

China-Kazakhstan Energy Relations After the Cold War



Merve Suna Özel Özcan

Asst. Prof., Kırıkkale University,
Department of International Relations
mervesuna@yahoo.com
Orcid ID: 0000-0001-9027-3990

Lütfi Tutus

Graduate student, Kırıkkale University,
Department of International Relations
tutus.lutfi@gmail.com

Abstract

Energy has maintained its importance for humanity since the ancient periods of history to this day. This importance has increased with the increasingly dependence of industrial development on the use of energy. As a matter of fact, the value loaded into energy over time has also been discussed with different dimensions. At the point reached today, energy forms part of national security. It is also indisputable that it will maintain this position in the future, as it did yesterday and today. The issue of energy security is now being considered in the national security dimension for all parties that need or hold this resource. In this aspect, it is not only a security issue that concerns nations, but also the focus of attention of the international system. In this aspect, the aspect of energy security that connects states in international relations stands out. As COVID-19 rapidly spread internationally, research on the global level focuses on the pandemic's impacts on the economical levels as well as on the environment, and energy. For this reason, the paper focus on the energy dimension and security in the relations between China and Kazakhstan. The energy views

and challenges of the two countries are presented within the framework of the concept of energy security and emphasis is placed on developing relations.

Key Words

Energy, Kazakhstan, China, oil, natural gas

Resumen

La energía ha mantenido su importancia para la humanidad desde los períodos antiguos de la historia hasta el día de hoy. Esta importancia ha aumentado con la creciente dependencia del desarrollo industrial del uso de la energía. De hecho, el valor cargado en energía a lo largo del tiempo también se ha discutido con diferentes dimensiones. Al punto alcanzado hoy, la energía forma parte de la seguridad nacional. También es indiscutible que mantendrá esta posición en el futuro, como lo hizo ayer y hoy. El tema de la seguridad energética ahora se está considerando en la dimensión de seguridad nacional para todas las partes que necesitan o tienen este recurso. En este aspecto, no sólo es un tema de seguridad que preocupa a las naciones, sino también el foco de atención del sistema internacional. En este aspecto destaca la vertiente de la seguridad energética que conecta a los Estados en las relaciones internacionales. A medida que COVID-19 se propagó rápidamente a nivel internacional, la investigación a nivel mundial se centra en los impactos de la pandemia en los niveles económicos, así como en el medio ambiente y la energía. Por este motivo, el artículo se centra en la dimensión energética y la seguridad en las relaciones entre China y Kazajstán. Las visiones y desafíos energéticos de los dos países se presentan en el marco del concepto de seguridad energética y se hace énfasis en el desarrollo de las relaciones.

Palabras clave:

Energía, Kazajstán, China, petróleo, gas natural

Introduction

Energy has emerged as one of the basic needs for the economy and society since the 19th century. With the Industrial Revolution, the role of energy began increasing rapidly alongside the speed of production and technological developments in countries around the globe. Because energy needs are characterized simultaneously by limited access and resources, they have created a realpolitik area that comes more to the forefront globally every day and has become closely related to the security areas of states. In the 20th century, energy issues in states' foreign and domestic policies has begun appearing as a security problem within international relations. Energy now creates great dependencies regarding states' power and has become one of the most important security issues.

The sensitive nature of energy against cyclical development has led to new energy policies after the Cold War. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) many states gained their independence, leading to the appearance of new actors on the international stage within a new world order and ten years before the 21st century. One of the areas formed by these regions and countries is Central Asia. During the post-USSR period, this region has been the world's fastest changing and transforming geography. The USSR's withdrawal revealed politically, economically, militarily weak states and the resulting power vacuum has

made the region very attractive. The changing situation affected both the region and other countries outside the region. China is one of the states that feels these effects most directly. With the end of the USSR, it became a neighbor to weak countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan on its western border. This has brought issues like political instability, economic problems, and ethnic elements, as well as opportunities.

