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Υπογραφή

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, written on a light-colored background.

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Table of Contents

Contents

Table of Figures	5
Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1	6
Introduction	6
1.1 Aim of Research	6
1.2 Methodology.....	6
1.3 Structure.....	6
1.4 Contribution	7
Chapter 2	7
Critical Theory in International Political Economy.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Critical Theory	7
2.3 Conclusion	8
Chapter 3	8
Structuralist Theory.....	8
3.1 Introduction.....	8
3.2 Structuralism.....	9
3.3 Market.....	12
3.4 Inflation theory.....	12
3.5 Theory of dependency.....	12
3.6 Conclusion	13
Chapter 4	13
Resource curse and structuralism.....	13
4.1 Resource curse.....	14
4.2 Resource curse and structuralism	14
4.3 Conclusion	15
Chapter 5	16

Case Studies.....	16
Introduction	16
<i>5.1 Kuwait</i>	16
<i>5.2 Turkmenistan</i>	21
<i>5.3 South Sudan</i>	25
5.4 Conclusions.....	30
Chapter 6	30
Structural Geopolitics	30
6.1 Structural Geopolitics.....	31
6.2 Structural Geopolitics and resource curse	31
6.3 Conclusion	32
Chapter 7	32
7.1 Results.....	32
7.2 Political stability and corruption.....	34
7.3 Conclusion	35
Bibliography.....	36

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Real GDP and Inflation rate of Kuwait	18
Figure 2 Political and Economic Transformation of Kuwait	19
Figure 3 Real GDP and Inflation rate of Turkmenistan	22
Figure 4 Political and Economic Transformation of Turkmenistan	23
Figure 5 Real GDP and Inflation rate of South Sudan	27
Figure 6 Political and Economic Transformation of South Sudan	28

Abstract

The resource curse phenomenon is referred to the state of worse economic performance in resource- abundant countries in comparison to resource- poor countries. In this research, the combination of structuralist theory and structural geopolitics provides an alternative explanation combining fields related such as political economy, international relations and geopolitics. Critical theory focuses on the internal and external factors which affect the behavior of the state. Structural geopolitics elucidates the power dynamics in international relations and expounds the correlation between micro-factors and macro- factors of a state. According to structural geopolitics, countries differ in terms of power. In the capitalist – imperialist system, where countries prioritize hard power, the exploitation of countries rich in natural resources is inevitable. This dissertation’s analysis includes three different countries which face similar internal and external difficulties; Kuwait, Turkmenistan and South Sudan. All of these countries deal with the advantages and disadvantages of their geographical location which provoke inconvenience to the internal structure of the state. The qualitative analysis shows political stability and the ways it affects other pillars of the state (education, human rights, etc.). The quantitative analysis shows the economic performance and limitations. The corruption rate plays also a crucial role in economic development.

Key words: international political economy, resource curse, critical theory, structuralist theory, geopolitics, structural geopolitics, state behavior

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Aim of Research

The aim of this research is to propose another explanation to the resource curse phenomenon through examining three case studies: Kuwait, Turkmenistan, and South Sudan. Each of these countries have presented symptoms of resource curse. Their economic and political performance are examined in terms of structuralist theory.

1.2 Methodology

Since the aim of the research is an assessment of existing theories, this research is heavily focused on empirical data from these countries. The quantitative indicators are used to prove the state of poverty and the wealth of natural resources. Qualitative research was necessary in order to include a more in-depth understanding of the economic development. Both Kuwait and South Sudan are common cases in resource curse, Turkmenistan represent an uncommon case but, the emphasis is given in its geopolitical location and its role as a secondary actor in the region. The results sprung from the research are later explained in the framework of structuralist theory. Structuralist theory emphasizes the importance of historical and structural factors such as unequal global trade relations, dependency on exports, and the concentration of economic power as profound determinants of underdevelopment. It argues that economic disparities are deeply implanted in the global economic system, which tends to favor developed countries at the expense of less developed, resource rich nations. This theoretical perspective provides a critical examination of the way the external structural formation and long-term dependencies influence the developmental trajectories of resource- rich states such as Kuwait, South Sudan, and Turkmenistan.

1.3 Structure

Following the qualitative analysis, where each country's history and geography are analyzed, the quantitative analysis focuses on the economic variables which prove the existence of natural abundance and economic dependence. After presenting the data, it is necessary to refer to structural geopolitics in order to explain the resource curse in the international system. The countries chosen represent three different geopolitical actors with different interests. Nonetheless, their geopolitical location affects their political and economic development.

1.4 Contribution

This dissertation attempts to explain the resource curse through structuralist theory in political, economic, and geopolitical perspectives. The internal and external environment of the state influences the state's behavior in the geopolitical system. From the geopolitical point of view, the natural resource abundance in correlation with economic stagnation is consequence of an imperialist system. In addition, the corruption is presented as an important variable which must be taken into consideration in the development progress of a state.

Chapter 2

Critical Theory in International Political Economy

2.1 Introduction

“Natural resources discovered in poor countries can increase poverty” (Fairhead, 2008). The poorer the country, the larger the significance of natural reserves, the worse it gets. (Ross, 2003). The phenomenon of the “resource curse” presents a paradoxical situation where nations rich in natural resources often struggle with economic development, social instability, and governance challenges. Structuralism, as an approach within economics and sociology, emphasizes the significance of underlying social, political, and institutional structures in shaping economic outcomes. In the context of the resource curse, structuralist analysis delves into the complex interplay between resource endowment, institutional frameworks, power dynamics, and global economic forces to elucidate why resource -rich countries may fail to translate their natural wealth into sustainable development and societal prosperity. In this framework, structural geopolitics is an essential addition to explaining why countries rich in natural resources remain undeveloped or have noted a slow economic development.

2.2 Critical Theory

Critical theory in International Political Economy offers a distinct perspective on understanding the global political economy. Rooted in the tradition of critical theory from the Frankfurt School of

social thought, it seeks to uncover the underlying power structures, social relations, and ideologies that shape the international economic system.

Critical theorists emphasize that unequal distribution of power among states, institutions, and social groups in the international system. Dominant actors, often powerful states, or transnational corporations, impose their interests and values on other actors, creating hegemonic structures that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. Moreover, the global economy is observed through historical materialist theory; the emphasis is on the evolution of economic relations, contemporary, and class struggles and how the contemporary international order is formed. The process of globalization as a complex and uneven phenomenon exacerbates existing inequalities between the North countries and South countries. Global economic integration benefits certain actors while marginalizing others, leading to disparities in wealth, development, and access to resources.

One approach of critical political economy is the structuralist theory. Structuralist theory is a perspective that emphasizes the importance of structural factors, such as economic institutions, systems, and relationships, in shaping the behavior of states and the dynamics of the global economy.

2.3 Conclusion

The resource curse phenomenon may have many explanations, according to the theory it is based on. Factors such as historical background, geopolitical location and governance are important in highlighting the reasons leading to a poverty trap, even though the existent resources. As a result, in order to give another explanation to the difficult topic of resource curse, the use of qualitative and quantitative analysis is crucial. Based on critical political economy, and more specifically structuralist theory, the structural factors affect the role of states in the global scene. Under the terms given by structuralist theory, resource curse may be explained in a different way.

Chapter 3

Structuralist Theory

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned above, the structuralist theory analyses the different structural layers which form the state and function within the state such as institutions, systems and relationships. As a result, these factors are transformed into the main actors who influence the behavior of the state. The structuralist theory is correlated with Marxism and was first presented in the case of Latin America.

3.2 Structuralism

The approach of structuralism is defined as an essentially theoretical approach that challenges the methods of both empiricism and positivism, with plenty of its insights present in several disciplines throughout the social sciences and humanities (Fabricio Missio, Frederico G. Jayme Jr., Jose Luis Oreiro :2015)

The main principle of structuralism lies in the concept that each system should be examined as an integral combination of related elements and not segregate the elements and study them individually. The relations that contribute to the formation of the structure are more important than the individual elements.

Taking these into consideration, structuralism holds a holistic approach to some extent. Methodological holism is defined by a totality that is considered to be more than the combination of the parts, and the individuals that it contains.

According to W. Jackson (2003), "structural theory can sometimes turn into holism and give the whole precedence over the parts, yet the original aim of structural ideas - as against holistic ones - was to ensure that the whole could always be transformed, or else the whole-part relationship would be redundant. A structural method, if handled properly, should never congeal into structural wholes that overshadow their component parts." The structuralist approach perceives the world as a combination of multidimensional relations; internal, as far as the political and socioeconomic correlations are concerned, and external with the existence of interactions between different economic agents.

