Recent Fight for Oil Resources
The Transformation of Oil Wars in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Petroleum\(^1\) is the world’s most valuable resource. It has been the case since its discovery centuries ago, but as our society grows and evolves, global reserves seem to be exhausted in the forthcoming decades. The question of energy security, especially with the involvement of oil, is a complex issue, which is heavily influenced by the political, economic and social actions of all global actors.

It has been argued by academics, that the century we live in may easily become that of resource wars. Already at the beginning of the century Michael T. Klare (2002) has predicted that dependence on resources, especially oil, can become a severe threat for all of us and will contribute to instability, especially in resource-rich regions. He argued, that although struggles might be framed within cultural, ethnic or religious differences, they will be actually fuelled by the need to control the uninterrupted supply and access to oil.

During my initial research, I found Rutledge (2005, pp. 12) stating that “States do not go to war for one reason alone.” This sentence inspired me to question therefore the ideas concerning whether oil itself can truly cause real wars between states, communities, anyone at all partaking in the business. As I dig deeper, I also found, that the Internet has done a thorough work in explaining that every conflict we are facing today is indeed about oil, but also the contrary, that nothing is about that. As a consequence, I made the realisation that writing about oil is a really complex issue and it is impossible to cover every aspect of it.

Nevertheless, I wished to find out the nature of oil wars, if any of them exist at all in the 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century. I found that the First Gulf War was the most convincing and closest to the picture I imagined as an amateur and therefore, I made this the basis of my thesis. I believe and will try to prove accordingly, that Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was a war in its traditional definition and indeed was biggest part about petroleum. However, regarding more current events actually from this century, I came to the conclusion that

\(^1\) I will use the term oil when referring to crude oil and natural gas liquids. In addition, the term petroleum will be also used synonymously to crude oil and for further products refined from oil (such as gasoline, fuel, etc...).
none of the most pressing conflicts over oil are similar enough to convince me of the same. Therefore, I will argue that in the new century, conflicts or wars in which oil played an important role were not in fact resource wars and I will try to explain why it is unlikely that anything like the First Gulf War would happen again in the close future.

I do not wish to go further back in time than the end of the Cold War, as I believe that was a huge divider in recent history, and the almost three decades which passed since has already seen events which are momentous in current international relations. As a matter of fact, I will analyse the undeniable need for petroleum and will start by describing its nature as a significant natural resource and by highlighting the possibilities it can provide in comparison to other resources.

I will also describe the phenomenon of oil dependency, since it is evident that none of the conflicts would be so imperative if current economies were not so reliant on petroleum. Oil dependency, therefore, is crucial in understanding the underlying basic reasons of conflict, should we talk about resource wars or not. I shall also touch upon the nature of petrostates before going into details on specific cases, as I reckon that there are similarities in the way resource-rich nations behave which is important regarding how it can affect their conflicting nature.

Nevertheless, defining war and the Kuwait-Iraq conflict will be also essential, just as describing other cases. First of all, I will touch upon the Iraq war of 2003, as this is a war which is generally believed to be about oil. I will continue on with the conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region, which I found to be a crucial event regarding its violent nature. Finally, I will discuss the South China Sea dispute, which is included in this thesis exactly because of its current popularity. I chose these three conflicts, because I wished to focus my attention on disputes outside of the First World nations territory which is considered to be a relatively peaceful part of the world. This does not mean, that they reflect all current trends of warfare, but they are significant and evidently help us understanding better the nature of oil as a player in violent conflicts.

In this paper I will use descriptive methods to reflect upon the current views on oil politics, energy security and violent conflicts in general. Especially in case of oil dependency, I use quantitative data to support how severe economic dependence is on petroleum and will touch upon some data concerning import and export trends of the biggest players. I will also analyse whether current events fit my definition of oil wars.
and will try to support my original hypothesis. Finally, in the conclusion I will reflect upon the questionable points I found during my research and will mention topics which may request further research in order to gain a more detailed and more accurate depiction of today’s events.

As for my bibliography, I was aiming at using as much academic resource as possible, however, as the freshness and still changing character of the topic allows it, I used up-to-date articles and opinions on this subject as well. I find it important to mention the authors whose work I found extremely helpful and significant in conducting this research. Michael T. Klare was one of the first writers whose work inspired me to work on this topic and his ideas contributed a lot to how I think about resource wars today. In addition, Gal Luft’s and Anne Korin’s reference handbook was especially useful in understanding the complexity of this issue and I found great arguments which I trust, made my point of view on the topic a lot less biased. I was also thinking a lot about Mary Kaldor’s theory on New Wars, which will be elaborated on further, and how it connects to this issue. Luckily, after I got invested in her work, I found that she also connected her theory to oil as well, therefore, her work had a huge influence on my thinking regarding this thesis.
1. Introduction to Natural Resources

1.1. Definition of natural resources

Although based on the Oxford Dictionary one can define a resource relatively simply as “an available stock or supply that can be drawn on” or even as a “country’s collective wealth” there are other defining characteristics which must be stressed. Kajati (2011) highlights that natural resources are those naturally (geologically) occurring endowments which due to their unique and distinctive features are essential to the sustainability of the given society. Another significant factor which cannot be ignored is the economic benefits of natural resources on human societies, as the exploitation of these supplies can be utilised as raw materials, for power generation or even for production of food stock.

Generally, natural resources are divided into two types based on their characteristics: renewable and non-renewable resources. In the case of non-renewable also called finite resources, the biggest challenge is their limited availability as time progresses (Kajati, 2011). These resources can be found in underground pockets - also referred to as reservoirs - and took them millions of years to form. Consequently, the term ‘non-renewable’ might be somewhat misplaced, as similarly to renewable resources, finite ones also reproduce, however, this time period is an immensely long one which exceeds many lifetimes (National Geographic Society, 2013).

The most advantageous characteristic of renewable resources - which is not possessed by finite ones - is evidently their ability to naturally renew and replenish themselves within such a short time period that it can still be useful for human needs. Significant sources of renewable energy are the sun in the form of active or passive solar energy, wind, and the Earth as well due to biomass energy, hydroelectric energy and geothermal energy (National Geographic Society, 2013). Nevertheless, not all renewable resources are considered to be as ideal as it may seem at first, hence the distinct category within them, called critical zone renewable resources. These include soil, forests, animals, underground water reserves, which are at risk of not being able to renew quickly enough, as human need for their use is constantly growing (Kajati, 2011).

This distinction between resources is especially crucial considering the fact, that due to the evolution of human societies, all natural resources are subject to exploitation. Due to the process of human development, nature has always been subordinated to societal and economic needs, even more drastically from the beginning of the twentieth century.
Although besides the economy, a society must fulfil other functions as well, such as governance, health care or culture, it is undeniably resting on an interconnecting hierarchical system. Consequently, the fate of a society and its economy is in constant interaction with its natural environment and these are all dependent on each other (Kajati, 2011).

