

Reviews

Recursos naturales estratégicos.

Los hidrocarburos y el agua

(Strategic Natural Resources. Hydrocarbons and Water)

Rosío Vargas and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, eds.

CISAN-UNAM

Mexico City, 2006, 184 pp.

This interesting book focuses on two kinds of natural resources, fundamental and therefore strategic for the development and survival of many countries. The first part includes studies and research results by outstanding academics about oil and natural gas, essentially concerning their unequal distribution in the world, the relentlessly larger increase in demand than in supply, which raises their price, their strategic importance in countries' economies and development and their marked tendency to be depleted, causing great concern about them being non-renewable. The authors also analyze issues like the world oil order, oil policies of both oil-rich and oil-poor states, the size of potential world reserves and their generalized depletion, as well as their link to growing international conflicts, particularly the ones promoted by the United States to ensure its control of what remains of the world's oil and fuel supply for the longest possible time.

Based on the Gubert multiple cycles curve, Douglas B. Reynolds maintains that in 10 years, the United States will suffer from oil scarcity and expresses great skepticism about its oil policy and domestic techniques and tactics to solve this problem.

Ian Urquhart studies the potentially enormous reserves in bituminous sands in Alberta, Canada, their role in that country's current oil export capability and the possible impact as a guarantee of U.S. oil security, prompting what could become its second oil boom. However, he expresses certain misgivings about the United States' enormous, growing thirst for oil and above all natural gas, particularly in light of the complex business and political interests surrounding the reserves and the environmental impact of their exploitation.



Antonio Gershenson uses solid data, tables and graphs to show the sustained tendency for oil and natural gas reserves to drop in the planet's main hydrocarbon basins, with the resulting increase in prices and official manipulation of figures about oil and gas reserves in Mexico and possibly in other countries.

Omowumi O. Iledare, in an optimistic well-documented study, emphasizes the enormous importance that the U.S. continental marine platform in its territorial Gulf of Mexico waters has taken on in the last decade. This is due to the growth of its proven recoverable reserves and the production of oil thanks to scientific and technological advances for deep-water (over 200 meters) exploitation. This is pointed out in the U.S. National Energy Plan, on which its current and future projects to exploit and supply hydrocarbons are based.

Mel Kliman argues that the Canadian perspective in favor of integrating North American energy systems contrasts with Mexico's not very decided participation.

The contribution of Rosío Vargas, the book's co-editor, is particularly noteworthy. She explains the need for a geopolitical perspective to understand available and potential oil resources, their unequal geographical distribution, the gradual depletion of key industrialized countries' deposits, their resulting increased dependence on the exterior for energy and the imperious need to obtain these

resources and secure them wherever they are. This has been a matter of vital interest, particularly for the United States, for a very long time. Its current government has made this its central objective. Proof of that is the invasion of Iraq, with United Kingdom support, using the pretext of the fight against terrorism.

It is common knowledge that the fuel basins of southwest Asia continue to be the largest in the world, turning the Persian Gulf into strategic booty for our neighbor and its associates.

Vargas clearly explains how the United States, sparked by its ambition, has used the banners of neoliberalism and globalization to counter measures by developing countries' governments to protect their energy resources for conservation, exploitation and management. In the specific case of Mexico, three factors prove this affirmation:

1. The dismantling of state companies intensified by the Fox administration under the pretext of the need for foreign investment and technology, in addition to a predatory tax system;
2. The resulting stagnation of Mexico's oil industry, accelerated by efforts to exploit and export unrefined fuels instead of fostering the petrochemical industry and the export of industrial products; and
3. Military control of Mexico's oil infrastructure, regularly demanded by the United States to ensure its oil supply.

Along these same lines, Víctor Rodríguez-Padilla looks at the government strategy in place for almost 20 years in Mexico, which has been an instrument of macroeconomic stability and attraction for private investment, as well as to privatize Mexico's oil industry by dismantling Pemex and turning oil-related activities over to foreigners. This is exemplified by what are called multiple services contracts, which are clearly unconstitutional, damaging the nation's patrimony.

In the second part of the book, two interesting articles refer to the role water plays in Mexico's relationship with the United States. Based on the theory of complex systems, they look at issues like the economic, political and military asymmetry between the two countries, the relationship between the surroundings and security—not limited to the military view—and the possibility of major conflicts given the growing scarcity of resources.