The term "structuralism" made its first appearance with the inflationary occurrence in Latin America. Raúl Prebisch had the initial formation of the theory in 1949 manifesto where he proposed the concept of an international system split between an industrialized dominant core and an agrarian-dependent periphery, which together shape a unique and unequal process of development.(Fabricio Missio, Frederico G. Jayme Jr., Jose Luis Oreiro :2015) In this approach, it is evident that the different structural features are emphasized- economic, political, and social. The idea of "social structures" derives from Marxism which includes the idea of the "behavior of economic variables". The behavior of economic variables is highly dependent on "non-economic parameters" and their nature. As a result, the behavior of the economic agents is significantly influenced by the volatility of the social and political parameters. Hence, these parameters play an important role in the study. (Furtado, C: 2000) Latin America's structuralism opposes to the liberal approach of international trade. In the study of structuralist macroeconomics, international trade contributes to the expansion of unequal development.

Structuralist macroeconomics has five fundamental core points. Firstly, the economic role of people and institutions is very important as they are related to different categories of distribution of income and wealth. When observed in these fields, they appear to have different behaviors and not much control over the system. Secondly, prices are formed by different actors in the economy. Thirdly, models include prices, and income flows in nominal and monetary terms. In addition, the models' behavior is dependent on the interactions made within the economic system. Under the empirical and institutional analysis of the economy, the economic system's "closure" is justified and chosen. Lastly, "models with more than one sector incorporate consumer response to changes in the relative prices". (Fabricio Missio, Frederico G. Jayme Jr., Jose Luis Oreiro :2015, p.261)

According to Alexander Hamilton (Report to Manufactures [1791]), developing economies do not have many advantages following a free market policy as far as developing a new economy is concerned, emphasizing the development of new productive sectors and not increasing consumption in the United States. That is explained by taking into account that firms are not in

favor of risks, the new economic leaders have market leaders abroad and other countries have their own protectionist policies. Taking the above into account, states are responsible for providing their national firms with protection from foreign competition, securing them enough to develop abilities in order to compete in different markets and reduce the danger of failure. (J.M. Ahumada: 2019)

The “productive power” by Friedrich List (National System of Political Economy [1841]) reveals the ability of economic sectors to develop scientific knowledge to a quantitative expansion of goods and a qualitative change (mental capital). The other two important capitals, physical (means of production) and natural (geography), and the economic linkages are essential for achieving “productive power”. The developing countries, at the time when England was the dominant economic manufacturing power, were passively integrated into the global economy which forced them to link with low mental capital endowments and were not capable of developing new productive powers. The strategy for developing countries recommended by List is to avoid integration into the global economy and imitate the economic behavior of the developed countries. In such a context, tariffs and subsidies are highly emphasized in order to protect small industries from foreign competition, until they develop their “productive power” and are capable of competing fairly in the world market.

The main arguments structuralist theory has against economic liberalism are international trade and growth in the global economy. The structuralist model consists of the developed center and underdeveloped peripheries which constitute a world economy. The process of development and underdevelopment is single-handed and the inequality between them is reproduced through international trade.

In the structuralist approach, international trade enhances the asymmetry of developed and developing countries.

According to Prebisch (1950), the relationship between the price index of the periphery’s imports from the center countries and its price index of exports to center countries had turned against the periphery since the 1870s. The reason behind this argument is that the periphery was obliged to export a large amount of raw material in order to be able to import the same number of industrial commodities. This is also known as the Prebisch- Singer Hypothesis. (Cuddington, J.T, Ludema, R, Jayasuriya, S.A: 2002)

The terms of demand and supply of commodities are the main factors with which Prebisch explained the inequality in international trade. As far as the demand factor is concerned, Prebisch mentions the “dynamic disparity of demand” between the center and the peripheries. This is explained as the income elasticity of demand, the center imports primary goods from the periphery at a lower rate contrary to its national income.

On the other hand, the periphery imports industrial commodities at a faster rate, contrary to its income. Engel’s law (increasing income - a smaller proportion spent on food) explains the low-income elasticity of demand at the center. In addition, the protectionist policies which form a restricted market for exports from the periphery countries, and the scientific knowledge developed new methods of producing commodities, as a result, fewer raw materials are required. All the above describe the low-income elasticity of demand in the center countries.

On the contrary, the high-income elasticity of demand at the periphery is clarified by the rate of imports of industrial commodities, contrary to the rate of their income. (Kay, C: 2009)

The rules and the pace of the economic market are formed by the center countries which provoke the difficult adaptation of the periphery countries.

The “terms of trade” as explained above, cause the integration of undeveloped countries in the capitalist economic “cycle” extremely difficult, as during an economic uprising, the periphery enjoys the gains from trading but during an economic downfall, the losses last for a longer time.

According to Cristobal Kay, in the economic “cycle”, the prices, wages, and profits are the variables under study that highlight how uncertain the economic market is for the periphery. During an economic uprising, even though the wages at the center increase, this cannot be said for the periphery. In an economic downfall, the center’s wages and prices are hardly affected, as the adverse effects are controlled by the international trade power and by the oligopolistic industry model; by contrast, the periphery suffers from the reduction in prices and wages, as the producers, because of the existence of surplus labor and the weakness of trade cooperation, are capable to reduce the wages. Thus, on account of this economic structure, the center is able to enjoy the benefits of its progress through higher wages and profits and the periphery’s productivity increase. The rising gap in incomes between the center and the periphery is explained by the unequal trade conditions and by the industrial increases in productivity.

As Singer articulated, developed nations enjoy a dual advantage by both preserving the gains from their own technological advancements and benefiting from the technological progress made by developing countries. In contrast, developing nations face a disadvantageous situation, as they neither fully benefit from technological innovations originating in developed countries nor are they able to sustain the advantages of their own technological progress (Singer, 1950)

Even though structuralist theory notes the maldistribution of gains of international trade in terms of equality, structuralists are not opposed to international trade and foreign capital. Both elements are characterized as essential for the periphery’s countries to increase productivity and growth. (Kay, C.: 2009)

In other words, structuralists noted that unequal trade is not a sole factor in the periphery’s poverty but affected the economic surplus which was capable of relieving it. This is also known as “outward-looking” development model where the exports economic outcomes are growing so fast that sustain an important rate of the growth in the economy and an integration into the global economy is achieved. Some successful examples are East Asian “Tigers” (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore)¹ during their export-led industrialization phases, as well as more recent examples like China and Vietnam. The effectiveness of an outward-oriented periphery depends on numerous factors, including domestic policies, global economic conditions and the ability to address structural constraints and inequalities.

As a solution to the severe consequences in income and employment of the world crisis in 1930s, it was proposed an “inward-oriented”, where the main focus was the import substitution industrialization (ISI). The strategy of ISI was to achieve a structural change in production as industry’s national income was increased and reformation in imports. (domestic industries are protected through tariffs, quotas and subsidies to replace imported goods with domestically produced ones.) A successful example of pursued inward-oriented strategy is Latin American countries during the mid-20th century.

In structuralist theory, industrialization is a central concept that is often examined within the broader framework of economic development and structural transformation. It was believed that industrialization could prevent a repetition of the disastrous effects of the 1930s world depression. In addition, it could secure a productivity and income increase and a reduction of unemployment and the surplus labor, which is one of the causes of low wages in the periphery.

¹ Also known as “Asian Miracle”.

3.3 Market

In structuralist theory, the market is presented as a key institution within the economic structure of a society. Markets operate within institutional frameworks, shaped by historical, social, and political factors. Structuralist theory examines the interaction between market dynamics and other structural elements, such as production systems, distribution networks and property rights regimes. In a structuralist environment is noticed the existence of modern, capitalist sectors and traditional sectors. Markets in developing countries may be segmented, with different levels of integration between modern and traditional sectors.

According to structuralist economists, markets may be imperfect because of possible information asymmetries, externalities and institutional constraints. As a result, the role of state intervention and institutional reforms is important to address market failures and promote more equitable outcomes.

In addition, structuralist theory critique market-oriented policies, such as liberalization and structural adjustment programs, which are often promoted by international financial institutions and development agencies. The adoption of market-based reforms should take into consideration the local conditions and institutional capacities, otherwise inequalities, social malware and dependency on external actors may arise.

The correlation of market development and industrialization in developing countries emerged by strategic interventions (industrial policies, investment in infrastructure and technology, and enhancement of market access and competitiveness). In conclusion, in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth in developing countries, it is important to balance market forces with state intervention.

3.4 Inflation theory

Structuralist economists take a broader view of inflation, considering a range of structural factors beyond just supply and demand dynamics. This approach emphasizes the importance of market structure, income distribution, exchange rate dynamics, institutional factors, and globalization in shaping inflationary pressures.

The three main elements of structural inflation theory are the relative prices that change accordingly to the changes of economic structure, downward inflexibility of money prices and passive money supply closing the deflationary gap caused by price increases. In the context of structural economics, according to Noyola Vazquez (1956), inflation represents a specific manifestation of the broader dynamic of class conflict.

3.5 Theory of dependency

Dependency theory, as proposed by Raul Prebisch in the late 1950s, is an approach to deeply understand the economic underdevelopment imposed by global political and economic order. According to theory of dependency, a vicious cycle of inequality divides the world economy between a rich core and a poor periphery. Periphery countries offer cheap labor and raw materials

on the world market. These resources are then sold to developed countries, which have the means and technology to transform them into finished products. Developing countries have resulted in purchasing the finished products at high prices. As a result, the periphery is not capable of upgrading their own productive capacity, as there is no available capital.