The end of the Cold War both brought new actors into the system and rearranged relationships between these states and the great powers. Within this context, the People's Republic of China (China), the world's most populous country, has moved up economically in the global system for about a quarter of a century, thanks to its economic reforms. However, China's economic transformation, making it the world's most important trading state, is not free from problems. The foremost of these problems are the raw materials and energy that China needs. Kazakhstan shares a border with almost all the Central Asian countries and is located in the heart of the region in an east-west direction. It is also an important regional energy actor due to its rich energy resources with the largest oil reserves in Eurasia after Russia and as a country that is highly dependent on oil export revenues. Kazakhstan is the second largest oil producer among the former Soviet republics after Russia. While this strengthens the country's hand in the energy field, it also squeezes it into a small space within the former Soviet zone. So, As Brzezinski (1997) noted, Russia sees the region as the one most likely to win the geopolitical and economic prize (p. 140). Thus, Russia's hegemony in the region affects Kazakhstan's energy-related power in Eurasia.

The main purpose of this study is to examine relations between Kazakhstan, one of the most important countries in Central Asia after the Cold War, and China, a major center for energy consumption. It will use a security-oriented approach, because the energy issue not only creates a mutual dependency in China-Kazakhstan relations, but also affects the energy security policies of the two countries. It also looks at the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially after 2019. After providing a conceptual framework for energy security, the paper examines Kazakhstan's geopolitical position in Central Asia and its energy outlook. The next section provides an energy outlook for China and then presents China's risks. Finally, the study examines the energy security context within the developing relations between the two countries.

Energy and Energy Security

Apart from its historical background, the issue of energy security can really be found in the international relations literature starting in the 20th century. The need to protect energy and to ensure energy security for states, understanding energy as a tool, results from the global energy crises experienced in the 20th century. The ongoing dynamics of the energy issue reveal different approaches to defining security. The fact that the energy issue affects more than one area also has an effect. Thus, the most common perspective of energy security is that it lacks a clear definition agreed on by all parties (Ang, Choong and Ng, 2015: 1081). The concept of energy security can be traced to the period before the First World War. During the pre-war period, the British Royal Navy Secretary, Winston Churchill, decided to switch the navy's warships from coal to oil. This meant a shift to unreliable Iranian oil from reliably sourced Welsh coal. From this date on, the concept of national security has gone hand in hand with energy security. Winston Churchill used the expression "diversity is just diversity" when referring to energy supply security (Yergin, 2006: 69). Besides this background, current perspectives of energy security have

been shaped by the oil shocks of 1973. Energy dependency arising from economic development since the early 1960s and the nationalization of multinational oil companies in the 1950s also played an important role in this process (Çelikpala, 2014: 79).

In 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a sudden attack on Israel. While the USA and the Western world supported Israel, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) responded with an oil embargo against Israel's allies, especially the USA. The most striking result of the widespread panic throughout global markets was the economic recession experienced in both developed and developing countries. The chaotic environment resulting from this embargo has been discussed by western academia as the first time energy security was seen as a national security problem (Chatzky and Siripurapu, 2009).

The World Energy Council defines the concept of energy security as the capacity to meet current and future energy demand reliably, the ability to withstand and bounce back quickly from system shocks, effective management of internal and external resources, and the existence of a reliable and durable energy infrastructure (World Energy Council, 2020). Security is evaluated as both short-term and long-term. Short-term energy security is understood as the energy system's capacity to balance sudden supply fluctuations. Long-term energy security is expressed as ensuring the balance of sustainable economic development and clean energy consumption. In general, energy security can be defined as the uninterrupted supply of energy at a reasonable price (IEA, 2019). The European Commission defines the concept as the ability to meet the energy that will be needed both from internal sources and from stable and accessible external sources (EU Commission, 2000).