Natural resources are incorporated into the wealth of a nation state. Soil, land, and all resources which are considered as geological wealth (carbon, hydrocarbon, minerals and ores) found underneath the ground are constituents, and it is another economic aspect of natural resources, that after extraction and further production, these resources contribute to the earnings of the owner (Kajati, 2011).

The currently most economically significant non-renewable resources producing energy are fossil fuels, such as petroleum, natural gas and coal. Nuclear power could be also considered as one of the most popular non-renewable resources, however, due to its high maintenance and costly nature, nuclear power plants are far from being as accessible and common as fossil fuels. Furthermore, the nature of nuclear power is very different from that of other non-renewable resources, regarding the fact that it can be considered a finite resource based on the rarity of uranium, which is essential to the production of nuclear power; however, the energy itself can be considered renewable. As a consequence, the categorisation of this resource is an issue of debate (National Geographic Society, 2013).

Nevertheless, even between traditional fossil fuels there can be huge differences, therefore the question arises; what makes petroleum stand out and why is it so indispensable that states do everything to protect their own supplies and as it has been argued by many scholars, some would even wage wars?

1.2. The Economic Importance of Oil

By accounting for approximately 30% of the world’s energy consumption, oil is the most valuable energy resource in today’s societies. As a strategic commodity, it is estimated to remain so until at least 2030 (Goldthau and Witte, 2010), while being essential in the survival of industrialised societies. The impact of oil is so significant, because among all currently known energy resources, it possesses the best physical characteristics. Measuring oil and other resources is not a direct process, but it is done rather by comparing their efficiency and effect in various processes, such as heating. This
is called ‘energy effect’ and the measurement used is called ‘joules,’ which is more often used in the form of ‘megajoules’ or ‘gigajoules’\footnote{1 MJ = 1 000 000 J; 1 GJ = 1 000 000 000 J} if required. The energy effect of oil can be measured by taking into account its weight, volume and natural state (Rutledge, 2014).

Based on Rutledge’s notes, a simple example through the comparison of coal, renewable resources and oil might help us understand the importance of petroleum as the following: the weight grade of a kg coal is 24 megajoules (MJ) and 18 MJ for a kg of wood, whereas for oil it is 43 MJ. For the volume grade, a cubic metre of coal contains 27,500 MJ, whereas the same amount of oil contains 35,000 MJ. Oil in its natural state is liquid, which compared to the other three (gas, solid and ‘field’) is quite easy to use and refine into other products such as petroleum or gasoline. On the other hand, renewable energy resources – for example wind- and solar power – and nuclear power belong to the field state meaning “they are all some type of pressure, energy or radioactive field” (Rutledge, 2008). Rutledge (2008) argues thus, that this difference is crucial regarding that field state resources are much more difficult to store as a form of energy and to convert them into electricity than liquid ones (Bertalan, 2018).

Following this simple comparison, one can clearly see the superiority of oil in the three grades. Oil not only serves as the fundamental source of general industrial and commercial activity, but most importantly as the basis of transportation – meaning everyday automobiles and machines and also commercial ships, trucks or airplanes as well (Raphael and Stokes, 2016). This has been the case ever since the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when a general transition from coal to oil provided significant advantages in these fields and oil-powered machines soon revolutionised warfare, transport and eventually, everyday life (Klare, 2002). Before the appearance of oil, coal was the biggest supporter of economic activity, and it is visible, as those states developed quicker who had access to it; now oil has taken its place. Consequently, the use of oil is indispensable for both industrialised societies and those still in progress, because due to its relatively cheap, rapid and safe production no other resource can support work and life as efficiently as oil (Rutledge, 2008). As a consequence, this point reveals one of the main reasons it is believed that today’s economies and states are dependent on this resource. Oil reserves are located in strategically important territories as we will see in the next chapters, and it
should come as no surprise, that combining oil dependency and geopolitical interests will most certainly result in disputes. (Bertalan, 2018).

Undoubtedly, the effect of fossil fuels including oil, on the environment and climate is their biggest disadvantage compared to renewable resources and is one of the most controversial debates of the 21st century. Although amongst fossil fuels, coal is the most environmentally damaging resource, petroleum still comes second in carbon-dioxide (CO$_2$) emission (Lovaas, 2009). In contrast to general beliefs, problems of CO$_2$ emission start earlier than the ordinary use of petroleum or other refined products originating from crude oil, since the process of exploration, extraction, transportation and refining all contribute to this heavy carbon pollution (Garthwaite, 2018). For instance, extraction from tar sands (also referred to as oil sands) is notably more difficult and expensive than it is for conventional liquid oil, considering, that the extraction and refining of these oil sands is a much more energy intensive process. The biggest oil sand deposits can be found in Alberta, Canada and Venezuela (American Geosciences Institute, 2019), therefore these countries are two of the most carbon-intensive oil producers. In addition, during the refining process, the most harming practice is gas flaring, when the existing natural gas next to oil is of no use, therefore it is burned within controlled circumstances (Garthwaite, 2018). Finally, the production of toxic waste, the risk of oil spills, underneath water noise pollution and air pollution and wildlife habitat degradation are all further consequences of oil drilling and production.

Unmistakably, even if climate issues are very much threatening to the existence of current societies, the economic benefits of oil still seem to promote short term well-being and wealth compared to the long-term consequences it might cause. Thereupon, it is understandable that setting aside the aforementioned disadvantages, oil is a fundamental economic asset of nations to reach their ultimate goals of prosperity.
2. Evolution of Energy Politics and Security

Energy policy can be described as the strategy of sufficient energy supply. It includes the creation of an efficiently working framework of energy management, securing current and future needs of energy considering economic and societal needs, meanwhile taking into consideration all existing sources of energy. As energy policy draws upon resources found in nature, it is also one of its responsibilities to provide such conditions which support the protection of our natural environment and sustainable development (Kajati, 2011).

On the other hand, according to Shaffer (2011, pp. 1) who argues that energy is a matter of politics, “a country’s ability to access energy supplies and the ways in which it uses energy crucially determine the state of its economy, its national security, and the quality and sustainability of its environment.” Consequently, energy and politics are intertwined and more than often one can have a significant impact on the other. For petroleum exporting countries their supply policy can be just as much of a tool in politics and foreign policy as military, economic or diplomatic tactics. Considering that oil prices are easily affected by international and domestic political developments, energy and politics are indeed inseparable (Shaffer, 2011).

2.1. Issues of Energy (In)Security

Understanding oil politics, policies and the world’s infinite craving for petroleum starts by understanding the concept of energy security itself. Although Klare (2008) argues, that there is no standard definition of this term, it could be mostly defined as “the reliable and affordable supply of energy” on a continuing basis, including times of crisis (Deutch and Schlesinger, 2006). This definition refers to all aspects of production, starting from exploration up until the final product arrives to the ultimate consumer. Should one of these processes fail, it can lead to regional or global conflicts, highlighting the extreme importance of energy security in contemporary global politics (Bertalan, 2018). As worldwide consumption has been rapidly growing in the past century, supply must satisfy these growing needs and must adapt to the requirements of states (Klare, 2008).