According to Fernando Henrique Cardoso (also served as the president of Brazil in 1995-2003) well-known dependency theorist, it is possible some level of development in this system. However, economic historian Andre Gunder Frank argued that the only way of escaping the dependency of the periphery's countries is the creation of a noncapitalistic national economy.

The theory was heavily influenced by Marxist and Neo-Marxist ideas and emerged in the context of decolonization and the Cold War, as many southern countries gained their independence from colonial domination and asserted their sovereignty.

Dependency theory argues that underdevelopment is not a result of internal deficiencies or cultural factors but rather a consequence of external exploitation and domination by the core countries, as opposed to structuralism which emphasizes the importance of underlying structural factors, such as economic structures, institutions, and power relations, in shaping social, economic and political outcomes. Structuralism examines how structural factors influence patterns of inequality, development, and conflict within and between societies. It considers the ways in which power dynamics and institutional arrangements shape the distribution of resources and opportunities.

Although, dependency theory can be seen as a specific application of structuralist principles to the study of global inequality and underdevelopment, structuralism encompasses a broader range of theoretical approaches, including those that do not specifically focus on dependency relationships between core and periphery countries.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, critical theory in international political economy provides a valuable framework for understanding the underlying power dynamics and structural inequalities inherent in the global political economy. The structuralist approach analyzes the structural factors that shape the global economy, including unequal power relations, institutional dynamics, and historical forms of colonialism and imperialism.

Chapter 4

Resource curse and structuralism

Natural resources, often referred to as raw materials, play a crucial role in fostering economic development. Oil, in particular, has historically been a vital driver of economic growth and a key component in the formulation of national development strategies (Broome, 2014, p.258). Moreover, the management and control of energy resources serve as a significant source of political and economic power. Major oil-producing countries, often concentrated in regions like Middle East,

Africa, and Latin America, wield significant influence over global oil prices and market dynamics. Geopolitical tensions, conflicts, and alliances among oil-producing and oil-consuming nations shape the stability and functioning of international energy markets. The management of oil revenues, often characterized by issues of corruption, governance, and resource nationalism, plays a crucial role in shaping domestic economies and social welfare outcomes.

4.1 Resource curse

The resource curse phenomenon, also known as the “paradox of plenty,” refers to the observation that some countries rich in natural resources, particularly minerals, oil, and gas, often experience slower economic growth, increased poverty, and greater levels of corruption compared to resource-poor countries.

The resource curse can be also explained as “the preserve effects of a countries natural resource wealth on its economic, social, or political well-being.” According to M. Ross, the study of the resource curse is correlated to many other debates in political science. Examples include the factors driving democratic transitions, how taxation contributes to state formation, the impacts of foreign aid, and the underlying causes of civil conflict. Many resource-rich developing countries have been secured by global policy initiatives including the Kimberley Accord, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and the “Publish What You Pay” movement. As noticed by the research on “Politics of the Resource Curse” by M. Ross, petroleum-rich states experience three harmful effects.

First, authoritarian regimes appear more durable. Second, certain types of corruption have increased, and oil is linked to the appearance of violent conflict in low- and middle-income countries. The effects of petroleum on authoritarian rule and conflict are recent phenomena. Roche has highlighted the importance of institutional quality and governance in mediating the effects of resource abundance on economic and political outcomes. Countries with weak institutions, high levels of corruption, and authoritarian regimes are more prone to experiencing the negative consequences of the resource curse such as economic stagnation, social unrest, and political instability.

In addition, Ross has examined the political dynamics of research into rich countries, particularly the emergence of rentier states where governments derive a significant portion of their revenue from natural resource rents.

4.2 Resource curse and structuralism

Structuralist theory examines the internal and external disequilibria arising from the productive structure of developing countries and its interactions with the developed world. This dependence can lead to the neglect of other sectors of the economy, hindering economic diversification and industrialization. As a result, resource-rich countries may experience a lack of resilience to external shocks, such as fluctuations in commodity prices. In addition, the role of weak institutions and governance structures in exacerbating the resource curse is highlighted. Resource wealth can

undermine accountability, transparency, and the rule of law leading to corruption, rent-seeking behavior, and mismanagement of public resources.

In the international relations sector, structuralism identifies the international system as capitalistic. According to Lenin *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1970 [1916]), he describes imperialism as an economic phase representing the peak of capitalism, marked by the consolidation of economic power within monopolistic corporations and financial entities. He emphasized the need for capitalist states to export surplus capital to overseas colonies and dependent territories. Monopolistic corporations sought profitable investment opportunities abroad, leading to the expansion of colonial empires and the exploitation of foreign resources, labor, and markets. In such an international system, the intense competition and rivalry among imperialist powers for control over colonies, markets, and strategic resources led to geopolitical conflicts and military interventions. Imperialist powers resorted to military force to protect and expand their economic interests. The outcome of this strategy ("uneven development") is the division of the world into spheres of influence, ultimately leading to World War I, which was held for the control of colonies in Asia and Africa.

Colonies and dependent territories were viewed as sources of cheap raw materials, labor, and profits. The exploitation of colonial resources and labor contributed to the enrichment of imperialist elites while perpetuating underdevelopment and poverty in colonized regions.

4.3 Conclusion

The resource curse highlights the paradoxical relationship between natural abundance and underdevelopment, illustrating how the mismanagement of resource wealth can exacerbate economic disparities, political instability, and social unrest within resource-rich countries. Structuralist perspectives, rooted in theories of dependency and world systems analysis, provide a critical framework for understanding the structural factors that perpetuate inequality and underdevelopment in the global political economy.

Chapter 5

Case Studies

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze the resource curse phenomenon under the prism of structuralist theory. Resource curse is based on indicators, namely government effectiveness, political stability, rule of law, natural resources rent, GDP growth, human development, transparency level and state fragility. There is an attempt of understanding the resource curse with terms of structuralist in three countries: Kuwait (Middle East), Turkmenistan (Central Asia) and South Sudan (Africa). The geopolitical location of each country is also an important factor in the international imperialist system.

5.1 Kuwait

History

In the 16th century, Kuwait came under the influence of the Ottoman Empire, which established a garrison in the region to protect its trade routes and maintain control over the Persian Gulf. However, it remained largely autonomous under the leadership of local merchant families known as the al-Sabah dynasty. In the 19th century, Kuwait sought protection from British colonial expansion in the Persian Gulf region. The Anglo-Kuwaiti Treaty of 1899 established Kuwait as a British protectorate, granting it protection from external threats in exchange for British control over its foreign affairs. On June 19, 1961, Kuwait became the first Gulf monarchy to gain independence from British rule and rapidly progressed into a modern state.

Geopolitics

Kuwait's strategic location on the Arabian Gulf made it an important trading hub in the ancient world. The city of Kuwait served as a center for maritime trade, fishing and pearling connecting the Arabian Peninsula with Mesopotamia, India, and East Africa. The discovery of oil in the 1930s transformed

Kuwait's economy and society, leading to rapid modernization, urbanization, and economic development. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, leading to the Gulf War (1990-1991). A U.S.-led coalition intervened to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, restoring its sovereignty and independence. The war had a significant impact on Kuwait's infrastructure and economy but also strengthened its resolve to defend its sovereignty.

Since the Gulf War, Kuwait has continued to develop as a modern and prosperous nation-state. It has a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government, where the ruling Al Sabah family holds significant political power.

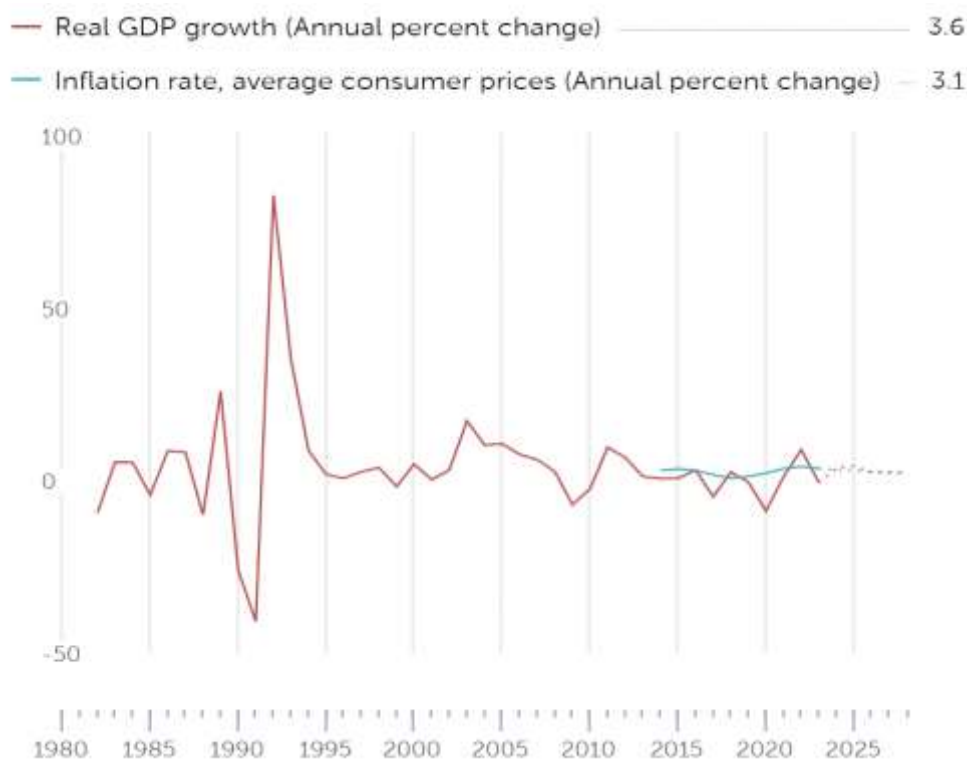
Economics

Kuwait is one of the world's leading oil-production countries, with significant reserves of crude oil (estimated at around 101.5 billion barrels, according to data from the Oil & Gas Journal. These reserves are located primarily in the Burgan oil field, one of the largest oil fields in the world. The top exporters are China (\$24.3B), India (\$15B), South Korea(\$10.8B).