These different definitions suggest that the debate around a multidimensional approach to energy security has not ended. However, different interpretations have been proposed and provide for a clearer understanding of the topic, especially as regards certain axes. The most important of these is the division of energy security into four basic categories by the Asia Pacific Energy Research Center, also known in the literature as the "4A approach". Under this approach, availability is expressed as existence, accessibility, affordability and economy. Existence is the presence of energy resources that can meet needs, while accessibility refers to the safe delivery of such resources to places of consumption. The acceptability category refers to the use of clean energy, bringing environmental concerns to the fore, while economy can be understood as access to sources of energy at an affordable price (APEREC, 2007).

Whether an energy importer or exporter, all countries need to care about energy security. As an element of the national security of states, energy security is just as important today as it was in the past, and it will remain important for the foreseeable future. Although renewable energy has gained importance in our age, as global warming concerns occupy more of the agenda, this does not change the fact that the world will be dependent on hydrocarbon resources for many years to come (Srivastava and Callahan, 2016: 65).

Finally, an issue that has emerged recently is the concept of energy geopolitics in terms of security. Geopolitics deals with the effective political control of a state over its territory. International politics occurs within a geographical context, and a system exists in which actors, including certain political and geographical regions, which we call nation-states, empires, or countries, interact with actors in other geographical regions. In the early 1950s, Burnham suggested strategies to weaken Soviet power in Central and Eastern Europe, and Edward Luttwak said that, in the

process of establishing a “new world order” with the end of the Cold War, “geo-economy” was the driving force behind geopolitics in international politics. The prediction that it will take its place as a power has attracted attention (Sempa, 2009: 3). When we talk about energy geopolitics, a country’s energy resources often come to mind. However, besides these resources, energy geopolitics also includes issues related to energy supply and demand in a country/region (Sevim, 2012: 4380). Central Asia and the Middle East are important players in energy geopolitics, while China is the world’s largest energy consumer.

The topic of energy security in the international arena also changed with the end of the Cold War. After the Cold War, the topic of security gained a paradoxical dimension related to neo-liberal practices and increased cooperation. This was because of the attempts made by energy giants like the USA to determine foreign policy based on the system’s energy needs. In 1999, Flavin and Dunn drew attention to the fact that the energy system was undergoing major changes and compared it to the glasnost and perestroika transformation seen in the economic and political systems of the Soviet Union. This analogy was based on cyclical changes together with the energy paradigm shift, especially after 2000 (Flavin and Dunn, 1999: 167-190). It is also a source of significant change for the international system with both familiar and new security threats, including dependence on imported oil and climate destabilization. With rapid technological and industrial developments during the 20th century, developed countries now also consume important amounts of energy, and growing needs in the Asia-Pacific region can also be interpreted in terms of industrial and productive developments. The speed with which energy consumption areas and outputs change is an important factor that also affects the international system.



Kazakhstan’s Geopolitical Position and Energy Potential

Central Asia has attracted the attention of many countries and empires throughout history. This region has been an important transit area for Silk Road trade. Trade routes through the region form a long line that runs through Central Asia, and it is the most important segment of the “Silk Road” that stretches from China, known as the “Afro-Eurasian” region, to northern Africa and the Mediterranean Özel Özcan, 2020: 120 -121). Many attempts have been made to define the borders of the Central Asian region. The most comprehensive of these definitions covers Uzbekistan, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Northern Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Northern India, Northern Pakistan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (Golden, 2018: 1-6).

The region has also been the stage for great power struggles during different periods. Iran, Tsarist Russia, England, and the Ottoman Empire all struggled to establish dominance in the region. Two great powers emerged in the 19th century in the Central Asian region. Eying its potential, the British sought to hinder the activities of their Russian rivals in the region because of the opportunities it provided. (Lattimore, 1950: 25). The contest between the British and Russians to exert their influence in Central Asia as far as the Aral and Caspian Seas was named the “Great Game”.

