



Discussing the weaponization of fossil fuels as an energy source

Committee: SPC1

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Introduction

Recently, countries have been avoiding costly military interventions by finding other ways to harm their opponents with methods such as sanctions and cyberwarfare increasing, so has the emergence of the manipulation of fossil fuels. Nations have begun manipulating fossil fuel access to weaponize it and use it as a tool for their gain, which has begun to threaten our global security. The weaponization of fossil fuels has become a threat to international security for many reasons, including the environmental damage of their use and conflicts over control. According to Jeff Colgan, there are 8 reasons why oil fosters international conflict, contributing “to conflict individually or in combination:

1. Resource wars
 - a. in which states try to acquire oil reserves by force;
2. Petro-aggression
 - a. whereby oil insulates aggressive leaders and therefore makes them more willing to engage in risky foreign policy adventurism;
3. The externalization of civil wars in oil-producing states ("petrostates");
4. Financing for insurgencies
 - a. for instance, Iran funneling oil money to Hezbollah;
5. Conflicts triggered by the prospect of oil-market domination
 - a. such as the United States' war with Iraq over Kuwait in 1991;
6. Clashes over control of oil transit routes
 - a. such as shipping lanes and pipelines;
7. Oil-related grievances
 - a. whereby the presence of foreign workers in petrostates helps extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda recruit locals;
8. Oil-related obstacles to multilateral cooperation
 - a. such as when an importer's attempt to curry favor with a petrostate prevents multilateral cooperation on security issues” (Colgan).

It is of utmost importance that we tackle this threat, which this research report explains.

Definition of Key Terms

Fossil fuels

“Any of a class of materials of biological origin occurring within the Earth’s crust that can be used as a source of energy. Fossil fuels include coal, petroleum, and natural gas. They all contain carbon and were formed as a result of geologic processes acting on the remains of (mostly) plants and animals that lived and died hundreds of millions of years ago. All fossil fuels can be burned to provide heat, which may be used directly, as in home heating, or to produce steam to drive a generator for the production of electricity. Fossil fuels supply nearly 90% of all the energy used by industrially developed nations” (Kopp). In regard to this topic, they are being used as weapons.

Weaponization

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines weaponization as: “to adapt for use as a weapon of war”. In this context, oil is being ‘weaponized’ by nations to use against others during conflict (weaponize).

Sustainability

“Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United), is the way that the UN defines sustainability. This relates to our consumption of fossil fuels, as well as our need to have global peace.

Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC)

This is an organization founded in 1968 of 10 oil-rich Arab countries who have formed a bloc. Member states include: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lybia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Tunisia. Their main goals are to promote cooperation, provide harmony, and provide unified economic policies (Organization). The OAPEC are not to be confused with the OPEC, who include countries that are not Arabic.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

OPEC is a bloc of 13 oil-rich countries founded in 1960. Member states include Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. Past members include Ecuador, Indonesia, and Qatar (OPEC). It has been influential in the past, and still is. Further details are mentioned in the “Key Parties” section.

Embargo

“An embargo is a trade restriction, typically adopted by a government, a group of countries or an international organization as an economic sanction. Embargoes can bar all trade, or may apply only to some of it, for example to arms imports. They are designed to punish the targeted country for its actions, and to deny it the means to carry out objectionable policies” (Liberto). They have been used against the USA in the past, and are one method of weaponizing fossil fuels.

Non-Renewable Resources

These resources differ from fossil fuels as they include nuclear energy, which the term “fossil fuels” does not. Non-renewable resources are those of which we have a limited supply, including coal, oil, nuclear energy, and natural gas. These resources are limited in supply because we consume them at a faster rate than they are produced. The opposite of non-renewable resources are renewable resources, which can be replenished such as solar, hydro, or wind energy (Dhir).

General Overview

For the general overview, various conflicts where fossil fuels have been weaponized will be presented as well as the use of fossil fuels and alternatives to them. Please keep in mind that this is simply a general overview and that further research may need to be conducted in order to properly address the issue when drafting a resolution.