Despite having a well-developed oil sector, Kuwait relies heavily on imports for various products that it does not produce domestically or produces in insufficient quantities. Firstly, because of its geographical location, Kuwait has limited arable land and water resources for agriculture, and as a result, it imports a significant portion of its food supply. Other imports include Cars (\$5.12B), Gold (\$3.25B), Jewelry (\$2.95B), Packaged Medicaments (\$1.42B) and Broadcasting Equipment (\$1.35B).

According to data from the World Bank, Kuwait's GDP at current prices was approximately \$110 billion USD in 2020. As Kuwait is an oil-producing country, is vulnerable to volatility due to fluctuations in oil prices, which can significantly impact its GDP figures.

Figure 1 Real GDP and Inflation rate of Kuwait

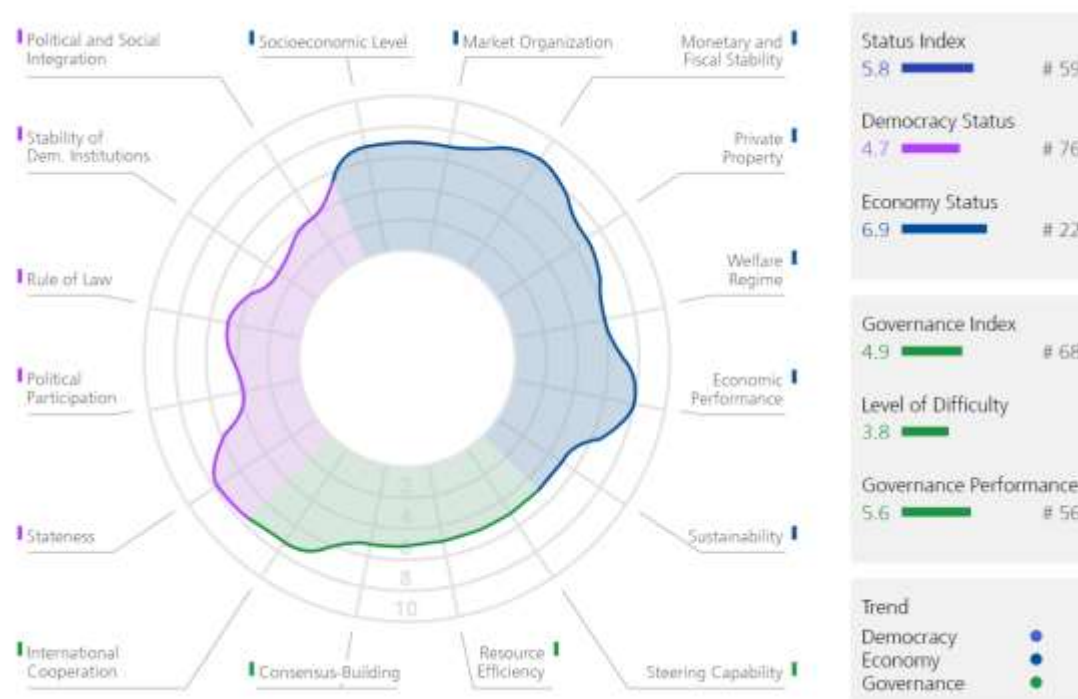


Source: International Monetary Fund 2022

Following the phenomenon of resource curse, as we see from Figure 1, Kuwait experiences “Dutch disease”. In this context, the appreciation of the currency due to resource exports makes other sectors of the economy less competitive. The outcome is a decline in non-resource industries, such as manufacturing and agriculture, further exacerbating economic imbalances and dependence on resource revenues.

In addition, Kuwait exhibits characteristics of a rentier state, in which the government derives a significant portion of its revenue from external rents, particularly oil revenues (93% of its revenues come from oil rents). As a result of rent-seeking behavior in Kuwait, the corruption rate is at high levels. As mentioned before, Kuwait operates under a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government. However, political parties are not officially recognized, and the executive branch dominates the National Assembly, as a result of the institutional framework that was formed by the 1962 Constitution. In short, the Constitution is not functioning in a politically sustainable environment. In other words, the rent-seeking behavior and ideology is destroying political institutions in Kuwait.

Figure 2 Political and Economic Transformation of Kuwait



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022

With regard to political transformation, Kuwait stands out as possessing the most open political system within the Gulf region (Berti & Guzansky, 2014). In 1962, the country adopted a written constitution and, the following year, established an elected National Assembly. The BTI 2022 report notes that this legislature is the longest continuously elected body among Gulf monarchies and is distinguished by its openness to vigorous and often contentious discussions on public matters. The National Assembly (Majlis al-Umma) possesses legislative powers, including the authority to dismiss the prime minister and cabinet members. Nevertheless, actual executive authority remains concentrated with the emir, who functions as both head of state and government. Since 2006, ongoing tensions between the executive and legislative branches have resulted in the dissolution of parliament on seven occasions (2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2016), underscoring a persistent power struggle. Although this institutional duality frequently leads to policy deadlock, it also fosters a level of political participation and public debate unprecedented in comparison to other Gulf states.

In terms of economic transformation, Figure 2 highlights that Kuwait's relatively high level of socioeconomic and human development- ranking 64th out of 189 countries- is primarily attributed to its substantial hydrocarbon wealth. The country possesses approximately 6% to 8% of the world's crude oil reserves. Oil and oil-related products account for an estimated 80% to 90% of Kuwait's total government revenue. This significant income from petroleum exports has enabled significant progress in key areas of human development. Additionally, Kuwait's economy is highly reliant on foreign trade. As previously noted, the majority of its exports are oil-based and predominantly directed toward Asian markets. Conversely, the country remains heavily dependent on imports to meet its domestic demand for food, consumer goods, and manufactured products (BTI 2022 Report).

Despite increased state revenues from oil exports and Kuwait's possession of one of the largest sovereign wealth funds globally- amounting to over \$590 billion in assets- the country has experienced a rise in budget deficits in recent years. Public debt slightly declined from 14.8% of GDP in 2018 to 11.8% in 2019. Nevertheless, efforts to expand non- oil revenue through taxation remain limited and face considerable obstacles.

The 2019 Global Competitiveness Report indicates that Kuwait has made progress in intellectual property protection, ranking 71st among 141 countries. However, the country faces significant challenges in advancing privatization. This difficulty is largely attributed to the private sector's heavy reliance on the rentier state system, as well as entrenched oligarchic structures, where a small business elite often safeguards and consolidates its economic privileges and interests.

As one of the world's wealthiest nations, the state is capable of taking the leading role in ensuring the well-being of its population (BTI 2022 report).

Cooperation Council states have influenced each other in many policy fields such as economic diversification (the implementation of renewable energy technologies and the decarbonization of oil refining processes, along with the development of digital infrastructure through the deployment of integrated 5G networks and the strengthening of state surveillance capabilities).

Unlike many other countries in the region, corruption is a subject of open public discourse in Kuwait. Since 2016, the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has marked a step toward institutional accountability, with efforts including the launch of the Kuwait Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2019-2020 aimed at investigating and addressing corrupt practices.

In terms of consensus-building, the national elite generally supports the transformation of Kuwait's economic model- from a dynamic state capitalism to one grounded in market economy principles- largely due to the anticipated expansion of business opportunities. However, this same elite resists reforms that may threaten their entrenched oligarchic privileges.

Kuwait's political and economic approaches also demonstrate a pronounced focus on external engagement. The country maintains active membership in numerous regional and international organizations, including the FAO, LAS, IMF, OIC, OPEC, the United Nations, and the WTO. Despite this, Kuwait has been relatively slow in aligning with international regulatory standards and enforcing related reforms, as demonstrated by the limited progress in the adaptation of Kuwait Vision 2035, introduced in 2017.