According to Klare (2008), the energy field has focused on three worrisome changes in global oil dynamics in recent years: 1) possibility of slowdown in the extraction and global flow of petroleum, 2) shift in production to the global South from the North, and
finally 3) direct threats and attacks of oil facilities and global infrastructure. Conflicts described later in this thesis will support these points and thus will highlight their consequence on the future of global security dynamics (Bertalan, 2018).

Just as the world economy is developing so does energy consumption rise, leading to a higher demand for energy sources. This case is especially relevant in case of oil, regarding the fact, that the supplying capabilities of currently known oil fields may not be able to keep up the pace with this increasing demand (Luft and Korin, 2009). As Klare (2008) points it out, avoiding the risk of having to face a shortage of energy supplies, or over-reliance on one particular resource is a matter of national security, whereas the state is responsible to diversify sources of energy and to prevent these possibilities (Bertalan, 2018).

Undeniably, access to oil is a matter of national security both for exporters and importers, which is evidently shown by the fact that most petroleum industries are state-owned enterprises. Since the 1970s most petroleum producing industries have been nationalised in the Middle East and also in several other important locations as well, such as Venezuela. Today, this results in having 75% of the world’s proven oil reserves in the ownership of these national companies (Shaffer, 2011). At present, oil shortage seems to be only a threat of the future, as currently the exporters are more or less capable of meeting the demands of importers. However, lacking and failing in change of consumption patterns and current policies, it could result in having continuous increase of oil demand and no solution to the problem (Raphael and Stokes, 2016).

According to the 2017 edition of the World Energy Outlook, world oil production in 2016 reached 92.4 million barrels per day (mb/d) which is 22% more than it was at the beginning of the century (75.2 mb/d). World oil demand in 2016, however, was even higher than output, as it reached 93.9 mb/d, from which the share of the Asia Pacific region was 32%. In case no changes occur in policies and consumption habits in the world, this rate will reach 104.1 mb/d and eventually 118.8 mb/d in 2040, increasing the gap between demand and production for 3 mb/d³ (Bertalan, 2018).

³ As Shaffer (2011) also points to this, all future estimates should be considered educated speculations. Production and consumption are dependent on technology and prices and since both of these factors are constantly changing, 100% precise estimates are not possible.
Genuinely, one might ask which countries are responsible for oil production and who is really in control. Although the present-day oil market is very different from that of the 1970s, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which was founded back in 1960 is still an important player (Shaffer, 2011). The fourteen members of OPEC whose 2/3 are located in the Middle East, are accountable for more than 40% of global oil production and around 80% percent of the proven oil reserves of the planet (Bertalan, 2018), Venezuela being the leader with more than 300 billion barrels, and Saudi Arabia coming at second with approximately 266 billion (Opec.org, 2018). Due to their huge reserves of oil, the OPEC – having the power to act even as a cartel – has a huge influence not only on the supply of oil, but also on its price. As a consequence, OPEC has the power to control or even distort the world’s oil supply as they please. (Luft and Korin, 2009). Besides the OPEC, important oil producers on the market include Russia and the United States, in addition to the former using its extensive energy reserves as a tool for foreign policy and economic prosperity (Cohen, 2009), whereas the latter is currently the biggest oil demander (WEO, 2017).

Furthermore, the fact, that there is a decline in discovering new oilfields is another threat towards energy security. The discovery of new reserves is also problematic, consider that presumable it will be located in geographically more remote areas which will be difficult to reach (Klare, 2008). Current reserves are valued to be around 6,146 billion barrels with more than 1/3 located on the North American continent, meanwhile, the actually proven reserves account only for less than 30% of it, 1,695 billion barrels (WEO, 2017). As a result, although these numbers may seem encouraging at first for the future, it is very much an estimation, and is also questionable whether these reservoirs will be found and whether the circumstances will ever allow extraction (Klare, 2002).

One of the most visible challenges, which might highlight the security aspect of oil even more, is the fact that many supply routes, especially those in the global South are considered areas of conflict and instability, which can hinder the safe transport of petroleum (Deutch and Schlesinger, 2006). As most states heavily rely on importing, even

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4 Although these numbers on current oil reserves seem to be consistent, all data should be considered in light of the fact that organisations publishing these data are usually market players, having their own incentive such as the promotion of their own role in this matter.
the biggest economies in the world such as the United States, China or India (Workman, 2018), it is crucial that areas, transport routes and pipeline infrastructure crossing all around the globe are secured (Luft and Korin, 2009). As a result, involvement of military in the protection of these territories have been prevalent in the past decades either openly or not (Rutledge, 2005). These issues will be further elaborated on in the next chapter as they heavily contribute to conflicts and disputes (Bertalan, 2018).

2.2. The Phenomenon of Oil Dependency

Despite the wide range of concerns one can find in the oil market, the phenomenon of oil dependency itself is a threat to national security. The term oil dependency is just as often used in academics for the process of importing this substance from foreign producers besides an economy’s dependent nature on this resource as discussed in the first chapter (Bertalan, 2018). Dependence on foreign oil reserves also equals dependence on those states and areas which operate and control these huge oil fields, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Persian Gulf, or Russia, Nigeria or Venezuela (Workman, 2018). Consumers and thus importers who cannot break free of their dependence, such as the United States, have to face on one hand strategic vulnerability, and on the other, serious competition with China or India for instance, who are also huge importers of foreign oil resources (Deutch and Schlesinger, 2006). This huge reliance highlights the importance of the changing dynamics of the energy sector as it might pose severe threats to the biggest economies of the world. Due to this unusual but very much existing threat, according to Schlesinger (2005) “we shall have to live with degrees of insecurity – rather than the elusive security we have long sought” (Bertalan, 2018)

Consequently, there is an ongoing vivid discussion on whether states should reach energy independence, reduce reliance on foreign oil imports and thus break free of this constant threat of insecurity. Nevertheless, only very few positive results have been presented to us, and it supports scepticism whether oil independence is a real possibility (Hakes, 2008).

Oil dependency is a visible phenomenon when one takes a look at global crude oil import and export statistics. It is a generally discussed topic, that China, India and the Asian continent are evolving in an unbelievable pace, however, their economic progress can be traced also by their import of crude oil, which is the greatest amongst all continents. The first five nations with the highest value of crude oil import are China, the
United States of America, India, Japan and South Korea. In addition to the top 5, the top 15 countries made up more than 80% of the total world crude oil import in 2017, with China leading as 20% of total import (Workman, 2018).

