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in Security Culture,
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Kommentare (0)

Democracy, Upheaval and Energy Politics: the Trouble in Transformation

by *Chris Lee-Gaston*

As police with tear gas and water cannons fuel unrest across Turkey, it seems that many eyes are wearily cast over Europe's favourite neighbour, soon to join the list of potentially unstable Middle-East nations. Yet even as Erdogan's messy power play brings Turkey's democratic survivability into question, the nation's solar energy industry is breaking new ground and massive nuclear power capacity is quietly being prepared to relieve the nation's energy import dependency. In Brazil, riots breaking out over a transport price hike reflect the pressures of inflation and widespread corruption: an outburst fuelled by a long history of mismanagement and ineffective policy at state and federal levels. Nevertheless, big plans are underway for the expanding of Brazil's power grid, set to underwrite national economic growth into 2030 and beyond. Behind these gruelling scenes of democratic upheaval, lie two distinct cases of energy policy in the making, in spite of overt political turmoil. This post highlights two instances of critical energy policy, unfolding behind the scenes.

Erdogan's Energy Legacy: Focus on the Turmoil in Turkey

"2013 is expected to be a pivotal year for the Turkish solar industry" – the essence of this prediction about the nation's new solar capacity in **an article published in April**, is proving to be right, but for all the wrong reasons. The recent turmoil began on the 28th of May, as concerned citizens gathered in Istanbul's commercial centre of Taksim to protest the razing and redevelopment of Gezi park. However the national-political dimension has swiftly and clearly taken centre stage over the otherwise unremarkable initial protests and eclipsed most every other newsworthy political event across the nation. 2013 is turning out to be a pivotal year for Turkey, although largely because of the nation-wide protest movement and not because of the nation's historic attempts to put an end to its long history of import dependence in the energy sector.

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The Turkish government's continuing **endorsement of the use of force** is at the centre of current popular protest. It seems that Turkey's incumbent Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has tried to put Machiavellian politics into practice and such a grisly misjudgement may have just earned him an untimely retirement. Yet beyond the violent spectacle and alleged abuses of power, it is business as usual for Turkey's energy sector. Long-term policies continue to play out as the expected **tendering of contracts** for Turkey's planned national solar expansion commenced uneventfully in June. It also seems that the Erdogan government's international contracting to install a **national nuclear capacity** will proceed as scheduled.

These projects form part of a larger strategy to reduce the overall energy dependency of the nation, while also increasing overall capacity to cater for future economic expansion. In short, the policies being enacted now will influence every aspect the Turkey's future, from the economy to the ecology, for decades to come. These grandiose projects promoted by Erdogan and his ministers will stand years after the potential downfall of the government that envisioned them. Yet the significance of these crucial energy developments is lost amid the current democratic crisis.

With developing stakes in international electronics, automotive and arms industries, Turkey is expected to exhibit sustained growth, pushing the nation's private industrial sector towards political prominence. Domestically, expansion in retail construction and commercial infrastructure is underway: and let the irony not be overlooked in that Gezi park, the initial flashpoint of the current national crisis, was initially subject to protest because of plans to redevelop it into a shopping mall.

It remains to be seen whether or not Erdogan's government can maintain a hold on power after or even until the next election. However we can be certain that so long as there remain infringements of democratic process to protest and abuses of authority to decry, there can be no debate over the 4800 Megawatts of nuclear power being added to the grid, or the vital

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importance of the fledgling solar generation capacity that is supposed to accompany it. Yet such critical decisions affecting Turkey's future should be subject to public scrutiny and open debate: something quite impossible during the current political turmoil.

The Trouble in Brazil: Protest and Power Politics.