Geopolitically, Kuwait holds a strategically strategic position that links global markets across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. However, it exists within a volatile context marked by internal rivalries within the Gulf Cooperation Council, ongoing state fragility in Iraq, and the broader conflict dynamics between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Within this environment, Kuwait has maintained a stance of neutrality and is widely regarded as a mediator in the Saudi Iranian conflict.

Conclusions

Kuwait represents a country with medium vulnerability of resource curse, which means that shares geographical and cultural aspects with high vulnerability countries (high uncertainty) such as Iraq and Yemen, rather than with low vulnerability countries (low uncertainty) such as Norway and Canada. Economic diversification is essential for reducing dependency on oil and building a more resilient economy. Moreover, the geopolitical location of Kuwait has enabled it to develop diplomatic ties with countries interested in securing access to Gulf oil reserves. Institutions have facilitated cooperation among states, but high levels of corruption and security concerns of the

region lead the state to stagnation of its democratic institutional development and economic development.

5.2 Turkmenistan

History

The region of modern-day Turkmenistan has been inhabited since ancient times. It was part of the Persian Empire, and later the Parthian and Sassian Empires. In the 7th century, Turkmenistan was conquered by Arab armies, leading to the spread of Islam in the region. It came under the rule of the Seljuk Empire in the 11th century, followed by the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, during which much of the region was devastated. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Turkmenistan was part of the Timurid Empire, established by the Central Asian conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). During this period, art, architecture and culture flourished in the region.

In the 19th century, Turkmenistan was divided into various khanates, which were gradually absorbed by the Russian Empire. By the late 19th century, it became part of the Russian Empire as a result of the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Turkmenistan became a Soviet republic in 1925. It remained under Soviet rule until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. During this time, it experienced significant industrialization and urbanization, but also faced political repression and cultural suppression. In addition, in 1991, Turkmenistan declared independence from the Soviet Union. Saparmurat Niyazov, known as Turkmenbashi, became the country's first president and ruled until his death in 2006. His leadership was marked by authoritarianism. After Niyazov's death, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow became president.

Geopolitics

Turkmenistan is located in Central Asia, bordered by Kazakhstan to the northwest, Uzbekistan to the north and east, Afghanistan to the southeast, Iran to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the west. Its strategic geopolitical location makes it a crossroads between Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, contributing to its importance in regional politics and economics. Turkmenistan was situated along one of the main branches of the Silk Road. Its location was vital for trade between the civilizations of China, Persia, India, and the Mediterranean region. Cities, such as Merv (also known as Mary) and Konye-Urgench, were important stops along the Silk Road route.

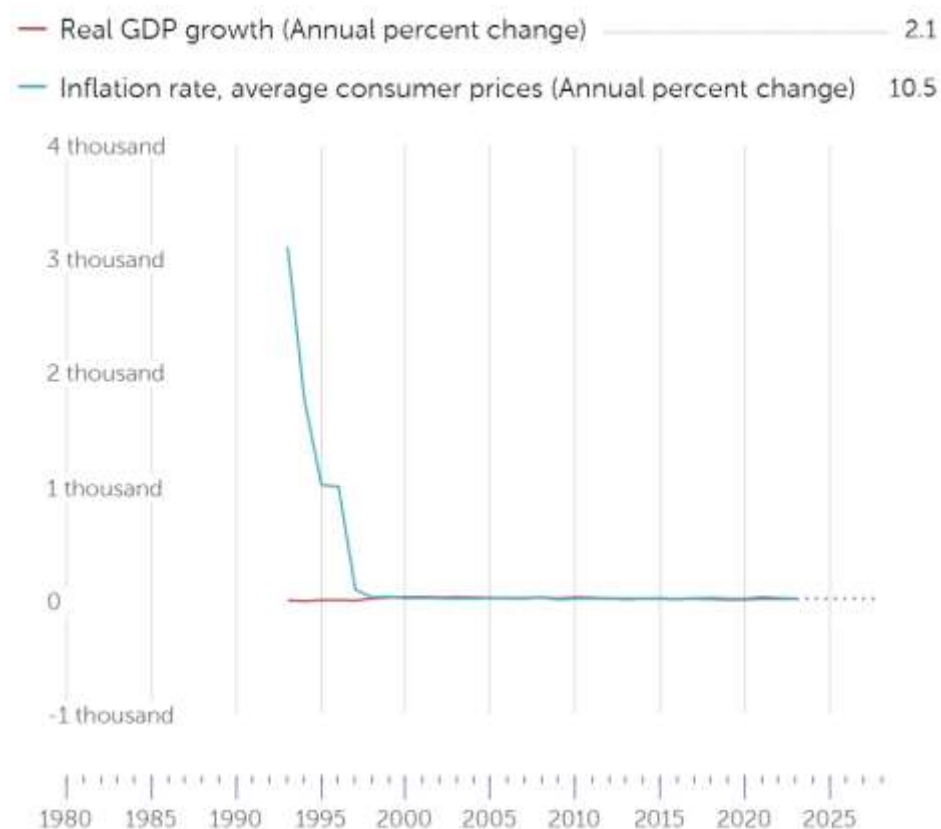
Given its proximity to major energy-producing regions and its access to the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan holds significant geopolitical importance in the context of energy geopolitics.

Economics

Turkmenistan holds the world's fourth largest proven natural gas reserves, making it a major player in the global energy market. These reserves are primarily located in the country's eastern region, particularly in the South Yoloten-Osman field, also known as Galkynysh, one of the largest gas

fields in the world. Its oil reserves are relatively modest compared to its natural gas reserves. Turkmenistan possesses oil reserves, primarily concentrated in the western regions of the country, notably around the Caspian Sea. According to the World Bank, the country has attained upper middle-income status, largely due to its hydrocarbon exports. Its leading export commodities include petroleum gas (\$9.21 billion), refined petroleum (\$1.28 billion), nitrogen-based fertilizers (\$585 million), crude petroleum (\$394 million), and electricity (\$165 million). The main export destinations are China (\$8.88 billion), turkey (\$884 million), Uzbekistan (\$664 million), Azerbaijan (\$460 million), and Morocco (\$193 million). On the import side, Turkmenistan’s key trade partners are the United Arab Emirates (\$1.22 billion), Turkey (\$1.08 billion), China (\$868 million), Kazakhstan (\$340 million), and Germany (\$203 million), with major imports consisting of manufactured goods, agricultural raw materials, and various other products. Turkmenistan’s inflation rate is approximately 10%, whereas the GDP rate is approximately \$40 billion USD.

Figure 3 Real GDP and Inflation rate of Turkmenistan



Following the phenomenon of resource curse, Turkmenistan heavily relies on its natural gas exports (a single commodity- lack of diversification) which forces the state to economic vulnerability to fluctuations in global gas prices. Moreover, Turkmenistan experiences lack of transparency in managing natural resource revenues and widespread corruption within the government. As a result, it has yet to create an inviting business climate for foreign investment and exacerbates inequality, ultimately hindering economic development.

In addition, the government of Turkmenistan exercises tight control over political institutions, media, and civil society. The ruling party, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, is the only legal political party which maintains control and stability through economic patronage and social welfare programs (outcome of the significant source of energy revenue).

Turkmenistan, also, faces significant social and infrastructure challenges, including limited access to basic services such as healthcare and education.

Figure 4 Political and Economic Transformation of Turkmenistan



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022

As showed in Figure 4, Turkmenistan exhibits one of the most authoritarian political systems globally. Fundamental human rights and civil liberties are consistently disregarded, and the country's economy functions under strict state control within a highly corrupt environment (BTI 2022 Report). Although the constitution formally outlines a separation of powers, this principle is not observed in practice. The executive branch exerts complete dominance over the legislative and judicial branches. President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who also serves as head of government, maintains centralized control and has the authority to dismiss senior civil servants at will. The country lacks functioning democratic institutions, with only limited indications of democracy observed.

Credible information on income inequality, such as the Gini index, is largely unavailable, but widespread poverty and significant disparities in access to social participation are evident. The state retains control over all major economic sectors, including oil and gas, electricity, cotton production and processing, telecommunications, and much of the manufacturing industry.

Turkmenistan's economy remains heavily centralized, and state controlled. The country lacks comprehensive anti-monopoly legislation, and while limited economic competition exists within the small and medium-sized private enterprise sector, these entities operate under strict state oversight.

Even private trade is subject to extensive regulatory control. According to the BTI 2022 Report, public procurement processes are largely non-competitive, with state tenders frequently awarded to firms closely connected to government officials.

Foreign direct investment is significantly hindered by restricted entrepreneurial and investment freedoms, weak legal protections, and pervasive corruption. Since 2015, the country's economic conditions have worsened due to a dramatic decline in exports. Important indicators reflect this downturn, driven by falling global prices for major export commodities such as natural gas, oil, and related products, as well as major disruptions in gas exports to key partners like Russia and Iran. Verified macroeconomic data remains elusive, as figures from international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank rely heavily on official government statistics which lack transparency. Additionally, credible information regarding the country's foreign reserves is unavailable.