“America is addicted to oil” said George W. Bush in one of his most famous declarations in his State of the Union address back in 2006. Although more than a decade has passed since this statement, and the United States has reduced its import of foreign oil (Ceicdata.com, 2018), the nation is still the second biggest importer and evidently, as the most powerful economy it cannot break from its dependency. Even though it’s a common misconception that the US is completely dependent upon Middle Eastern oil, surprisingly their biggest crude oil supplier is Canada with almost 40% and Saudi Arabia only comes at second with 13.4% (Workman, 2019). As for China, their dependency is constantly growing ever since the 1980s, with importing more than 8 thousand barrels per day in 2017, whereas the United States hasn’t even reached the same amount since 2012 (Ceicdata, 2019).

Data on global exports show that producers are also dependent on oil, as their revenue is very much affected by their economic activity. Not unexpectedly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the leading states of OPEC, ranks as the biggest crude oil exporter of the world. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia is also trying to reduce its dependence on oil income by strengthening the private sector, oil still accounts for 87% of budget revenues, 90% of its export earnings and 42% of GDP (Forbes.com, 2019).

As it has been shown, oil is definitely connected to international politics, economics and security and therefore, it comes as no surprise that many argue that due to these weak points in the industry, conflicts will most certainly arise. Heffron (2018) argues, that there could be many solutions to the growing oil dependency starting with the improvement of energy stockpiles, through taxation of multinational companies, up until the reduction of use of oil in transportation as the most important option. However, these solutions have been relatively unsuccessful and as a result, energy insecurity is even more present in global security dynamics than ever before.
3. Understanding the Nature of Petrostates

The global oil industry and thus the world’s oil dependency evidently shape the political and economic path of countries, especially that of the producers. Those states where “revenues from net oil exports constitute at least 10% of gross domestic product (GDP)” are called petrostates (Colgan, 2013, p. 2). Consequently, there are tendencies of domestic and international politics among these states which show similarities due to the common nature of income. As a result, the interaction amongst domestic politics, institutions and even historical legacy has an effect on the influence of oil income (Colgan, 2013).  

Colgan (2013) argues, that these similarities are even more striking when one takes into account the geographical, economic and cultural background of these state. The biggest producers in the Persian Gulf region can be considered petrostates, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq or Libya and Algeria from the Maghreb region of the Middle East. In addition, Russia, Venezuela, Sudan, Nigeria and even Norway can be considered to fit the petrostate scheme. Evidently, the following characteristics might affect those countries as well, which may do not meet the definition of a petrostate, yet they are deeply involved in the oil market, such as the United State, Mexico, Egypt or even Canada.

3.1. Resource Curse

The so-called resource curse is a debated phenomenon of resource-rich nations, which can be best described as a set of negative characteristics of the economic and political system within these petrostates. The resource curse usually includes, low rates of female labour-force participation and increased state-ownership of businesses” as the economic signs (Colgan, 2014, p 199). In addition, the Dutch disease is also another phenomenon which is typically considered to be present in petrostates, as an increase of

5 „The amount of income flowing into these producer countries, is based a lot on the price they can set for their products. The current price of oil is around 50-60 $/barrel depending on which oil benchmark is regarded (eg.: Brent, WTI, ORB, etc…). This is not the highest, but not even the lowest it has ever been, and it is very much subject to change based on supply, demand, arising energy policies and general power politics. Compared to the 2008 historical record of 150 $/barrel price (Luft and Korin, 2009), today’s price can be considered relatively low” (Bertalan, 2018).
the oil sector would lead to the decrease of other sectors (Ebrahim-zadeh, 2003), meanwhile leading to currency volatility and appreciation. On political terms the resource curse refers to enduring authoritarian leadership, lack of political accountability and transparency, possibility of civil violence and war, increased gender inequality, and generally weak governing institutions (Colgan, 2014).

As Colgan (2014) highlights, many believe, that oil production has an effect on a nation’s democratisation process and regime type in general. It is argued, that the resource curse is an effect of rentier politics applied by resource-rich governments who use for example low tax rates, patronage and clientelism and high public spending in order to acquire and keep their control as long as possible (Klare, 2009).

There are many ways to define the concept of a rentier state, and one can even differentiate between a rentier state and a rentier economy, however, I will focus on defining the latter, as this is the best way to interlink the economy and the state. According to Beblawi and Luciani (2016), Chatelus’ concept of ‘circulation economy’ can be very well applied for rentier economies, regarding that rent is considered “any income not originating from the productive activity of the concerned unit, the flows and dimensions of which are not directly linked to the beneficiary’s activity.” Consequently, the biggest part of the income of these societies is not based on productivity, but rather on reliance and competition for the control of rent, in our case, oil itself.

These rentier societies therefore use all the aforementioned tools and in certain cases, the complete lack of them, to preserve their authority. For instance, the absence or limited role of taxation in a society can interfere with democracy, state formation and even institutions, regarding that this step serves as a social contract between the state and the citizens themselves. In addition, to these rather common characteristics among petrostates, it is also prevalent by governments to use energy subsidies in various forms, including industrial use, residential heating and most regularly subsidies for transportation fuels meaning gasoline and diesel (Colgan, 2014). Colgan (2014) argues, that although subsidisation is not rare in so-called non-petrostates, there is still an essential difference in magnitude and frequency. This fundamental distinction is based on general feelings of national ownership over these resources, in which case the subsidies can be considered as a redistribution of the huge wealth generated by the natural resource. Feelings of national ownership play a significant role in regarding causes of conflicts as well, which will be later elaborated both in case of Iraq and Nigeria.
Further signs of a rentier society include the recurring presence of authoritarian regimes and clientelism. To begin with, free and fair elections characterising liberal democracies are of no incentive amongst authoritarian leaders of petrostates. In case of clientelism, there is no need for that, since material rewards are given in exchange for political loyalty and subordination towards a given regime, political actor or organisation. The accumulated oil wealth therefore is distributed amongst close friends and family, members of the elite and is often used to control power over the army and further security services which are tools to suppress any emerging opposition (Klare, 2009).

Spending large sums on military leads straight to one of the most prevalent characteristics of the resource curse, which is the frequency of domestic armed conflicts. As the opposition has no peaceful way of addressing their concerns or protesting, they are given no choice but to engage in armed revolt or civil wars (Klare, 2009). According to Colgan (2013, pp. 28), there are three ways in which oil can promote civil war: “by providing finances to warring parties, like rebels; by increasing the financial value of victory in a civil war and thus the motivation to fight; and by encouraging corruption and weakening the institutions of the state.” Consequently, it is more likely that petrostates will have to face civil war at one point, than non-resource exporting ones, even if these rebellions rarely turn out to be successful.

Interestingly, the resource curse itself has a paradoxical nature. Although domestic political conflicts may generate further unrest, petrostates can also establish a form of security due to the persisting nature of autocratic regimes. Considering that very few revolutions manage to make actual changes in the regime, autocratic leaders within these petrostates do have a considerable extensive political autonomy and longer tenure in office than in many non-petrostate leaders (Colgan, 2013).