Benefits of Fossil Fuels and their Weaponization

There are a variety of benefits to using fossil fuels, which is an important factor in our use of them. One aspect is that fossil fuels are the most efficient energy source that we currently have available to us as they have a high calorific value (Rinkesh). When burning them, circa 60% of the heat is able to be converted into electricity, a form of energy that we can use. Alternatives to fossil fuels have a lower calorific value, for example, solar panels have an efficiency of circa 20% (Consumer). Another benefit to fossil fuels is that the by-products are useful, for example, petroleum jelly and plastics, which have a vast variety of applications. Other benefits include economic benefits, job creation, wide availability, and reliability (Rinkesh).



Fossil Fuel Use for Energy

Most of our energy is sourced from fossil fuels. Whether it be in our transportation, heating, electricity, production, or another form, it is found in many aspects of our daily lives. Fossil fuels form “when prehistoric plants and animals died and are gradually buried by layers of rock over millions of years”, and different types are formed depending on the conditions. Humans have been using fossil fuels for energy for centuries now, starting in the late 1700s (Britannica). However, it wasn’t until the late 1900s that the steam engine, powered by fossil fuels, gained popularity. To harness the energy from these sources, “fossil fuel industries drill or mine for these energy sources, burn them to produce electricity or refine them for use as fuel for heating or transportation” (Energy.gov). Fossil fuels account for approximately 80 percent of the world’s energy source. Fossil fuels are found in the forms of natural gas, coal, and oil (EESI). As fossil fuels are not evenly distributed throughout the world, there are certain areas that are rich in fossil fuels. These oil-rich areas such as Venezuela, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and more, are drilled in to obtain the oil. This extraction process is labor-intensive and requires high quantities of energy. For resolution writing, it is important to note that the quantities of oils that are referenced are measured in barrels, as this could help add precision to the proposed policies (NS Energy).

Military Fossil Fuels Use

What allows fossil fuels to have so much power and become weaponized is the fact that militaries and many aspects of our lives require it (EESI). Therefore, if one country were to have more oil, it would also have more power over other countries. This is where fossil fuels fall victim to weaponization. Oil-rich countries may limit the number of fossil fuels that they export or make other changes in the distribution of fossil fuels depending on international relations or politics. Some other threats that the military’s consumption of oil could pose are that the military is very vulnerable to increases in prices and that the transport of fossil fuels is dangerous while in conflict (Union), which oil-rich areas would have more control over.

Sustainability of Fossil Fuels

Fossil fuels are non-renewable resources, meaning that there is a limited supply of them. When burned, “the stored carbon and other greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere. An excess buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has caused dramatic changes to Earth’s climate—a trend that will worsen as more fossil fuels are burned” (EESI). Since fossil fuels have been contributing largely to climate change and are non-renewable, they are not considered to be sustainable. It is expected that fossil fuel reserves are completely depleted within the next ± 70 years (MAHB), meaning that resolutions should aim to address this issue, especially as it could lead

to increased weaponization and conflict over these scarce resources. The issue with fossil fuels and their lack of sustainability carries over into the threat to our global security, where fossil fuels threaten our mutual survival. This is threatened not only by the increased carbon emissions causing climate change, but also by other limitations to fossil fuel use such as pollution, human health issues, environmental harm by oil spills, transport, and extraction, and rising costs (Rinkesh).

Alternatives to Fossil Fuels

There are many alternatives to fossil fuels that are being developed and already have been. Some of these come from renewable sources, such as solar, wind, or hydroelectric energy. Other alternatives include nuclear energy and biofuels. Each of these energy sources has its own advantages and limitations, just like fossil fuels. Benefits include that they are more sustainable, healthier for humans and animals, and less labor intensive (Rinkesh). However, these also come with limitations such as lower efficiency, high costs, and unreliability.

Past Conflicts over Fossil Fuel Control

This research report will only briefly cover conflicts that have involved weaponized fossil fuels; therefore, it may be helpful to conduct further research into these issues. Most recently, the Russo-Ukrainian war has been in the spotlight and will likely be the most discussed conflict featuring fossil fuel weaponization. However, it is important to remember that this is not the first conflict where fossil fuels have been weaponized and that there have been others in the past, even though none have been labeled as “oil wars”, the threat of an oil war has become ever more exaggerated (Meierding).