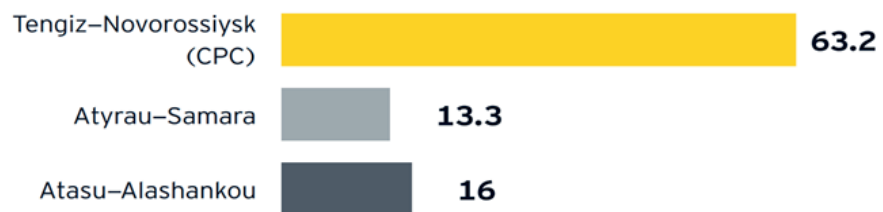
After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the Central Asian countries gained their independence one after another. Kazakhstan declared its independence on December 16, 1991 and left the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan is located in the center of Central Asia. Besides being the largest state in the region, the country is also ahead of other Central Asian countries in terms of development and has important underground and aboveground riches. Since 2015, the country has been one of the top ten fastest growing economies in the world, thanks to its export policies and development of its rich oil, gas, and coal resources (IEA, 2020). Kazakhstan’s exports of mineral products make up around 75% of Kazakhstan’s total exports between 2013 and 2020 (David, 2022). Although this segment is an important part of the Kazakh economy, it also imposes certain resource limitations. In other words, just like the Russian economy, it could be proposed that Kazakhstan has a fragile economic structure based on the energy trade.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates Kazakhstan’s oil reserves at around 30 billion barrels. This means it is the 12th largest country after the USA, as regards the world’s proven crude oil reserves, and has the second largest oil reserves in Eurasia after the Russian Federation. Although there are an estimated 172 oil and 42 natural gas fields in Kazakhstan, two inland fields in Tengiz and Karachaganak, and the Kashagan field, located in the Caspian Sea, have the largest reserves. These three areas make up 65% of Kazakhstan’s natural gas production (EIA, 2019; Ritchie and Roser, 2020). Kazakhstan has 2.407 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves (CIA World Factbook, 2020). Kazakhstan mainly exports fossil energy and chemicals, namely crude oil, petroleum gas, refined copper. The country mostly exports to China, Italy, Russia, the Netherlands, and France, with China occupying the top spot since 2012. Although China is an important energy trading partner, it is striking the amount of uranium it buys from Kazakhstan. China has a demand volume of 57 percent (China Briefing Team, 2021).

Kazakhstan has problems reaching international markets and acting independently in return for its energy exports. There are two reasons for this. One is geographical, and the other is related to its time as part of the USSR. During the early years of its energy independence, the country faced challenges related to insufficient industry capacity and access to competitive markets because the oil refineries built by the USSR on Kazakh lands were generally built far from its reserves. While the facilities built during the USSR period bind Kazakhstan to Russia, Russia, which has processing and infrastructure advantages, exports oil at high prices while it buys it at low prices. This situation puts Kazakhstan at a disadvantage regarding its own resources (Chow and Hendrix, 2010: 31; Batsaikhan and Dabrowski, 2017). On the other hand, Kazakhstan’s geographical location, far from sea routes and trade points make it difficult to deliver energy resources to the outside world. Pipelines built during the Soviet Union pass through Russia. Thus, after independence, the resources extracted in the country were first exported to Russia and then to European markets (Batsaikhan and Dabrowski, 2017; Gökbel and Turganbayeva, 2021).

Energy therefore needs to be transported using certain output lines. Because Kazakhstan is a landlocked country, it has increased transportation costs and, as a result, energy for export (especially oil) is transported to the Caspian Sea using wagons and pipelines. The three main oil and gas projects, Kashagan, Tengiz, and Karachaganak, stand out here. Chart I contains 2019 data for these three pipelines. Tengiz is the most important of the three pipelines 63.2 million tons of energy were transported through this pipeline in 2019 alone. As seen in Chart I, oil production is continued at the energy transportation point, intending to expand oil export routes to Europe and China (EY, 2021: 4).

