

Energy Cooperation between China and Central Asia from the Perspective of Geopolitics: Challenges and Countermeasures

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Abstract: Central Asia is an important bridge and channel connecting the Eurasian continent and has important strategic significance for the entire Eurasian continent. Energy cooperation between China and Central Asian countries has become an important path for mutual benefit and common development. However, as the geopolitical landscape in Central Asia becomes more complex, there are potential risks in energy cooperation between the two sides. How to deal with challenges and achieve stable and mutually beneficial cooperation is a problem that must be solved for China and Central Asian countries.

1. Introduction

Geopolitics is the political power that realizes the specific powers with power, interests and security as the core through the control and utilization of the geographical environment, and the process of mutual competition and coordination and the spatial relationship formed by the geographical environment[1]. Geopolitics is the product of the interaction between human politics and the geographical environment. It is characterized by space and competition[2]. Its essence is the competitive relationship between actors, especially the nation-states, that is, geopolitics shows outstanding competitiveness. The spatial and competitive geopolitical nature requires sovereign states to think about their geopolitical strategies from the changes in geopolitical space. Central Asia due [3] to its special geographical location, it has been a transportation hub for the East and West since ancient times. Under the background of the "Belt and Road Initiative", further development of energy cooperation with Central Asian countries is related to the realization of the goal of mutual benefit and common development between China and neighboring countries, as well as China's national security.

Since the 1990s, China has carried out various cooperation with Central Asia. However, with the constant changes in the form, various problems have arisen that have had a certain impact on China's energy cooperation with Central Asia and even pose a threat. There are two main aspects: First, the geopolitical struggle. Impact, and second, non-traditional security issues.

2. Challenges and threats to energy cooperation between China and Central Asia

2.1 Geopolitical struggle

Due to its special geographical location and abundant oil and gas resources, Central Asia has become the target of competition among major countries, and its geopolitics is multi-polarized. After the Cold War, the geopolitical pattern of Central Asia changed from a one-yuan pattern to a pluralistic pattern. Russia's full-scale contraction in Central Asia has created a power vacuum in the region, thus creating conditions for the intervention and penetration of external forces. In recent years, the further exploration of the rich oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea has intensified the competition of big countries in Central Asia. The United States, Russia, Turkey and Japan have intervened in this power vacuum in different ways and channels for their own interests. There is a situation in which a variety of forces compete in one area.

After the "9.11" incident, the United States relied on the anti-terrorist garrison in Central Asia,

which made the already complicated situation worse. One of the important goals of the US strategy in Central Asia is to control the oil and gas trends in Central Asia, thus curbing China. In May 2006, US Vice President Cheney visited Kazakhstan. His main purpose was to urge Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to make "correct choices" about the direction of the oil pipeline, thus curbing China.

In summary, the Central Asian region has actually become a stage for the game of major powers, and various forces are fighting against each other, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact on energy cooperation between China and Central Asia. At the same time, the increasingly serious non-traditional security factors have also hindered the smooth progress of energy cooperation.

2.2 Non-traditional security issues

Central Asia has long been plagued by "three forces." After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the long-established national and religious energy was quickly released. These energies were suppressed by the bipolar pattern during the Cold War. Due to the special ethnic composition and religious beliefs in Central Asia, the rapid outbreak of these energies is the rapid spread of national separatism, religious extremism and international terrorism in Central Asia. These forces are draped in the cloak of religion and nation, colluding with international criminal groups, and engaging in terrorist activities. The four countries of Hajitau have been greatly challenged.

"The biggest security issue facing the four countries is to prevent the infiltration and destruction of religious extremism. Illegal armed forces have been entrenched in the Ferghana region on the border of the three countries for several years, and organized the armed protection of the 'drug transport line' and other actions, becoming a big worry for the political stability of the four Central Asian countries." [4] Although Russia has already ended its Chechen military operations, the Chechen national separatist forces and illegal armed forces have not disappeared. The terrorist incidents created from time to time remind people of the evils they have committed.

For China, the more threatening is the "East Turkistan" forces. Xinjiang is not only an important oil and gas supply area, but also the first stop for China-Kazakhstan oil pipelines to enter China. The safety of these oil and gas field facilities and pipelines is directly related to the production and transportation of China's energy, and also affects the supply of oil and gas demand in the eastern coastal areas. Therefore, the social and economic development and stability of Xinjiang is of great significance to China's national security. The terrorist activities of the "East Turkistan" forces undoubtedly constitute the greatest threat. For example, in 1998, terrorists repeatedly launched bombings in Yecheng County, Xinjiang, targeting the oil pipeline. The gas and oil pipelines of Yecheng Kirkaya to Zepu Petrochemical Plant were bombed, causing huge losses.

In summary, the long-term existence and activities of the "East Turkistan" terrorist forces have not only damaged the social stability and development of Xinjiang, but also have a certain impact on China's political stability. At the same time, it has also caused a huge threat to China's energy import and transportation and supply. Moreover, the activities of this terrorist force will have a huge negative impact on the energy cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, and will also affect each other's normal trade activities.