3.2. Foreign Policy Attitude of Petrostates

If one can conclude some form of correlation between oil production and domestic politics, the question evidently arises whether is there any influence of oil on a state’s foreign policy. Colgan (2014) argues, that common features of foreign policy in petrostates include extreme spending on military, financial support of developing countries in the form of foreign aid, use of checkbook diplomacy and also in certain cases, funding of insurgency or terrorist groups in foreign lands. The use of checkbook diplomacy might even sound logical, considering that oil is the biggest advantage these
petrostates have, and naturally, they want to use all assets in their power to influence what they can in foreign policy decision. However, funding insurgency movements in foreign countries is evidently a very controversial, especially for conflicting neighbouring states, such as in the case of Iran and Iraq.

However, there is little agreement on whether, how and why oil can lead to international conflict. Klare (2002, pp. 57) argues that resource wars, which are “conflicts that revolve over the pursuit or possession of critical materials” have been prevalent throughout human history. And evidently, oil will continue to affect international security, even if resource competition will not prove to be the only source of dispute. According to Colgan (2013), there are seven further pathways - besides resource wars - in which oil can contribute to international conflict: risk of market domination, oil industry grievance, petro-aggression, petro-insurgency, externalisation of civil wars in petrostates, transit routes and finally obstacle to multilateralism.

It is often argued by critics, that the threat of resource wars is overexaggerated, nevertheless, oil can evidently influence foreign policy decisions. Colgan argues in favour of this with his Petro-Aggression theory in several of his writings, however he specifically elaborates on it in his book of 2013 titled Petro-Aggression, When Oil Causes War. He argues, that although petrostates may have many similarities in both their domestic and foreign policies, it can make a huge difference whether the political leadership gained control of power through revolution or not. According to his thoughts, a petrostate is more likely to become an aggressor, firstly in case the risk-tolerance of a state increases or the costs of fighting decreases, secondly if a domestic revolution took place in the given country, and finally when oil income contributes to the domestic revolution.

In spite of the arguably rather aggressive nature of petrostates, they can also become victims of aggression. As this will be pointed out in the next chapter with the study of the Kuwait-Iraq War in the 1990s, these states are targets of everyone else who needs this resource and is strong enough to take it. Although, as I argue, similar events in the new century did not evolve to actual forceful aggression, there are ongoing disputes which manifest similar tendencies. For example, the current rivalry between the United States and Russia in Venezuela is clearly influenced by the huge oil reserves of the nation besides other factors, nevertheless, it seems like all three parties would rather prefer a discussion than anything more beyond that (Tamkin, 2019).
As a general lesson from history, it is known that violence can be undoubtedly provoked by economic injustice, ethnic or religious differences or even by political rivalry, however, when oil is present in a nation’s territory, the risk of conflict becomes even greater (Klare, 2009). However, can we predict the 21st century to be a century of decades plagued by conflicts over oil and eventually a century of resource wars?
4. 21st century Resource Wars

The visible role of oil in warfare has been mostly recognised since the beginning of the 20th century. Klare (2002) argues, that many battles in World War II were fought in order to gain access to oil rich territories, however the number of conflicts can be considered even greater in the Cold War. In these wars, oil played a strategic role and thus, the control of those territories or having an influence on the rulers of the territory meant the securing of oil supplies.

In this chapter, I will draw upon the evolving concept of war and analyse four infamous cases of conflicts in the new century which are often characterised as current resource wars. I will begin with the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to establish a core concept for what I consider an oil war and why is that. Moving on from that I will elaborate on the issues concerning first of all the Iraq war of 2003, secondly the Niger Delta conflict and lastly the South China Sea disputes. In addition, I will highlight how the characteristics and phenomena of those discussed in previous chapters connect to the conflicts themselves.

4.1. Thoughts on War

Ever since societies existed, some form of war has always been present amongst them. Whether it is human nature or the effect of given social and cultural characteristics is a topic of debate. However, when one talks about resource wars, it cannot ignore the need to define the concept of war. Although it may seem as a general step in discussing this topic, however, its significance is outmost evident once we realise, that how we define war sets the foundations of this debate and can show whether the threat of resource wars is as severe as it is argued.

One of the most important pieces on war has been written by Carl von Clausewitz almost two hundred years ago, yet his work is still significant, as his work on understanding the nature of war and not tactics or techniques on how to wage war can serve even those who do not agree with war (Heuser, 2007).

According to Clausewitz (2007), “war is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will” (2007, pp. 13) He defines war as “nothing but a duel on a larger scale” (2007, pp. 13). Consequently, his definition of a successful war depends on whether one can impose their own will on the other. This is a very intelligent definition, which does not
explicitly require the killing of the enemy (Heustler, 2007), however, he is very much highlighting, that distress and brutality are parts of it.

Clausewitz also argues, that politics play an important role in war by stating that it is “the continuation of policy with other means” (2007, pp. 7) He argues, that in case of war, the political objective is the original motive of a war, which will determine the military objective, however, as it can easily change, only its influence on the forces it moves should be taken as standard.

His thoughts have been criticised recently for having no bearing on today’s warfare, regarding his paradoxical trinity concept. Which he calls primordial violence, hatred, and enmity have been translated by thinkers of this issue, as a trinity of government, military and society. The concept of government shows the main point of those who think Clausewitz is outdated, considering that in today’s warfare, several non-state actors can participate who do not fit this category (Heuser, 2007).

It is also important to emphasise when one talks about warfare, the distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The distinction is based on when and how can one wage a war. As Walzer (2006) points it out, it is very much possible that committing an aggression is a crime, but an aggressive war can be fought in accordance with the specific rules. He also refers to Clausewitz when he argues, that war is limitless, and it is the aggressor who must bear the responsibility of starting the fights.

On the other hand, Mary Kaldor one of the most proponent advocates of the ‘new war’ theory describes that a new type of wave has been present since the end of the Cold War. These new wars, also referred to as ‘low-intensity conflicts’ or ‘post-modern’ wars are a new type of organised violence which differs from classical wars and blurs the line “between internal and external conflicts, between aggression and repression and between local and global” (Kaldor, 2012, pp. 17) fights. This new war theory has been applied to oil wars as well, in which the wars are no longer connected to controlling territories or governments, but rather conflicts of petrostates with weak political legitimacy, rentier economy and consequently, heightened risk of violence (Kaldor, Karl and Said, 2007).
4.2. Making Sense of Oil Wars in light of the First Gulf War

The differences of Iraq and Kuwait had been long present even before the former invaded the latter. Their history goes back to the times when both nations were part of the Ottoman Empire and Kuwait was part of one of Iraq’s provinces and did only split from Iraq when later the country was ruled by the British. In the mid-thirties there was a sense of belonging to Iraq, especially due to its relative success thanks to the growing oil wealth. However, once Kuwait became more prosperous because of their own oil resources things have changed (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 2001).