Chart I: Per-route volumes of oil exports in 2019 (million tons)



Source: (EY, 2021:4).

However, the country's geographic location adjacent to the Caspian Sea increases its power in terms of strategic and energy resources. Kazakhstan has the largest recoverable oil reserves in the Caspian Sea region, considered one of the most important oil production areas for the world's energy supply. Although region's border issues were partially resolved in 2018, there are still energy distribution problems between five countries (Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia). The Caspian Sea and the resources it contains highlights Kazakhstan's geopolitical position, especially as regards the energy issue, strengthens its hand in energy, and provides the country with significant space for related foreign policy implementations. Most of the region's exports go through the CPC (Caspian Pipeline Consortium) pipeline to the Black Sea. Future development of the Karachaganak field requires significant investments, primarily aimed at maintaining and then increasing current production levels (Karachaganak Expansion Project) (David, 2022).

The region, under Russian protection for about 200 years until the collapse of the USSR, was influenced by Russian religion, culture, and politics. Russians, understanding the importance of transportation infrastructure and pipeline geopolitics, centralized control of strategic infrastructure including railways and natural gas and oil pipelines. Their attempts to continue these habits today will make the region's countries more dependent on Russia (Brzezinski, 1997: 140). Past and present Russian pressure is the biggest factor in Kazakhstan's search for alternative routes, and the Ukraine Crisis has shown that Russia can use oil as a weapon when it suits their purposes. This poses a great risk for Kazakhstan, as its hydrocarbons are shipped to European markets from Russian ports and using Russian infrastructure.



China's Energy Consumption and Policy

During the Cold War, China had good relations with the USSR because of its communist policies and was part of the same bloc. However, during the 1960s, changes in the international arena also changed relations between China and the USSR. After Mao's death, China began changing its course, and in 1979 it began moving in a new direction with the ideology-free foreign policy and economic reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping. Deng Xiaoping played a historical role in the post-Mao era, and during his time in office, China began changing its values. China's GDP growth between 1978 and 2008 is an important indicator of this shift (Özel Özcan, 2021:279-280).

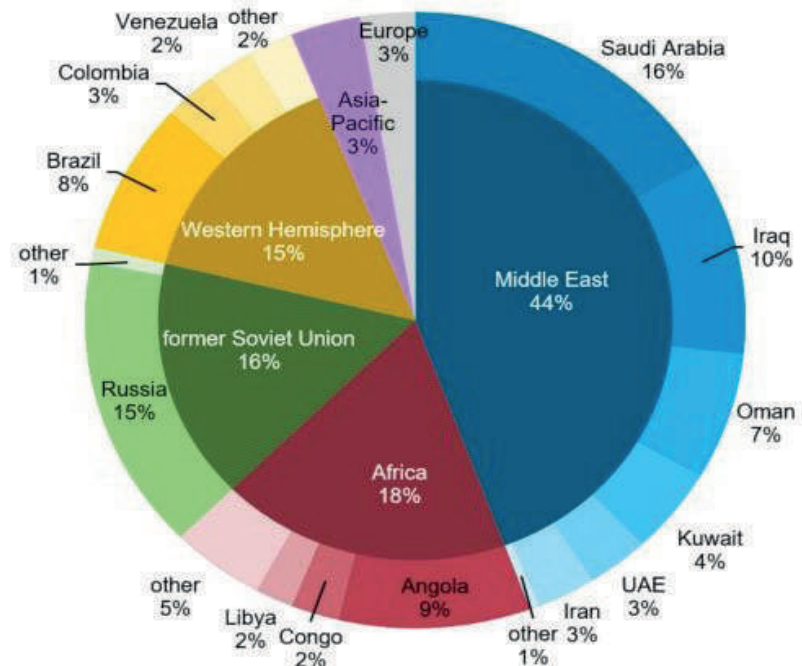
In 1993, China became a net oil importer for the first time in history. China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, its competition with liberal economies, and an inflow of direct foreign investment required that China increase its production capacity. China's energy demand therefore increased significantly (Turan, 2020: 94).