3. The countermeasures

3.1 Domestic response strategy

(1) Vigorously develop the Xinjiang economy and narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. There are two main problems caused by the economy: Firstly, the problems caused by poverty. "The market development in ethnic areas is not perfect, some departments and enterprises may not consider the ethnic areas according to the market orientation of resources, which will cause disappointment and dissatisfaction among ethnic minority cadres and masses. The sense of loss and embarrassment sometimes evolve into ethnic sentiment and affect ethnic relations" [5]. Secondly, the hidden dangers caused by the gap between the rich and the poor. The problem brought about by the gap between the rich and the poor is universal. When it emerges in a region with complex ethnic groups and backward economic development in Xinjiang, it will bring more serious and

complicated problems, that is, under the instigation of "East Turkistan", contradictions It may be intensifying, and the tendency to separate may occur and intensify. Therefore, in order to completely solve the "East Turkistan" problem, we must vigorously develop the Xinjiang economy, improve people's living standards, and improve their happiness index, thereby eradicating the living soil of terrorism, separatist forces and ultra-nationalist forces.

(2) Pay attention to religious work. "Religion, nationality is no small matter"[6]. Ethnic minorities in Xinjiang mainly believe in Islam, and "East Turkistan" often uses religion as a cover to carry out its terrorist separatist activities. The use of religion as a cover increases the security of its activities. Therefore, to prevent religion from being used by the "East Turkistan", we must attach importance to religious work, incorporate religious affairs into the track of legal management.

(3) Promote cultural exchanges. Differences in national culture often bring many contradictions and conflicts. "Because of different nationalities and different cultures, there are differences in customary traditional beliefs; therefore, collisions will inevitably occur in exchanges." [7]. Therefore, we must conscientiously implement the state's policies in ethnic minority areas in Xinjiang, and further strengthen cultural exchanges between the Han and ethnic minorities in order to enhance mutual understanding and trust, thereby consolidating national unity.

3.2 International efforts

The "East Turkistan" problem is not accidental. It has a complicated historical and realistic background. Therefore, in order to effectively combat the "East Turkistan", China must also seek international cooperation and support.

(1) Further improve the anti-terrorism cooperation of the SCO. The establishment of the SCO has provided a favorable opportunity for China to solve the "East Turkistan" problem. Central Asia has always been the hardest hit by the "three forces" and is also the source of the "East Turkistan". The joint anti-terrorism mechanism established by China, Russia and Central Asia is mainly targeted at Central Asia. Activities such as joint anti-terrorism exercises conducted among member states have played a deterrent role against terrorist forces. However, there are still urgent problems to be solved in the current counter-terrorism mechanism under the SCO framework. For example, "the lack of specific measures for implementing emergencies and joint operations, lacking specific implementation rules and effective monitoring mechanisms, and the relevant documents on counter-terrorism cooperation are still thin"[8]. As the core of the SCO, China should give full play to its leadership role, closely liaise with all member states, especially Russia, enhance political and military mutual trust, improve the SCO anti-terrorism cooperation mechanism, and overcome deficiencies and difficulties. Only in this way can the SCO's counter-terrorism cooperation achieve results, and China can rely on this platform to actively carry out counter-terrorism cooperation with other countries and curb the "East Turkistan" forces from its roots.

(2) Strengthen dialogue and exchanges with some Western countries .The United States began to fight terrorism after "9.11". However, its definition of terrorism often adopts double standards. Therefore, based on its special purpose, the United States does not believe that "East Turkistan" is a terrorist organization, and has always used it as an excuse to intervene in China's internal affairs; and some European countries have opened the door to "East Turkistan" and blamed China. "In fact, as early as September 11, 2002, the UN Security Council officially included 'East Turkistan' in the list of terrorist organizations and individuals"[9]. Therefore, if China wants to continue its anti-terrorism efforts, it will need to further strengthen political and cultural exchanges with Western countries and increase political mutual trust.

(3) Give full play to the role of the United Nations. "Although the international community has formulated many international conventions related to counter-terrorism, there is no complete and systematic international law against terrorism. In practice, countries had to determine whether an act is a terrorist act based on self-determined standards and procedures. This opens the door for the abuse of counter-terrorism for the benefit of a few major powers"[10]. Therefore, in order to effectively combat terrorism, the international community should establish a comprehensive and unified international convention against terrorism, clarify the definition of international terrorism,

and set up specialized agencies to identify terrorist activities and avoid double standards.

4. Conclusion

China has thousands of kilometers of borders and a deep foundation for friendly cooperation with Central Asia. Although there are still many shortcomings and problems to be solved, all members of the SCO have common interests in many fields, which closely connect them together. Therefore, the cooperation of all member states has a stable and profound foundation and premise. As long as they adhere to the principle of mutual benefit, mutual respect, and equal dialogue, the energy cooperation between China and Central Asia will surely develop healthily and steadily, and maximize the mutual interests of each other.

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