Yet, it is also important to note that there is still a question of whether oil has been the main driving factor of these conflicts or if it is simply a tactical tool. Some may argue that since oil has never been the sole purpose for a country to initiate war on another, the threat of an “oil war” breaking out is far less likely than it is made out to be, especially since it is challenging for countries to operate and use conquered oil. The UN member states and other international institutions have also been quick to respond to “oil grabs with diplomatic censure, economic sanctions, and even military force” (Meierding), which heavily discourage countries from trying to enter conflicts in order to gain more control over petroleum-endowed areas and could be strengthened in order to further discourage countries.

The earliest war that was fought over fossil fuels, in which they then became weaponized, was the Chaco war. This was a war fought between Paraguay and Bolivia over the Gran Chaco area, which the Bolivians believed to be oil-rich from 1932 to 1935 (Goldberg).



The next conflict in which oil was weaponized was World War I, fought from 1914 to 1918. Although this conflict was not directly fought over the control of fossil fuels, parties began to use oil-powered machines (Key), and the demand for fossil fuels therefore sharply increased. It became an asset for nations to have, which is why the UK seized the Mosul province during WWI (Meiderding). This same principle applies to World War II as well, fought from 1939 to 1945 (World), where Germany invaded the Russian Caucasus area, and Japan the Dutch East Indies (Meierding).

Another conflict that was considered to be heavily influenced by fossil fuel weaponization was the 1973 embargoes. This happened during the Yom Kippur War, fought from October to November of 1973. This conflict was fought between Egypt, Israel, and Syria, and Israel turned to the United States for aid, which they eventually gave (Etherege). This was then countered by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, OAPEC, by disallowing the USA from importing their petroleum (Corbett). In this conflict, the control over fossil fuels was used as a weapon against the USA, and it ended up having a detrimental effect on the international oil price as well as the American economy.

The next conflict with fossil fuel weaponization was the Gulf war, fought from 1990 to 1991 over the Persian Gulf Region (Persian). This conflict was triggered by Iraq invading Kuwait, which Iraq did to “acquire the nation’s large oil reserves, cancel a large debt Iraq owed Kuwait, and expand Iraqi power in the region” (Wallenfeldt). This is considered to be the conflict, a so-called “oil gambit”, where oil played the largest role and where it was weaponized the most (Meierding).

The South China Sea conflict is another where fossil fuels have the potential to be weaponized and previously have been. This is an ongoing conflict for control over the South China Sea, an oil-endowed area off the coast of China. Currently, China claims sovereignty over the sea, which is countered by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam, who each claim different parts of the territory. There are several parts of the South China Sea that are disputed such as the Paracel and Spratly Islands, which have been claimed by several countries since the 1970s (Territorial). With increasing energy insecurity, China may be pushed towards using its control over this oil-rich area for fracking and against other nations (Montgomery).

Finally, the Russo-Ukrainian war has also led to the weaponization of fossil fuels for energy use. During this most recent conflict, both sides have used fossil fuels and weaponized them in their favor. This conflict is ongoing and began in 2014 after Russia attempted to annex Crimea, a disputed territory between Russia and, found on the Black Sea (Conflict). In response to Russia’s attacks on Ukraine, the Group of Seven major powers, the European Union, and Australia have decided to place a price cap on Russian fossil fuels, limiting the revenue that Russia can get. In response, Putin

has signed a decree that bans all nations that implemented the price cap from importing Russian Oil (Marrow). This conflict has increased global energy insecurity since fossil fuels are being used as assets and weapons by both sides of the conflict (Conflict).

In all of these conflicts, oil, a fossil fuel, became a weapon, since the party who had oil had an advantage over the other and what the other party wanted to gain. Those who controlled the fossil fuel reserves could determine who could access them and how much, affecting the other parties' efficiency. Countries placing embargoes, or bans, on others' oil and switching who they import from, have also weaponized fossil fuels for energy use since countries who largely depend on revenue from fossil fuel exports will suffer economically if they sell fewer fossil fuels since they would have less income.

Timeline of Key Events

This is a non-exhaustive timeline of events which pertain to the development of fossil fuels as an energy source and its weaponization (Oil Price, Britannica).