China's energy consumption changed after 2007. China managed to increase its energy production over the last decade, focusing on renewable and nuclear energy. In 2008, hydro, wind, solar and nuclear energy represented 9.5 percent of overall energy used, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (Jian, 2011: 7). Although these steps seem positive, China's energy policy still has risks. China's growth rate, its energy consumption distribution according to resources, and the regions that import energy provide a clearer perspective of the country's energy security risks. China, as the world's largest energy consumer and producer, grew 6.1% in 2019, its lowest growth since 1990. The largest share of its energy consumption, 58%, comes from coal, with oil in second place with 20%. The remainder is represented by natural gas, with 8%, hydroelectric power, with 8%, and nuclear energy, with a 2% share (EIA, 2020).

This chart of energy consumption data shows that China is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world. Its high rate of coal consumption means that China is placed under pressure by the international community on climate change issues related to greenhouse gas emissions. Another problem is that existing reserves are not evenly distributed throughout the country, and coal transportation uses the railway network to capacity and causes transport congestion (Leung, 2011: 1331). The importance of clean energy is growing and participating increasingly in the energy se-

curity definitions proposed thus far. Within this context, China's energy security policies need to change. Coal, which provides more than half of the energy consumed and is less advantageous than other sources a regards greenhouse gas emissions, places the country's energy security in jeopardy. Moreover, an analysis of the regions and countries from which China imports energy draws attention to a different energy security dimension. Specifically, as a result of the embargo imposed by the USA on Iran and Venezuela, the Beijing administration shifted its deficit to Saudi Arabia, meaning that Russia, which had been China's largest oil supplier, ceded this position to Saudi Arabia in 2019. While the Middle East is the main region from which Beijing imports oil, with a 44% share, Africa holds second place with an 18% share (EIA, 2020).

Chart II: Regions and countries from which China imports energy



Source: (EIA, 2020).

The data in Chart II shows that the Middle East's rich oil and natural gas deposits will maintain their importance for the world's energy supply in the coming years, as they have done in the past, and China's shift to this region will contribute to this. The reliability and stability of this region's energy supply, which China is most dependent on, is in doubt. The constant chaos in the region and the influence of the US therein are the most obvious risk factors for China. China also has difficulties finding diversified resources, which is another element of energy security. China is accused of selling weapons in exchange for energy in Iran, Sudan, and Venezuela, designated by the United States as rogue states. Relations with these states are characterized as challenges to western values and increases international public pressure against China (Daojiong, 2006: 182-184).

Finally, although the countries from which China imports both liquid and dry natural gas are safer than petroleum in terms of resource reliability, the main issues with the countries and regions from which it imports

both energy sources are related to security of transfer. On the other hand, although almost 80% of its energy imports are maritime, the surrounding oceans are under the control of the US Navy and the possibility of conflicts in the South China Sea and East China Sea jeopardize China's transportation routes (Karaca, 2012: 99-100). Any potential Chinese intervention in Taiwan brings with it the risk of maritime blockade of China by the USA and its allies (Daojiong, 2006). This situation, known as the "Malacca Dilemma", deals with the possibility that the Malacca Straits between Indonesia and Malaysia could be besieged by the US in retaliation for any potential Taiwan crisis or that energy transportation could be interrupted by piracy (Leung, 2011: 1333).

