels, presents a considerable hurdle for the US. The US's military involvement in Iraq, including the subsequent occupation, was partially driven by a desire to challenge OPEC's production restrictions and thereby exert more control over oil prices. Conversely, while stability and high oil prices are vital for Russia's energy security, OPEC's overwhelming dominance has limited Russia's capacity to fully leverage its oil exports. Hence, both the United States and Russia are motivated to dismantle OPEC's monopoly on global oil prices.

Additionally, they aim to lessen their reliance on Middle Eastern oil. For the US, this entails reducing dependency on the volatile region and diversifying energy imports. Despite the abundance of oil in the Middle East, security concerns have led the US to decrease its share of oil imports from the region, redirecting its focus towards alternative sources such as the Caspian Sea, Africa, and Russia.

Similarly, Russia perceives itself as a competitor to the Middle East in the energy sector and seeks to shift the United States' focus away from the region towards Russia.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the competition among major powers in the Middle East is deeply intertwined with the region's crucial geopolitical significance and the strategic value of its energy resources. The United

States and Russia have developed comprehensive energy strategies tailored to the region, reflecting their divergent approaches and respective strengths on the global stage.

While the United States leverages its formidable economic and military power to navigate complex geopolitical environments, Russia relies on its energy resources to project influence in the region. Both countries face challenges in maneuvering through the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, including the impact of unilateral sanctions and evolving international energy patterns.

Despite encountering obstacles such as geographical distance and anti-American sentiment in the Middle East, the United States benefits from its economic and military prowess. Conversely, Russia enjoys the advantage of its proximity to the region and shared historical ties, although its relatively weak economy poses challenges.

In navigating this complex landscape, both countries must grapple with the challenges posed by the financial crisis and contend with contradictions in their energy strategies. While they share common interests in the region's energy dynamics, their competition and cooperation are shaped by traditional positions and new geopolitical considerations.

Ultimately, the contrasting strategic policies of the United States and Russia underscore that the Middle East's interest dynamics are far from a simple zero-sum game. Instead, they represent a nuanced and variable interplay of interests, competition, and cooperation. In this dynamic environment, both sides prioritize maximizing their national interests as they maneuver to assert influence and advance their objectives in the Middle East and beyond.

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#### **Enerji diplomatiyası: ABŞ və Rusiyanın Yaxın Şərqi strategiyalarının müqayisəli təhlili XÜLASƏ**

Bu məqalə zəngin enerji resursları və mürəkkəb geosiyasi dinamikası ilə məşhur olan Yaxın Şərqi xüsusi diqqət yetirməklə enerji diplomatiyası təcrübəsini araşdırır. Tədqiqat iki böyük dövlətin – ABŞ və Rusiyanın Yaxın Şərqi enerji diplomatiyasına yönəlmiş fərqli yanaşmalarına fokuslanır.

Rusiyanın Yaxın Şərqi enerji diplomatiyası ənənəvi dövlət idarəçiliyini enerji resurslarının idarə edilməsi ilə birləşdirən çoxşaxəli yanaşma ilə xarakterizə olunur. Əsas enerji ixracatçısı və global enerji bazarlarında əsas oyunçu kimi Rusiya enerji maraqlarını qorumaq, geosiyasi təsirini gücləndirmək

və ABŞ-ın regiondakı hökmranlığına qarşı tarazlıq yaratmaq üçün Yaxın Şərqdə nüanslı yanaşma nümayiş etdirib, o cümlədən Səudiyyə Ərəbistanı, İran və İraq kimi neftlə zəngin dövlətlərlə strateji tərəfdaşlıq əlaqələri qurmağa çalışıb.

ABŞ isə öz növbəsində, siyasi, iqtisadi və hərbi səylərini birləşdirən sistemativ yanaşmadan istifadə edir və regionda öz təsirini qoruyub saxlamaq, eyni zamanda geosiyasi gərginlik və terror fəaliyyətləri də daxil olmaqla qlobal enerji təchizatı üçün potensial təhlükələri yumşaltmağı hədəfləyib.

Tədqiqat həmçinin tarixi kontekstləri və müasir inkişafı təhlil edərək, qlobal enerji dinamikasında Yaxın Şərqin strateji əhəmiyyətini, ABŞ və Rusiyanın enerji diplomatiyası strategiyalarını hərəkətə gətirən motivləri aydınlaşdırır.

**Açar sözlər:** enerji təhlükəsizliyi, geostrateji əhəmiyyət, Orta Şərq, ABŞ enerji diplomatiyası, Rusiya enerji diplomatiyası

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**Энергетическая дипломатия: сравнительный анализ стратегий США и России на Ближнем Востоке**  
**РЕЗЮМЕ**

В данной статье рассматривается практика энергетической дипломатии с особым акцентом на Ближний Восток, известный своими богатыми энергетическими ресурсами и сложной геополитической динамикой. В исследовании основное внимание уделяется различным подходам двух крупнейших держав, США и России, к энергетической дипломатии на Ближнем Востоке.

Российская энергетическая дипломатия на Ближнем Востоке характеризуется многогранным подходом, сочетающим традиционное государственное управление с управлением энергетическими ресурсами. Будучи крупным экспортером энергоносителей и крупным игроком на мировых энергетических рынках, Россия применяет на Ближнем Востоке тонкий подход для защиты своих энергетических интересов, усиления своего геополитического влияния и противовеса доминированию США в регионе, включая стратегическое партнерство с богатыми

нефтью странами. такие как Саудовская Аравия, Иран и Ирак.

США, со своей стороны, используют системный подход, который объединяет свои политические, экономические и военные усилия и направлен на сохранение своего влияния в регионе, одновременно снижая потенциальные угрозы глобальным поставкам энергоносителей, включая геополитическую напряженность и террористическую деятельность.

В исследовании также анализируются исторические контексты и современные события, разъясняются стратегическая важность Ближнего Востока в глобальной энергетической динамике и мотивы, определяющие стратегии энергетической дипломатии США и России.

**Ключевые слова:** энергетическая безопасность, геостратегическое значение, Ближний Восток, энергетическая дипломатия США, российская энергетическая дипломатия.