Natural gas, oil and related petroleum products constitute approximately 90% of Turkmenistan's total exports. A significant shift in the country's energy trade occurred with the completion of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline in late 2009, which reduced Turkmenistan's reliance on Russia as its primary gas trading partner. However, this development also led to a growing dependence on China as the dominant purchaser of Turkmen gas. Although Russia continues to import gas from Turkmenistan has been promoting the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Nonetheless, the long-term viability of the TAPI project faces significant challenges and uncertainties that hinder its implementation (BTI 2022 Report)

From a governance perspective, Turkmenistan is confronted with major structural obstacles, including severe poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent deficiencies in the education and healthcare systems- largely stemming from the mismanagement of resource wealth. The state maintains an explicitly anti-democratic position, with no significant political actors, civil society groups, or interest organizations capable of promoting democratic governance. Political and economic decision-making is highly centralized, controlled exclusively by the president and the presidential administration. Turkmenistan's foreign policy is defined by its official position of permanent neutrality and seeks to maintain stable diplomatic relations with neighboring states, including Afghanistan and countries bordering the Caspian Sea. This strategy primarily aims to enhance economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, with a focus on natural gas and oil exports. However, ongoing issues related to inefficient governance and a lack of transparency continue to impede the country's broader economic development.

As far as international cooperation is concerned, Turkmenistan maintains tight state control over its engagements with foreign partners. While the country holds membership in key international bodies such as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the OSCE, and collaborates with various organizations that contribute to its economic and social development, its officially declared neutrality- adopted in 1995- effectively serves as a mechanism of self-imposed isolation. This policy is primarily aimed at preserving regime stability and limiting external political influence. In Central Asia region, Turkmenistan has lost the minor influence in the revival of region's cooperation. Bilateral contracts remain limited to a necessary minimum, focusing on imports and exports. (BTI 2022 report) In the case of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the state's government avoids any possible influence of the reformation and liberal processes of these countries into its own country. The cooperation between Turkmenistan and Russia experiences a period of restoration of military and political cooperation as a result of the cross-border threat of Afghanistan, the demand for technology for oil and gas production and, since 2019 the resumption of gas exports from Turkmenistan.

Over the past five years, diplomatic and economic relations between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have steadily reinforced. This cooperation is largely focused on the development of regional connectivity projects, including the expansion of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus- Asia (TRACECA) and the Lapis Lazuli corridor, which links Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Notable initiatives also include the planned installation of a fiber-optic cable along the Caspian Sea seabed between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, as well as ongoing discussions concerning the construction of a Trans-Caspian submarine gas pipeline- approximately 300 kilometers in length- that would facilitate the export of Turkmen natural gas to European markets via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

Conclusions

In the case of Turkmenistan, the international community has shown limited willingness to pressure the Turkmen government on human rights or democratization issues. The authoritarian regime serves the interests of the “core-countries” by maintaining the status quo dependency. Turkmenistan’s lack of political openness and institutional transparency acts a major barrier to its economic development.

5.3 South Sudan

History

Sudan, including what is now South Sudan, was colonized by the British and Egyptians in the 19th century. The British administered the south separately from the predominantly Arab north. This division was the cause of future conflicts. Following World War II, Sudan began to move towards independence. However, tensions between the predominately Arab-Muslim north and the largely Christian and animist south persisted. Southern Sudanese leaders demanded more autonomy, leading to intermittent conflicts with the central government. In 1955 until 1972, the first Sudanese civil war occurs. The Anyanya rebel movement, representing southern grievances, fought against the Sudanese government. The conflict ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, granting the south regional autonomy. The second civil war (1983-2005) was one of Africa’s longest and deadliest conflicts. The conflict ended in widespread displacement, famine, and humanitarian crises. In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement, providing for a referendum on independence for South Sudan. In 2011, South Sudan was established as an independent nation. In 2013, a political dispute between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar escalated into a new civil war, exacerbating the country’s humanitarian crisis.

Geopolitics

South Sudan is located in East-Central Africa, bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). It is located at the crossroads of East Africa and the Horn of Africa, where could be a potential transit route for trade and commerce. Despite the internal conflicts, South Sudan's elites are active regional actors. The country's resource potential is an invaluable diplomatic instrument. South Sudan's diplomatic commitments regarding energy and water are crucial.

East Africa is a vital region because of the Nile politics. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) being Africa's biggest infrastructure project and is constructed on the Blue Nile near Ethiopia-Sudanese border. This location is crucial for the diplomatic relations between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, and as a result South Sudan. Because of the dam's location, it is cheaper to export power to South Sudan than it is to transport it to Addis Ababa. In this context, Juba has an advantage, as "it has been exploiting regional rivalries and fluctuations in global commodity prices". This enhances South Sudan's ability to act and shape regional developments.

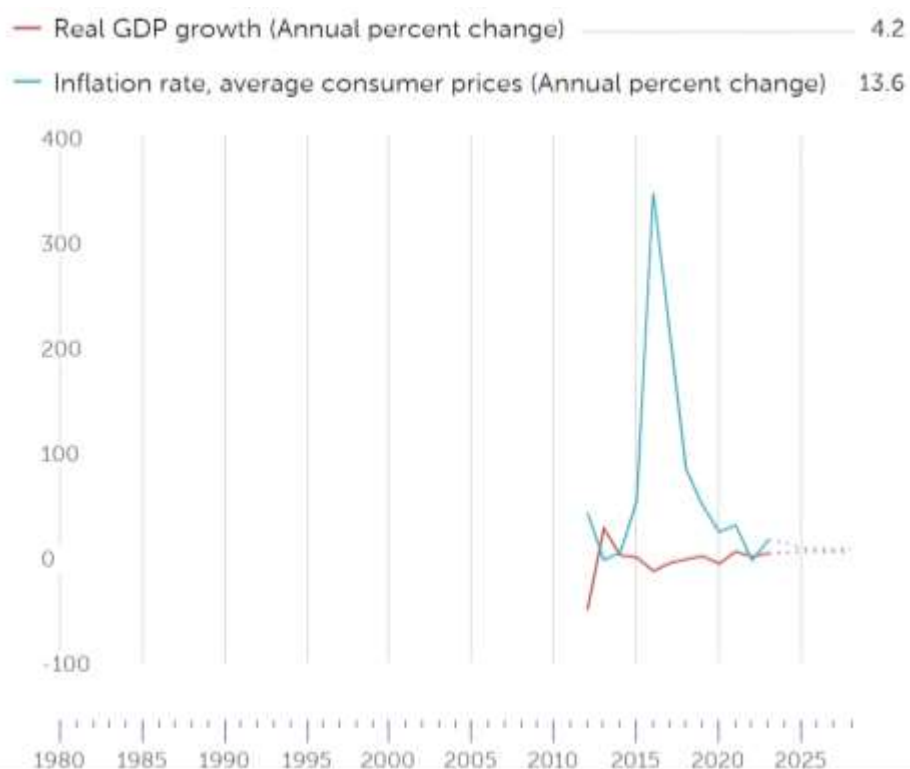
Economics

South Sudan's primary exports include crude petroleum (\$471 million), refined petroleum (\$24 million), gold (\$20.4 million), forage crops (\$15.2 million), and barley (\$2.98 million). The country's main export destinations are China (\$237 million), Italy (\$141 million), Singapore (\$67.2 million), Japan (\$49.6 million), and the United Arab Emirates (\$45.5 million).

Its top imports are Cars (\$32.6M), Knit T-shirts (\$29.5), Packaged Medicaments (\$25.9), Delivery Trucks (\$25.7) with top importers United Arab Emirates (\$364), Kenya (\$170), China (\$156), United States (\$38.5) and India (\$30.2).

South Sudan's inflation rate is 13.6% and the GDP rate is approximately 4.2%.

Figure 5 Real GDP and Inflation rate of South Sudan



Source: International Monetary Fund 2022

South Sudan represents one of the east Africa's most unstable countries. The corruption rate is at high levels, and the majority of the population lives in complete poverty. The country's elite is focused on the exploitation of energy and water reserves in the region, but this might not benefit most citizens. The humanitarian crisis following the civil wars and the extreme violent conflicts in the Upper Nile and Jonglei State, has been an unstable variable in terms of development. According to International Monetary Fund, 90% of South Sudan's revenues comes from oil. Its oil reserves are estimated at 3.5 billion barrels, becoming the third oil-rich country in sub-Saharan Africa, after Nigeria and Angola. Meanwhile, more than 80% of households depend on agriculture for their livelihood and the population is heavily reliant on humanitarian aid. Even though, in 2018 the Revitalized Peace Agreement was signed to secure the safety in the region, national stability has yet to be achieved. Beyond oil, South Sudan also has considerable potential for increased production of food and renewable energy like wind, solar and hydro. In addition, South Sudan is dealing with food price shocks and is receiving International Monetary Fund emergency financing in order to prioritize food or energy insecurity.