The eight-year long Iran-Iraq war was exhausting for both nations even though Iraq managed to emerge as a victor. Still, the country was left with heavy debt towards foreign nations in addition to leaving several development projects unfinished due to the long war. Unfortunately, Iraq was unable to reconstruct its country just from its income of oil, considering that petrostates of the Gulf created a situation of overproduction and thus, prices dropped. The phenomenon of overproduction appeared during the Iran-Iraq war, when both countries stopped production and therefore, other Gulf nations increased their production quota, which remained intact even after the end of the war (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 2001).

Although Iraq had issues with Israel as well at the time, solving the oil price problem was more pressing for the country as Iraq’s financial position became even worse by 1990, for which Saddam Hussein clearly blamed Kuwait, as the only state who wasn’t willing to change oil prices. Furthermore, the two countries had ongoing border disputes, which became an urgent issue, when Kuwait started drilling oil from a territory considered their own by Iraq, the South Rumaila oilfield (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 2001). As Kuwait wasn’t willing to accept the compensation of 10 billion US dollars asked by Iraq, although initially was against the use of force, eventually Saddam Hussein decided on the invasion (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2003).

Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait was indeed a violation of international law; however, it clearly wasn’t a sudden reckless idea. Nevertheless, the international community and the United States was quick to condemn the event and started the organisation of a coalition. As Mearsheimer and Walt (2003) point out, at first it wasn’t so obvious at the time that the US would indeed use force against Iraq, so Saddam did not retreat when it would have been best, knowing in hindsight.
Meanwhile Arab countries still looked for a peaceful settlement of the crisis, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 660 demanded Iraq to immediately and unconditionally withdraw from Kuwait. When it did not happen because Saddam Hussein was not willing to retreat by leaving behind their equipment (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2003), not even despite economic sanctions, the UNSC authorised the use of force against Iraq.

Saddam Hussein remained in power for more than a decade, long after the First Gulf War ended. Unfortunately, the economic sanction survived as well, leading to further debacles for Iraq in the following years. However, it is undeniable, that his actions in the Gulf set the atmosphere for the forthcoming years.

In addition, I believe that this war came closest to what one could define as an oil war. If we take into account Klare’s definition on resource wars from the previous chapter, the same can be applied specifically for oil. The First Gulf War was evidently revolving around oil and it has been made evident by Saddam Hussein throughout the years before the incident happened. Should Kuwait comply with Iraq’s request of elevating oil prices or paying the compensation, the war may never would have happened.

However, as it did, it was also characterised by the traditional means of warfare mentioned by both Clausewitz and Walzer. It was the exact continuation of Iraq’s political wish of changing current oil dynamics as of being able to consolidate the nation’s economy. The war has been first hand condemned by the United Nations as quickly as it has never done before (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 2001), but they responded in accordance with just war and proportionality (Walzer, 2006).

Based on this war, I argue, that this is a true example one could call an oil war. However, even if Mary Kaldor’s theory is working or not, evidently there seems to be a change in the nature of warfare, affecting resource-rich nations as well. Should they face any conflicts of oil, nothing like the Iraq-Kuwait war has happened since and will most likely not happen in the close future either should trends continue like this.
4.3. Iraq and the Start of a New Era

“In the images of falling statues, we have witnessed the arrival of a new era” announced George W. Bush former President of the United States in 2003 to highlight the end of combat operations in Iraq. The Iraq War, also named Second Gulf War can be called one of the most infamous military interventions of the United States in the 21st century. The narrative that Iraq was a wealthy country due to its oil reserves evidently helped the decision whether to wage a war or not (Kaldor, Karl and Said, 2007), and since then it has become a general belief of the public that the war was fought for oil. If it was so, the war turned out to be a disastrous failure (Fettweis, 2009).

Obviously, government communication never openly supported or admitted to the claims that the true reasons of fighting in the Gulf region was over oil resources. The September 11th terrorist attack of 2001 evidently uncovered a threat for the US originating from the Middle East, even if Iraq was not the perpetrator of the attack. The ‘war on terrorism’ therefore, provided a simple and clear incentive for moving into the region (Hinnebusch, 2007).

The legitimate reason used by the Bush administration for the invasion of Iraq was based on the claim that Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq at the time was developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which could have been used against the US, especially if they are acquired by terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, which was indeed responsible for the 9/11 attack. Later these allegations and claims were proved false (Hinnebusch, 2007). Disregarding the freshly issued United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 on requesting Iraq to comply with admitting inspectors to investigate the existence of such weapons, and after Saddam Hussein not agreeing to cooperate with the American ultimatum, bombing of Iraq began in March (CNN, 2019).

Kaldor (2007) highlights, that it comes as no surprise, that even though these publicly announced official reasons stated differently, the first military target of Operation Iraqi Freedom was none other than gaining access to oilfields and refineries. Evidently, those who steadfastly argue that the Iraq War was indeed an oil war, point out, that although wars tend to be expensive, according to plans – and maybe hopes - the incoming oil revenue would have made the war basically cost free. This clearly did not happen, regarding the fact that in the year of the invasion, Iraq exported 60% less oil compared to
the previous year, and crude oil production fell even more shockingly by 85% to less than 200 thousand barrel/day (Ceicdata.com, 2019).

US intervention in the region not only resulted in the lack of uninterrupted flow of petroleum, but also contributed to a rapid state failure. The signs for this approaching state failure were everywhere, as Iraq’s economy had been declining at the time for more than a decade since the 1980-1988 war with Iran and the 1991 Gulf War with Kuwait (Kaldor, Karl and Said, 2007), in addition to having UN economic sanctions on the state. Consequently, GDP fell in a dramatic manner, criminality rose, and there was a severe loss of legal income and legitimacy. In retrospect, it is quite clear, that no matter what the initial goals of the US in Iraq were, the emerging domestic instability never could have made the war as easy as American-led forces first experienced. Resistance towards foreign occupation just heightened insurgency movements and lead to extreme civilian casualties (Kaldor, Karl and Said, 2007).

All in all, the Iraq War turned out to be a huge misstep for the United States, where no Iraqi freedom, no American oil wealth and no regional stability have been reached. One of the most important question critics have raised is what the point of attacking Iraq was, when the States could have just as easily release the sanctions and purchase oil from Iraq. Undeniably, the risk of Iraq using their oil for political advantage was present, however, Russia, China and even some Western European countries were already engaging with the state, rather than isolating it (Hinnebusch, 2007). As I highlighted it beforehand, Middle Eastern oil hardly accounts for the biggest part of American crude oil import. However, what was apparent for the United States and is posed a greater threat than fake accusations of WMD, is that their Pax-Americana system, which was meticulously constructed in the Gulf region started to crumble. With Iraq and Iran escaping US dual containment, with continuous Israeli and Palestinian conflicts in the region and thirdly with growing Saudi – US tension, American influence and hegemony in the Middle East became weaker than ever before. As a consequence, conquering Iraqi territories would have allowed the United States to build up a permanent military base in the Persian Gulf and proclaim their dominance (Hinnebusch, 2007).