The Role of Energy in Kazakhstan-China Relations

The most important topic in China and Kazakhstan's energy relations, especially after the Cold War period, is meeting China's increasing energy needs against international cyclical changes. While China aims to meet the needs, Kazakhstan benefits from entering into energy relations with a great power like China, as well as from its regional proximity. In this respect, the states used a win-win approach when examining China – Kazakhstan relations after the Cold War. 1997 was important for China-Kazakhstan energy relations. A number of issues were discussed during Nazarbayev's visit to China in 1997, including the development of oil and gas fields. That same year, the operating rights for Kazakhstan's Uzen oil field were purchased by China's CNPC for twenty years (Jian, 2011: 5-7; Aydın, 2005: 89). The Beijing administration, which has made significant investments in the Kazakh energy market, has also become the owner of important oil fields and projects. CNPC's share of Kazakhstan's Aktobe company increased to approximately 82% in 2003. In 2004, CNPC acquired shares in the Kansu and Bektaş fields (Liao, 2006: 40).

Besides Kazakhstan's economically stable development as of the 2000s, the "Belt and Road" initiative has especially allowed Kazakhstan to make great progress with its own economic and commercial development. Chinese investment in Kazakhstan mainly focuses on oil exploration and extraction, gas stations, networking, and agricultural products. However, the political affinity between the two countries is also of note. Relations between China and Kazakhstan enjoy strong policy support (Duan, 2021: 162) and the strength of these relations can be seen most clearly in the field of economics. Kazakhstan ranks first in the region in terms of trade with China.

An analysis of 2009 data shows that Chinese investments in Kazakhstan continued despite the global economic crisis of 2008. China and Kazakhstan signed agreements in April that year, holding negotiations on cooperation in the natural gas and oil sectors, the provision of investment loans, and the construction of the China-Central Asia Natural Gas Pipeline. Thus, China used its financial power to turn the global crisis in its favor and expand its investments (Palkin, 2012: 85). Map I shows the China-Central Asia Natural Gas Pipeline, China's first international natural gas pipeline, is 1,883 km long and has a capacity of 60 billion cubic meters per year. So far three parallel lines (A, B and C) have been built in this project, which transports natural gas from Turkmenistan to China, passing through almost all the Central Asian countries. Another line, routed through Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, is being expanded to include Tajikistan (Ministry of Trade, 2020).

Map I: The China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline



Source: (International Energy, Charter, 2016)

The Beijing administration accelerated its activities oil production and processing activities in Kazakhstan as it did in the natural gas sector. As seen in Map II, the China-Kazakhstan Pipeline is the most important line for energy flows between the two countries. The Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline, discussed during the negotiations in 1997, extends from the Atasu region of Kazakhstan to the Alashankou region of China. The project was signed in 2004 and its construction began in 2005, with China and Kazakstan each holding a 50% stake. The project, completed in 2007, was designed with capacity of 180 thousand barrels per day (KCP, 2019).

Map II: Figure 5: China-Kazakhstan Pipeline



Source (KCP, 2021)

China also cooperates with KazMunAygaz, a Kazakh company, in the Chimkent refinery, one of Kazakhstan's largest oil facilities. These developing relations are important as they provide Kazakhstan with alternatives to Russian energy transportation routes and new balances of power (Kalyuzhnova and Lee, 2014) and the Beijing administration with a diversified energy supply through its many investments in oil and natural gas fields in Kazakhstan. China's imports from Kazakhstan in 2007 mainly focused on crude oil, steel, scrap copper, scrap steel, and aluminum and copper products (Duan, 2021: 164).

On the other hand, the fragility of the energy field as a result of Covid-19 is open to question. Many countries around the world experienced closures due to the pandemic, affecting many areas and especially the industrial sector in developed countries. Within this context, the demand for oil-based energy sources has decreased. Oil market shrinkage and stagnation has reached levels that have deeply shaken oil exporting countries. Energy-dependent countries like Kazakhstan have also encountered problems with their energy supplies. The global economic contraction caused by the Covid-19 collapsed the oil market, and oil prices dropped into negative territory for the first time in history in April 2020 (OECD, 2020). During this period, while the pandemic was punishing economies, a new era in oil production began with a consensus reached by the OPEC and Russia. Under this agreement, Russia and Kazakhstan would produce more oil in the coming months, while Saudi Arabia voluntarily reduced its production (Riley and Liakos, 2021).