Figure 6 Political and Economic Transformation of South Sudan



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022

South Sudan is a newly established state, having gained independence through a referendum held in January 2011. The overwhelming voter turnout reflected deeply rooted tensions between northern and southern Sudan, shaped by longstanding divisions along regional (North -South), racial (Arab- African), and religious (Muslim- Christian) lines. Since independence, the country has remained in a fragile and precarious position, divided between conflict and peace. South Sudan ranks among the lowest in the world in terms of socioeconomic development. According to the United Nations Development Program, it is positioned 185th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index. The rule of law is largely absent, and corruption is difficult to assess due to the lack of clear separation between political, economic, and military power structures. The state is highly unstable, and the prospects for lasting peace remain uncertain. Although the transitional constitution formally establishes a presidential system with a separation of powers – outlined in Article 48- in practice, this separation is undermined by the extensive authority granted to the president. Furthermore, the government continues to operate in a prolonged transitional phase. Much of the national territory remains inaccessible to state authorities due to severe infrastructural deficiencies, further limiting governance and public service delivery.

The prolonged civil conflict, lasting seven years, along with the deteriorating security environment, has led many international aid organizations to withdraw from South Sudan. Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 6 of the BTI 2022 Report, the government's lack of transparency in managing and implementing donor-funded projects has prompted international donors to reduce direct financial support to the state. Political actors tend to align their behavior with the privileges and opportunities available to them while in power, often prioritizing personal or factional interests over institutional accountability.

World Bank data from 2009 estimated that approximately half of South Sudan's population was living below the poverty line. According to a 2020 report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 7.1 million individuals were in urgent need of international assistance.

The functioning of South Sudan's market is significantly constrained by weak rule of law, pervasive corruption, and persistent insecurity. Socially, the country faces additional obstacles due to extremely low levels of education and workforce skills. Although legislative measures such as the Investment Promotion Act and the Competition Act of 2009 were introduced to prevent monopolistic practices, the substantial involvement of high-ranking military and government officials in commercial activities has led to de facto monopolies in several sectors. Consequently, key industries are dominated by foreign actors: Somali traders largely control the petroleum sector, Ugandans and Kenyans lead in hospitality, Ugandans and Sudanese are prominent in construction, and Eritreans manage much of the water supply. Close ties with state authorities and military leadership are often a prerequisite for market participation.

Trade in South Sudan is liberalized; however, as a landlocked country, it relies heavily on neighboring states for the import of food and consumer goods. The northern regions primarily depend on Sudan for supplies, though political tensions make this relationship unpredictable. In contrast, the southern regions are supplied by Uganda and Kenya, with the Port of Mombasa serving as a critical gateway for imported goods.

One of the critical challenges facing South Sudan is large-scale land acquisition by foreign investors. Before the outbreak of the civil war, investors from the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, and various Arab and Western nations collectively held ownership over approximately 10% of the country's land- equivalent to around 2.5 million hectares- primarily for activities related to resource extraction, oil exploitation, and agricultural production.

South Sudan became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2012, though it has yet to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). It has been part of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) since 2011 and officially joined the East African Community (EAC) in April 2016. However, due to the outbreak and continuation of the civil war, the government has been largely unable to participate actively in EAC proceedings and has struggled to meet its financial obligations to the organization. Prior to the conflict, the South Sudanese government sought to strengthen economic ties with neighboring East African countries, particularly in the area of trade. Notable initiatives included proposals for the construction of an oil pipeline linking South Sudan to the Kenyan port of Lamu, intended to reduce the country's reliance on Sudanese pipeline infrastructure. However, the onset of civil war and subsequent global declines in oil prices significantly disrupted these plans, leading to a drop in oil production. Another proposed infrastructure project involved the development of a highway connecting South Sudan to the port of Mombasa to facilitate regional trade and transport. As of now, neither initiative has secured the necessary funding for implementation.

Inflation is affected by the state's high dependency on oil exports. In 2016, South Sudan suffered hyperinflation (379.8%) and managed to stabilize the rate of inflation to 187.9% in 2017, 83.5% in 2018 and 51.9% in 2019.

The near-total collapse of South Sudan's economy can be attributed to a combination of factors, including a sharp decline in oil production, a significant drop in global oil prices, and extensive government spending to finance the civil war. By 2019, public debt had risen to 65.4% of the country' (BTI 2022 report).

Conclusions

Following the resource curse, South Sudan is oil-rich country with high levels of corruption. Its location is important in the formation of east African relations. South Sudan is dealing with the aftermath of colonialism. The state as a geopolitical construct carries the influence of historical and cultural factors for centuries. This forms the behavior of the state in the international system. Its geopolitical location is the key to dominance. The extreme levels of corruption and the dominance of the ruling class's interests make it a high uncertainty state. As a result, in this framework, international cooperation becomes a prisoner's dilemma game.

5.4 Conclusions

Kuwait, Turkmenistan and South Sudan are three different examples of how the resource curse phenomenon has influenced their existence in the international community. They are oil and natural gas rich countries dealing with political instability. Political instability can be measured by the corruption of the country's elite (established authoritarian regimes, monarchy), internal conflicts, uneven distribution of wealth, and freedom of speech. The slow or no progress of political development is causing a slower progression of economic development. The variable of corruption and the low predictability of a state discourages international cooperation. On the other hand, each of these countries has a different influence on the international system. Depending on their geopolitical location, the countries' elites make the most out of their foreign policy advantages. In this context, the view of the resource curse should be examined in terms of structural geopolitics.

Chapter 6

Structural Geopolitics

Critical geopolitics emerged in response to traditional geopolitical approaches, which often portrayed states as unitary actors competing for control over territory and resources in a competitive and conflict-driven international system. By contrast, critical geopolitics challenges

these conventional notions, highlighting the ways in which geopolitical discourses are constructed, contested, and politicized. One key aspect of critical geopolitics is its focus on the role of discourse in shaping geopolitical narratives and practices; how dominant discourses of geography and territory are used to justify state actions, legitimize hegemonic power structures, and construct national identities.

6.1 Structural Geopolitics

According to Gearoid O Tuathail, geopolitics is power politics. Structural geopolitics is a sub-category of critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics studies the existing structures of power and knowledge, while considering cultural, political and regional characteristics, discourses. “The dynamics of globalization, informationalization and the proliferating risks” provoked by the evolution of technology across the earth. These three factors have changed the “dimensionality” and “territoriality” of geopolitics.

Structural geopolitics is the study of the structural processes (i.e. Globalization) that condition how all states practice foreign policy. In the context of globalization, the variety of different cultural and economic tendencies forces the unity of the world’s largest economies and “dissolves the ability of any single state to full control and manage its own economic destiny”. According to I. Wallerstein’s world- system’s theory, the global economy operates as a unified system characterized by unequal power relations and economic exploitation. The global economy is a capitalist world- economy, where capitalist relations of production govern economic activity. Capitalism drives the pursuit of profit and expansion, leading to patterns of exploitation and inequality within the world- system. More specifically, the world system is divided into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions. Core countries are economically dominant and industrialized, with advanced technology and high levels of wealth. Semi- peripheral countries have some industrialization and economic development but are not as dominant as core countries. Peripheral countries are economically dependent and less developed, often relying on exporting raw materials to core countries. The global division of labor allocates different regions and countries to specific roles within the global economy.

In addition, world- system theory emphasizes the historical development of the modern world- system, tracing its origins to the rise of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Historical processes such as expansion of European empires and the global development of global trade networks have shaped the current structure of the world- system.

6.2 Structural Geopolitics and resource curse

The phenomenon of resource curse may be analyzed within the framework of structural geopolitical factors. The rich North countries exploit the rich in natural resources countries of the South but keep the latter in undeveloped conditions in order to maintain the dominance in the region.

States' behavior reflects historical, cultural and strategic factors as they act as geopolitical actors. The social struggle which affects the internal stability and forms an unstable environment is the major similarity amongst these countries. Education and human rights are intensely oppressed. As a result, in the countries under study, the resource curse evolved into a poverty trap. States' power is of highly importance in key regions where the benefits of having control are plentiful.

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, critical theory identifies states as geopolitical actors who are highly influenced by their historical and cultural background. The world transformed into a capitalist and imperialistic system where the poor in resources countries have more benefits, exploiting the rich in resources countries. Political stability, democracy and human rights are important in maintaining each state its wealth. As a result, structural geopolitics focuses on the region each country locates and the behavior it develops according to its history and culture. Moreover, structural geopolitics provides a framework of how the distribution of power and resources across different regions forms international relations. The global landscape is presented as a complex and interconnected system where geography, economics, and political power are correlated. The location of the country in this system (core, semi-peripheral, peripheral state) determines to a large degree its influence and strategy in order to navigate and benefit from its advantages in the global system. Core countries often exert significant control over global economic and political structures, while peripheral struggle to assert their interests, often end up exploited. As a result, global power shifts, such as the rise of new economic powers or the decline of established ones, are reflective of deep changes in the structure of the global order.

In conclusion, the intersection of structural geopolitics and the resource curse underscores the importance of focusing on the systemic and structural factors that enhance inequality and underdevelopment. To escape from the resource curse, resource rich countries are in need of better governance, economic policies and challenge the power structures that maintain their dependency.