In conclusion, one can argue, that Iraq’s oil reserves might heavily incited US invasion, however, none of the aforementioned reasons posed as severe and imminent threat towards the US which could have justified such immediate military intervention (Hinnebusch, 2007). Calling the Second Gulf War an oil war, would be a void and
insufficient description of the situation, yet it still proves, that such attempts are self-defeating, and the benefits cannot overweigh the losses (Fettweis, 2009). Nevertheless, it is still a very recent and strong experience of the century, to become a deterrent example for all states with similar aspirations.

4.4. Conflicts on the African Continent: The case of Nigeria

The Delta region of the Niger River in Nigeria has been recently described as “one of the world’s most severely petroleum impacted ecosystems and one of the five most petroleum-polluted environments in the world” (Obi, 2010, pp. 221) and has been one of the most severe domestic conflicts surrounding oil in recent years. Although the past two years have been relatively silent compared to the first decade of the new century, the conflict still hasn’t been completely resolved. The Niger Delta conflict is a different, yet very relevant example in proving my original argument, regarding that fights are conducted because of oil resources, yet, the aggressor in this case is not a foreign nation invading Nigeria’s resources.

As Obi (2010) highlights, the major issue in this conflict results from the action of dispossession, during which the mass of the population is deprived of having rights over the natural resources of the country, meanwhile the incoming oil wealth ends up in the hands of the upper class and leaves the everyday people and the region itself in extreme poverty. Furthermore, another aspect which only makes the situation harder, is the fact that the nationalised Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNCP) has a monopoly over the exploitation of resources. The NNCP therefore contributes to the accumulation of resource wealth by granting access to various oil majors and thus, oversees and ensures the steady flow of oil (Obi, 2010). However, as in most African petrostates, in Nigeria as well, the relationship between the companies and the state is an exploitative one, since the technology and the know-how used during the whole extraction and production process is not controlled by the state, but by international oil companies (Obi, 2014).

In case of Nigeria, the military behaviour of petrostates is specifically visible, regarding that the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) is often used in order to protect and safeguard installations and to put down protests and resistance movements if needed (Obi, 2010). This is also part of the already mentioned unequal partnership. There are also further signs of a rentier economy state, such as lack of transparency and wide range of corruption, regarding that incidents have been noted where oil companies provided direct
payments to armed groups in addition to bribing government and local officials (Obi, 2014).

The main source of problem in the Niger Delta conflict thereafter, results from the sense of ownership and control of oil by local population, or in this case, the lack of it, ever since the second half of the 20th century. Furthermore, oil production led to severe land expropriation and pollution in the region, however, the ethnic minority community had no chance of successfully claiming and receiving compensation from multinationals, as they had no actual ownership over the oil. This disagreement has been attested throughout the 20th century in the form of firstly peaceful petitions, later civil wars in the 1960s and 1990s and even in pressure groups pushing for the creation of autonomous states in the Delta. However, none of these led to actual serious changes for the new century, in fact, the situation only got worse, as oil dependency forced the oil industry to keep expanding, the oil crises of the 1970s and the following economic crisis rendered Nigeria’s socio-economic situation unbearable on the long run (Obi, 2010), and as the state failed to respond adequately to peaceful protests, violence soon became the only viable choice of the people to raise their voice (Obi, 2014).

Current resistance is based on the framework of “resource control” meaning not only the control of the natural resources available in the region, but also referring to reaching local autonomy. What further adds to the complexity, is that the resistance movement itself is not a homogenous coalition. Even though the ethnic minority militia is evidently against the actions of the state in the region, some of them still enter into partnership with Delta ruling elite, exactly those who benefit the most from the exploitation of the territory (Obi, 2014).

Similarly, the complexity of the Niger Delta conflict is also shown in what became a blurred boundary between resistance, military action and criminal action. The region is not only in an economic dismay despite having wealth in the world’s most important resource, but social conditions continue to elevate the seriousness of the issue, as youth unemployment, the appearance of grievances and extreme poverty plague the everyday life of the Delta population (Obi, 2014).

According to the oil curse paradigm, petrostates are more likely to face domestic civil unrest, and evidently, Nigeria has been struggling with containing this issue in recent years. However, it would be irresponsible to conclude, that the only reason of violence in
the Delta region lays in oil wealth. As Obi (2014) highlights, oil is rather an “add on” in this case, than the original root of the problem. As Klare (2009) also argued, social and economic injustice, history of exploitation and marginalisation all contribute to the current unrest. Following this, what is even more imminent in this situation is that the role which oil plays in international political economy only contributes to serving the interests of the elite. In this case, oil represents global power for the state, exploited by predatory transnational companies and investments. Releasing oil from its role as a power projector would be the best solution for Nigeria (Obi, 2014), until then, it will continue to fuel civil unrest by highlighting differences between the state and the individuals and their needs, objectives and priorities.

4.5. On Chinese Waters: The South China Sea Conflict

China’s claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea territories and islands has been an ongoing issue ever since the end of World War II, however, conflicts keep arising led by hunger for hydrocarbon and fisheries reserves, and also by US-China rivalry in the Asia Pacific region, heightening the already strong opposing views (Buszynski, 2012).

The main actors of the territorial dispute include particularly China and Vietnam, however, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam are also affected by varying regional claims. The claims are based on two principles, firstly the precedent of “effective occupation” established by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1928, which rules that the territory belongs to the occupier if there is an already established and exercised jurisdiction. This precedent can be evoked for China in case of the Paracel Islands; however, it fails to support the nation against the Philippines and Malaysia when it comes to the Spratly Islands (Buszynski, 2012).

Secondly, and most importantly, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) amongst others, regulates that resource-based claims cannot go beyond a coastal state’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) meaning 200 nautical miles. In case of China, the claims go well beyond that, causing obvious overlaps with the interests of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. In spite of the disagreements, this does not mean that China is accepting towards UNCLOS, and is rather relying on its historical heritage, which on the other hand is evidently not superior to international law (Buszynski, 2012).

Specific conflicts include several events, when China interfered in the EEZ of the Philippines or that of Vietnam by breaking cables, gathering intelligence or harassing oil
exploration (Buszynski, 2012). Furthermore, satellite images can prove, that China has been manoeuvring to physically enlarge and expand the size of their islands, therefore their exclusive economic zone along with that. Moreover, the country has been building up military stations, ports, airstrips, and for instance, even militarised Woody Island with radars, jets and missiles (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

Despite the very convincing global need for oil and natural gas and the proven availability of these resources in the South China Sea region, it is still argued, whether another natural resource, fish, is just as important in the question. Considering that 12% of total global fish catch is provided by the South China Sea fish stock, it is undoubtedly one of the most important players in the economy of regional nations, since it is not only significant as a source of nutrient, but also as a source of employment. The use of maritime militia has become prevalent in fishing practices in the region, as the huge demand for the resource creates competition for it. Evidently, just as claims overlap in case of the exclusive economic zones, the same is true for fishing. Ships and their personnel are sometimes caught illegally fishing and going beyond their maritime borders. However, fishing practices and techniques and over-exploitation of maritime livestock have led to a serious decline in the number of fish and predictions for the future see even more severe complications (Schofield, Sumalia and Cheung, 2019).