Therefore, even with the impact of Covid-19, which was upgraded to a global pandemic in 2019, China's energy needs and supply from Kazakhstan continued according to policy. In this direction, it chose to increase its oil purchases from Kazakhstan in 2020. China's share of the Kazakhstan energy sector is now estimated at 25%. This means that one of every four units of energy produced in the country is sent to China (Gökbel and Turganbayeva, 2021: 19).

Finally, the Nur-Sultan administration announced its "Strategy 2050" policy, which includes economic reforms, to become one of the top 30 countries in the world's economy by 2050. In line with this goal, the country adopted the "2014-2020 New Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (Strategy 2050, 2012). This document is valuable as Kazakhstan's energy security roadmap. This document defines diversified, stable, and secure transfer routes that serve the interests of all parties in the energy sector. Kazakhstan will implement the initiatives required to provide a sustainable energy supply that will be sensitive to the environmental concerns related to the problems of today's industrial society. Plans for future energy policies have been created including expressions like "The Republic of Kazakhstan will extend its strategic partnership with China on a large scale in the development of transit, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture, technology and energy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kazakhstan, 2014). Although this framework includes different sectors, when infrastructure, transit and transportation are considered together, it suggests energy security is an important part of China-Kazakhstan relations. China is the world's second largest economic power, and an important partner that can provide solutions to the problems faced by Kazakhstan with its energy policy. Kazakhstan is located in the heart of the closed basin region, and therefore, at the center of gravity of all north-south and east-west movements in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's strategic position in the region is also evident in Chinese investments.

China made a major global breakthrough with the Belt and Road Initiative. This initiative, announced for the first time by Chinese President

Xi Jinping during his visit to Astana, is also important for revealing the importance of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has attracted a significant amount of Chinese investment related to this global project because of its geographical location. Kazakhstan's road and railway infrastructure, which enables transportation and logistics in the east-west direction, is important for moving Chinese goods to Europe. Due to this, China has turned Kargas in Kazakhstan into the world's largest capacity land cargo terminal by connecting it with Lianyungang (Turan, 2020:21). This shows that the energy in China-Kazakhstan relations has not decreased despite the effects of Covid-19, and China views Kazakhstan as an important regional partner for its energy needs. Additionally, although Middle Eastern and African countries are important for China's energy policies, Kazakhstan is a strong partner for developing Central Asian relations and continuing its projects within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Conclusion

The energy issue is, today, one of the most important areas in the international arena, as it has been in the past. After the Cold War, China's relations with countries from the former USSR independent countries, especially in a context of energy supply problems, draws attention. In turn, Kazakhstan is, geographically, the most important country in Central Asia. Energy requirements are a national issue for China to ensure its economic stability. Since it became an energy importer it has never experienced any issues, but this does not mean this will not happen in the future. In potential security situations, China would not be able to control energy transfer routes, and its seaborne energy imports will likely be disrupted. Kazakhstan's energy resources and location on China's western border minimize this risk. Kazakhstan is a more reliable route for transporting natural gas from Turkmenistan to China. Although the Middle East and Africa are China's largest energy importers, their instability becomes an important security problem. This is yet another reason why Kazakhstan is an important actor in security of supply.

Due to a lack of storage space in 2020, Kazakhstan came to the point of stopping oil production. However, with current energy demands, China offers Kazakhstan a good market potential. Until China's emergence as an important actor, Kazakhstan's natural resources were exported through Russian infrastructure and from Russian ports. This meant Russian export commitments and that Russia was in a position to control Kazakhstan's resources regarding both the amounts and the prices of its exports. Chinese investments have meant that resources have begun flowing to east as well as west. This partnership with the world's second largest economy is important for breaking the Russian monopoly. Simultaneously, its old and insufficient infrastructure has evolved to the point it can meet its needs with Chinese investments, paving the way for Kazakhstan to find markets for its resources in a more competitive environment.

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