Date	Event
1765	James Watt improves the steam engine
1859	First Oil Well Drilled
1880	Coal first used for electricity generation
1908	Model T launched, oil increases in popularity
9 th September 1932	Chaco War begins, fought between Paraguay and Bolivia
28 th July 1914	World War I begins, sharp increase for fossil fuels to power
1 st September 1939	World War II begins, tanks, trucks, ships, and other assets increase fossil fuel demand
19 th October 1973	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries [OAPEC] places embargo on American Oil
22 nd September 1980	Iran-Iraq War
2 nd April 1982	Falklands war, fought between Argentina and the UK
2 nd August 1990	Gulf war, Iraq invades Kuwait
20 th March 2003	USA invades Iraq
20 th February 2014	Russo-Ukrainian War begins
24 th February 2022	Russo-Ukrainian War escalates

Major Parties Involved

Many countries are prominent considering this issue, especially those who are rich in fossil fuels. This research report will go into depth on some of the most prominent parties involved, which may not cover all key parties.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC]

This organization is an energy bloc, formed in 1960, that has a total of 13 member states. Member states include Algeria, Angola, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. Past members include Ecuador, Indonesia, and Qatar (OPEC). All of these oil-rich states are major parties that are involved, especially Saudi Arabia and Iraq as they have successfully weaponized oil in the past (Aljamra). These countries meet every six months to negotiate oil prices and to adopt similar policies on fossil fuels in order to make the global market more stable (OPEC). All of these countries have the potential to use their control over fossil fuels to weaponize them during the conflict. It has been speculated that OPEC has a lot of power over the price of fossil fuels on the global market, making them highly influential.

Russia

Russia is the world's second-largest petroleum exporter after Saudi Arabia (Marrow), meaning that oil has a high importance to its economy. During the recent developments in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Russia has used fossil fuels and weaponized them against Western countries and come into the spotlight. However, as a global superpower, they have been involved in other conflicts in the past as well such as both world wars, and the Persian Gulf war. They are also the third-largest petroleum producer in the world (Russian), making them influential on the international fossil fuel market, as well as dependent on the revenues from oil sales.

United States of America [USA]

The USA has been involved in a variety of conflicts that have concerned the weaponization of fossil fuels, including the Yom Kippur war, WWI and II, the Gulf war, and invading Iraq in 2003, not hesitating to become involved. As a global superpower, they are one of the most fossil fuel-reliant and highest polluting nations in the world, consuming 24% of the world's natural gas in 2020 alone (EESI). The US military is also the largest institutional oil consumer in the world, making it very vulnerable to price spikes and heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels for energy, which could be used against it. However, the US military is also developing alternative technologies by using biofuels

and hybrid-electric vehicles (Union). The USA also produces fossil fuels, allowing it to have some control over the market.

Possible Solutions

As this issue is very multi-faceted, there should be a variety of problems that have to be addressed. Some aspects that were previously mentioned include: addressing how the scarcity of fossil fuels affects weaponization, suggesting or encouraging the use and development of alternative technology, and addressing the impact that fossil fuel weaponization has had.

First, measures should be put in place that prevents countries from weaponizing fossil fuels further, which may impose on a nation's sovereignty. The UN may employ the World Trade Organization [WTO] or International Monetary Fund [IMF] to monitor the situation and/or intervene if needed. For more information about the WTO (Jiménez-Guerra) is a helpful resource about the specific involvement of this organization. Another way to prevent countries from weaponizing fossil fuels is for countries to invest in alternative energy sources and have a more spread-out energy sourcing. Encouraging investment into sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels allows countries to rely on fossil fuels less as an energy source, and become less dependent on them. Oil-rich nations should also attempt to invest more in other sectors to become less dependent on fossil fuel revenues and diversify their incomes, for example, Saudi Arabia has been investing in tech and infrastructure (Oxford). Nations may also encourage investors to sell their stakes in fossil fuel companies, lowering their values (Follow This). It is also important to remember that investing in alternatives would take time to implement and for results to be visible, therefore these policies may be politically unfavored.

The UN may also want to set up conferences where nations are able to consistently have a dialogue about fossil fuel use, potentially including OPEC. Previous agreements about fossil fuel trade could be revised here or new legislation tightening regulations could be introduced. Legislation could cover what the policy would be for nations to retaliate if one attempts to weaponize fossil fuels or regulate the distribution of fossil fuels. It is also important to consider that fossil fuel companies are prominent stakeholders in this issue, and their involvement should be considered.

Overall, it is important to make sure that fossil fuels are harder to weaponize, that there are consequences when nations attempt to weaponize them, and that fossil fuels have less influence over nations.

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