Considering the huge appeal the South China Sea region holds, it is understandable, that the bigger territory a state has access to, the more powerful it can get. As a consequence, attaching the sea region to China would be a huge geopolitical step in reaching regional hegemony and superiority, even though it is evidently contrary to the interests of many regional powers, such as India, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The United States has been also involved in this issue, trying to balance China’s aspirations, however, it is not going as great as could be. The US has taken steps to show the way towards freedom of navigation as it performs various operations sometimes even within twelve nautical miles of artificial islands and occupied territories. Even though it signals that the United States does not recognise the current actions of Beijing, it has still failed to show up as a real leader to assert rights of the other claimants as well (Poling and Glaser, 2019).

In conclusion, it is clear to see that the South China Sea dispute is a lot more complex than it seems at first. Although the role of natural resources is evidently playing a huge role in the conflict, it is also a matter of legal and territorial differences to which the
answer must be tackled by the international community sooner or later. The presence of maritime forces in the region keeps this conflict very much alive and threatening, however, it is only on the edge of being a truly violent conflict, especially over oil, at least compared to the previous cases.
Conclusion

Just like in case of any other academic research, the same goes for discussing resource wars from the point of view of oil, that it is inevitable to run into such complexities that one must choose which subtopics are highlighted and which must be left behind. Bearing in mind that crude oil and petroleum have the ability to incite violent and armed conflicts, I set myself to research the nature of petrostates and the disputes surrounding them in the 21st century.

I found it crucial to introduce at the beginning the importance of oil as a natural resource, in order to understand the world’s infinite craving towards this substance. Oil is a strategic commodity and is indispensable for today’s developed and developing economies based on its advantageous physical characteristics. I also regarded as essential information on how can just one sole resource have so strong influence in security and political issues. Oil dependency makes the world a less secure place and it is evident that none of the analysed events would have been the same should the world be able to replace this material.

Chapter three collects all the ways petroleum can affect domestic politics and foreign relations of a petrostate. I found it convincing that oil producing countries are facing a so-called resource curse and therefore, I collected such characteristics as the visible presence of corruption, high rate of unemployment, uneven regional economic development, recurring presence of authoritarian regimes and clientelism and extreme military expenditure. Once we take a closer look, it is evident, that in many of the observed cases these characteristics are present and are contributing factors to the conflict.

Moving on, it became essential that knowing all this information about petrostates was not enough and further research had to be done in order to critically assess the question of oil wars. As a consequence, I found the 1990 Iraq-Kuwait war to be a great example of how a traditional resource war over oil should look like, however, I also realised that in the past years, this event proved to be unique. Therefore, I decided to look at various types of conflicts in connection to oil on a global scale and analyse whether the predictions of forthcoming resource wars are visible in this matter. Based on my research I conclude that although all of them are serious issues of the current century, they are not qualified as oil wars, traditionally speaking.
Although the Iraq war of 2003 was an extremely serious intervention of the United States and is one of the most infamous wars of the decade, it was still not about oil. It was primarily about spreading geopolitical control and ideology, meanwhile seeing the additional benefits of oil reserves in the region. Nigeria’s case is evidently a unique one, regarding that it is a case of civil war, however, the main issue here is the differences between the state and the population. Oil in this situation serves as an “add on,” highlighting all that is disagreed by the people, yet committed by the state. The South China Sea dispute is a very actual topic of discussion; however, it is far from being a war at the moment. This is rather a conflict, where the risk of violence grows every day with China’s aggressive geopolitical aims, and where natural gas is undeniably significant, but still very different from the more traditional concept of oil wars.

This thesis does not concern with whether Mary Kaldor’s theory on New Wars is accurate or not, however, there does seem to be some form of transformation going on in the system of warfare. And not just oil wars are on the decline – if there have been any before – but generally the number of all kinds of wars are becoming smaller than it was in the previous century. Fettweis (2009) argues, that this is one of the reasons why oil wars are very unlikely to happen in the near future, including two further reasons.

In addition to Fettweis’ argument, fighting for oil is a self-defeating process, which was also highlighted in the case of Iraq in 2003. Purchasing oil from producer countries will always be cheaper than seizing their territory and taking control. Secondly, the consumer and the producer share the very same interest, and that is stability. During any serious operation, oil fields, reserves and production facilities are very likely to be damaged, which doesn’t serve neither the occupier, nor anyone else. It would be also costlier to wage a war, reconstruct what is left after the damage have been made, and invest in the protection of the newly acquired territory. In spite of the different interest of buyers and sellers in case of prices, their interest is still to keep the product flowing, which is severely hindered by instability (Fettweis, 2009).

Definitely, there are still many events which happened in the past two decades which are worth mentioning due to the huge amount of oil reserves and the conflict it might have caused. Detailing and comparing all of them would help us gain insight even more into the world of oil politics, however, as this thesis needs a limit on scope and length, this remains a topic for future research.
One of these examples could be the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea back in 2014. Although many believed once again that it has been done in order to seize sea water oil and natural gas reserves, half a decade later it seems more like a geopolitical strategic step towards Ukraine (Treisman, 2016). Another very significant conflict which is worth mentioning here, is the South Sudan conflict, where the nation is once again abundant in this resource. Although a bit different, this case still shares many similarities with Nigeria, as the feeling of ownership is present in the region, yet not supported by the government (Klare, 2017). Finally, another intriguing case for the future might lay in the exploration of the Arctic territories. As the exploration of new oil fields is on the decline, the Arctic might hold a new opportunity, regarding that it is estimated to have huge undiscovered reserves of oil and natural gas. However, it does bring about several questions, such as the effect of exploration on wildlife and climate. As territorial claims in the Arctic region are still unresolved it is very much a potential zone of conflict.

Arguably, conflict is not only limited to oil; water – as demand is exceedingly overtaking current supplies from North Africa till East Asia; minerals and gems – such as mercury and diamond; and finally timber also sparked conflicts, particularly in countries still in the midst of development, and will most certainly continue to do so. Clearly, not only oil is the only resource, which is prone to incite conflict, however, it is the most likely to do so in current the global landscape (Klare, 2002).

To conclude, it is very evident to see, that the relation of oil and conflict is an existing one, yet it still requires a lot of research so that one can fully comprehend the nature of it. As the issue of oil dependency is getting more and more visible, conflicts may arise more frequently, but regarding the transition in the nature and perception of warfare, reactions to them can change as well. Ever since the First Gulf War, not one nation stated explicitly when going against another that their main reason was oil. And as the examples show, it may not happen again in the future. However, this does not mean that oil conflicts are irrelevant, but that the international community should take preventive actions and prepare before resources truly run out of capacity. The threat is real, and so should it be taken seriously.
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