Chapter 7

7.1 Results

Kuwait is presented as a semi-periphery where it holds many characteristics of a slow development country, but it has secured a level of predictability as far as the political stability is concerned. In the context of geopolitics, and especially the MENA region, a territory of geopolitical significance, Kuwait has not the ability and capability to dominate due to the lack of economic diversification. Moreover, its neighbor, UAE, is also a large oil producer in the world. Turkmenistan's authoritarian regime contributes to the stagnation of economic development and serves the interests of the core- countries (China- Russia).

In South Sudan, as a former colony, remains the cultural norm of corruption and the colony behavior. The country's elite prevents its economic development as it conflicts with their interests. More specifically, in Kuwait the problematic relationship between the government and the elected parliament provokes policymaking difficulties that the country must deal with. On the other hand, Kuwait is the only state in the Gulf region which provides political participation and public debate. States which are included in the Gulf Cooperation Council have influenced each other in many policymaking fields such as economic diversification which is crucial for reducing dependency on oil resources and reforming a more resilient economy. United States have sought to secure their interests in Kuwait, prioritizing access to oil over the country's broader development needs. The 1990-91 Gulf War and subsequent U.S. military presence state as examples of how external powers have intervened in a region to maintain control over natural resources. The need to maintain security arrangements limits Kuwait's autonomy in foreign policy and forces it to align with the strategic interests of its more powerful allies, at the expense of its own long-term development. The role of institutions is of high importance as they have facilitated cooperation among states, but high levels of corruption and security concerns of the region have as a result the stagnation of democratic institutional development and economic development of the state.

Turkmenistan is unable to create an inviting business climate for foreign investment as a result of lack of transparency in managing natural resource revenues and widespread corruption within the government; also, it exacerbates inequality which prevents economic development. It also faces significant social challenges such as healthcare and education. As far as the foreign policy is concerned, the country follows neutrality and stable political tactics with its neighboring countries, including Afghanistan as well as the Caspian Sea states in order to expand its economic partners. In addition, Turkmenistan plays an important role in the "New Great Game". Its abundance of natural gas resources attracts the attention of major powers like Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union. Turkmenistan makes efforts to maintain balance in its relationships with Russia, China, and other powers to avoid over-reliance on any one partner. According to structuralist theory, this integration into the global economy does not lead to development or autonomy for the country, but instead reinforces its dependency on more powerful nations. Even though, Turkmenistan can be seen as a navigator in the competition among global powers, in reality, there are limits posed by the overarching power dynamics that define the global system.

South Sudan's socioeconomic development is extremely low and among the lowest globally. Despite its rich oil reserves, struggles with severe poverty, corruption, and instability. According to structuralism, these issues are a result of the country's position within the global system. Its economy is overwhelmingly dependent on oil exports, which are controlled by multinational corporations and foreign powers. This dependency maintains South Sudan undeveloped. It supplies raw materials to core countries, and at the same time, is unable to diversify its economy or develop domestic industries. The exploitation of oil resources by multinational corporations, often based in core countries, reflects unequal economic relationships. The profits generated largely benefit foreign entities and the local elite, while the majority of the population remains impoverished. The oil abundance has exacerbated corruption, with political elites exploiting revenues for personal gain rather than investing in public services or infrastructure. The instability and underdevelopment are highly perpetuated by the weak institutions. The overwhelming focus on oil has undermined the development of other sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, which sets the country highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. This lack of diversification is a consequence of the state's integration into the global economy in a way that prioritizes resource extraction over sustainable development. According to structuralist theory, the history of South Sudan is shaping its current situation. The borders, institutions, and economic structures imposed during colonial rule have left South Sudan with challenges that influence its position into the global economy. The

continuation of exploitative practices by global powers and multinational corporations can be viewed as a modern extension of these colonial dynamics.

As a result, under the prism of structuralism, the resource curse phenomenon is translated as a poverty trap. In the modern capitalist world, countries which developed as a result of imperialism exploit oil-rich countries and hinder their economic development in order to prevail in the international system.

7.2 Political stability and corruption

In the countries under study, political stability is doubted in many ways, either an authoritarian regime exists or the elites who are in power are corrupted. Taking into consideration the fact that they were colonies or were a part of an empire, they had a different evolution as states. The internal structure of the countries had a common characteristic, corruption. According to Rothstein and Uslaner, corruption is a phenomenon that seems to be very “sticky”. In other words, most empirical evidence shows that “once the system gets there, it stays there”. Corruption exemplifies a type of frequency-dependent equilibrium, in which the expected benefits of engaging in corrupt behavior are heavily influenced by the perceived prevalence of corruption among others (Bardhan, 1997). As North (1998) observes, a puzzling question remains as to why countries with institutional arrangements that hinder economic growth do not simply adopt the more effective frameworks employed by successful economies. There also appears to be a complex relationship between democracy and corruption. Research by Montinola and Jackman (2002) and Sung (2004) suggests that this relationship is curvilinear, indicating that the level of corruption does not decrease uniformly with increasing democratization. As a plausible explanation is that, despite having the institutional capacity to implement effective anticorruption measures, political leaders are often disincentivized from doing so, as they frequently stand to gain the most from the rent-seeking opportunities embedded within corrupt systems (Johnston, 2005). Warren (2004) contends that such systemic corruption within key institutions poses a significant barrier to democratic development. In a similar vein, Offe (2004) raises critical questions regarding the conditions under which countries become trapped in self-reinforcing cycles of institutional corruption. He further inquires what normative commitments, political interests, or structural incentives might drive efforts to reform such systems, and what motivations exist to establish mechanisms capable of restricting or regulating opportunity structures. According to North, Wallis and Weingast (2006), there is a division between universal and particularistic political cultures. The former labelled as a “limited access social order” and the latter which is characterized by “privileged access to valuable rights and activities” and “builds an inherent affinity in human nature for building personal relationship”. In the first category, an aristocratic- feudal state, a third world autocracy, or a prior Soviet communist state resembles these characteristics. In contrast, the “open access social order” resembles mainly the advanced OECD countries, characterized by “free access to political and economic arenas of competition using specific but impersonal contractual forms” (North 1998). The Weberian model of governance- characterized by impersonal procedures and rule-based contracting- constitutes the foundational norm of an “open access” or “universalistic” political culture or social order (Rothstein, 2005) According to Johnston 2005, in order to control corruption, the whole social order/ political culture has to change from the “limited access” to the different equilibrium characterized by impersonal-universal forms of exchange. Johnston emphasizes that

institutional reform must occur gradually, noting that the establishment of robust social, political, and state institutions is a long-term endeavor that unfolds over generations. Similarly, the Anti-Corruption Toolkit published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime highlights that transforming institutional cultures is a time-intensive process, as individuals entrenched in prior value systems must gradually come to accept and internalize new norms. In contrast, Rothstein argues that effective change requires comprehensive and simultaneous reform efforts. Drawing on Schelling's (1996) concept of a "tipping point", he asserts that reaching a new equilibrium in governance strategies are limited to incremental interventions or narrowly focused "entry points", they are unlikely to persuade a sufficient number of actors to abandon corrupt practices. Consequently, the system risks reverting to entrenched patterns of systemic corruption rather than achieving transformative change (Rothstein,2005). Empirical studies further support the view that the quality of political institutions is a key determinant of a nation's economic and social development (Mauro,1995; Rodrik, 1999; Rose-Ackerman,2004) Taking into consideration Myrdal's "soft state" in "Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations (1968)", the ruling elites are more interested in maintaining their own power and privileges than in pursuing the public good. This has as a consequence the tolerance for corruption, rent-seeking behavior, and the circumvention of laws, which in turn undermines the state's ability to function effectively. The term "soft state" refers to countries which lack political will and as a result public policies are weakly implemented, suffer from widespread corruption, and an inability to enforce laws and regulations. "In such states, the government often struggles to assert its authority effectively, leading to inefficiencies and failures in governance". Myrdal believed that these characteristics of a soft state prevent economic and social progress, especially in developing countries. In addition, Myrdal states that a crucial factor was colonial powers' destruction of many of the traditional of local power and influence and failure to create viable alternatives.

7.3 Conclusion

This dissertation tested the combination of resource curse phenomenon and structuralist theory. Taking into consideration the principles of structuralism, three countries were chosen according to their geopolitical location. Their economic development was at different stages in order to notice if resource curse evolves or the geopolitical environment affects the economic performance of the countries. All of these countries experience a slow economic development in correlation to political stability and high corruption rate. Structuralist theory posits that the social and economic structures of a nation are formed by its position in the global capitalist system where core countries dominate and exploit the peripheral ones. The resource curse phenomenon in the countries under study is affected by historical and systemic inequalities of the global economic order. Moreover, the unequal exchange relations perpetuate a form of economic colonialism, where resource rich countries captured in the economically periphery are trapped into exploitative relationships with more political and economically developed countries. These structures in the system and the global hierarchy prevent these countries from achieving sustainable development.

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