Mexican researcher Agustín Maciel Padilla states that for the United States, water has become a matter of national security, particularly along the border with Mexico. This is due to its intensive industrialization; population growth, especially on the Mexican side; and the patent deterioration of the environment. This is particularly the case of the quality of the air and water caused by the disastrous management of industrial waste as a result of both governments' actions for almost a quarter of a century, paradoxically to try to create an efficient hydraulic infrastructure along the border and protect the environment. Among these actions are the creation of bi-national institutions derived from NAFTA and the Twenty-First Century Border Program (1996).

According to Maciel, of these three factors, the United States is only interested in water as a matter of national security because it considers it a possible source of contamination and epidemics for its population. At the same time he argues that for that very reason, the U.S. should not ban migrants from access to health services. In my opinion, both countries should consider health in the border area a matter of national security and deal with it promptly and effectively.

U.S. researchers D. Rick van Schoik, Erik Lee and Thomas McGuckin also deal with this issue. They emphasize the recent intense cooperation between the two governments with regard to environmental security, arguing that trade is the main motivation and foreseeing opportunities for a real long-term partnership for water management.

The authors concur that the two countries' international waste water treatment plant has been a fruitful experience, but that there have been many failed attempts also, including the resurfacing of the All American Canal, built to guarantee water for San Diego to the detriment of that being collected by Mexican wells. This is the result of an abusive unilateral decision, just like the one, in its time, to give Mexico salt water in Arizona. They also point to the need for better monitoring of water flows in the basin and the impacts produced by being careless of or altering them. They suggest that a body be established to manage the water and promote trade of the different kinds of water left unused by each of the parties so they can be better utilized.

Recursos naturales estratégicos is therefore a work that brings together varied opinions on matters of common in-

terest, written in simple, clear language. It should promote awareness among key Mexican government officials about the need to design a comprehensive border policy as part of our bilateral relations. That policy must be based on our understanding of the many, complex components

in the relationship, considering implications and consequences, and raise itself to the height of an instrument for national security. This task is urgent. **MM**

Edmundo Hernández-Vela S.

Encuentros y desencuentros entre México y Estados Unidos en el siglo XX

Del porfiriato a la posguerra fría

(Convergences and Divergences of Mexico and the United States in the Twentieth Century. From the Porfirio Díaz Dictatorship until After the Cold War)

Walter Astié-Burgos

Miguel Ángel Porrúa

Mexico City, 2007, 460 pp.

Many have been the defining moments in the complex bilateral history of Mexico and the United States. Geographic proximity joins almost fatefully with a history oscillating between divergence and convergence.

Walter Astié-Burgos's book *Encuentros y desencuentros entre México y Estados Unidos en el siglo XX* (Convergences and Divergences of Mexico and the United States in the Twentieth Century) helps us understand the singularity of this relationship. Written by a career diplomat, the book's 12 chapters narrate interesting political and diplomatic encounters and incidents that show just how complex the relationship between the two countries is, with their different histories and ways of understanding the world, at times similar and at times dissimilar, but sharing a geographic, economic and political space.

The author analyzes the evolution of the Mexico-U.S. link situating it in its international context. The role of our neighbor as a world power, particularly during the twentieth century, has had very clear implications for this relationship. Under these conditions, it is necessary to understand domestic issues in both countries and their place in the international dynamic.

The book's first three chapters narrate the historical events that determined the nature of the Mexican state at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,



when relations wavered between frank confrontation because of the 1847 war and Mexico's resulting loss of territory, and greater closeness because of the convergence of the two economic models during the *Porfiriato* (the 30-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz). It is this last historical period that is the starting point for Astié-Burgos's systematic examination.

Starting then, the author analyzes more than 100 years of history that explain the forging of national and cultural identities and how that has been reflected in both countries' foreign policies. Taking this into consideration, some structural and other more temporary aspects of the links between Mexico and the United States can be reviewed.

While the United States' pragmatic policy contrasts with that of its Mexican counterpart due to dramatic events like the outbreak of the 1910 revolutionary war or the 1938 oil expropriation, at other times, the Mexican position comes close to being equally pragmatic. In fact, the extensive lobbying by the Salinas administration to get NAFTA approved in the early 1990s actually has precedents in the remote