The situation in Turkey could well be surmised as obscuring the significance of national energy policy. However in Brazil, a comparable condition of public unrest is instead drawing attention towards the energy sector. Like the situation in Turkey, a seemingly innocuous case of public protest in Sao Paulo over a **price hike on public transport services** has become the stark face of an otherwise implicit dissatisfaction with the national state of affairs. As Brazil's decade-long resource boom slowly grinds to a halt, declining economic surety is intensifying the effects of systemic corruption and widespread mismanagement and protesters are calling the government to account. Yet new laws governing distribution of oil revenue, indicate changes in energy policy taking place, behind the nation's widespread public unrest.



Brazil's recent trouble began on the 6th of June, as a small group of activists took to the streets of San Paulo to protest a 7% increase in the cost of local bus fares. Just as in the case of Turkey's own localised unrest, the heavy-handed conduct of police was enough to escalate demonstrations irreparably and within a matter of days. The recent protests in San Paulo have also made waves, in the wake left by the aforementioned turmoil in Turkey. Having elicited wide coverage in the international media of late, commentators have been swift to draw links between the protests and a wider level of unrest within the South American nation. Behind the current trouble in Brazil stands a long history of endemic corruption and mismanagement that pervades both state and federal governments, as well as the commercial, industrial and energy sectors.

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Although current president Dilma Rousseff, has arguably been more proactive than her predecessors in combatting prolific state and federal corruption, such problems remain widespread. In response to the recent protests, sweeping corruption reforms, as well as increases in public funding for schools and hospitals are being hastily promised, on the back of yet-unsecured **future oil revenue**. This in particular is cause for concern, as the Brazilian government may also be caught out by **overconfidence** in estimations of the strength of potential revenue from oil, gas and other raw energy sources. The recent floundering and imminent collapse of one of Brazil's premiere oil and gas companies **OGX** amid failure to complete key projects, also speaks directly to the risks of sponsoring government spending with **speculative resource revenue**.

As caretaker of public resources, the national government must responsibly manage its energy assets to feed growing industrial capacity. However promised reforms based on oil revenue demonstrate both a historical shortage of responsible policy-making and a lack of foresight for future energy strategy and wider economic considerations therein. It is important to keep in mind that Brazil is a relative newcomer to the long-term planning of energy: with the first long-term national strategic plan for energy policy being released in 2007 with an intended projection of 25 years.

Introduced during Lula da Silva's presidency, **major projects** under this scheme include further hydro-electric capacity, a third nuclear plant in Angras dos Reis and a minority of wind-generated power as well as two significant network expansions, all scheduled for completion before 2030. Despite the current unrest, Brazil's chances to capitalise on its developing industry will benefit from this earlier directive within the energy sector, if it can overcome the entrenchment of an appropriative and self-interested temperament pervading governance on multiple levels.

Conclusion: More Energy Policy, Less Power Politics

In both Turkey and Brazil, key energy policy is currently being planned and implemented amidst turbulent political conditions. These strategies will reach well beyond the democratic mandates of current governments in both nations. In the case of Turkey, critical future energy developments and associated policy are being obscured by the public protest and sadly this may prevent an essential political discourse about the future of energy within the nation, as well as contributing to the interminable delay of Turkish hopes to join the EU.

In Brazil on the other hand, public unrest is rather being underscored by resource politics and further exacerbated by governmental mismanagement and current financial conditions. Within such a climate, it is doubtful that planned energy sector projects will receive the attention they deserve and economic growth may suffer because of this. The fact that energy policy is being used to offer imprudent placations to protesting citizens is a second cause for serious concern in the troubled South American nation.

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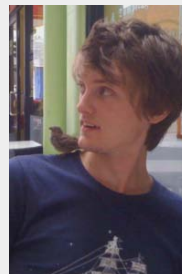
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In conclusion, when conditions of governance are so intolerable that people must take to the streets in protest, the tragedy is twofold: we should lament not only the failure of democratic functions to address the needs of citizens, but also the loss of an opportunity for open political discourse and a sensible application of long-term energy policy as an essential part of national development.

Christopher Lee-Gaston is 25 years old and a PhD student at Flinders University, South Australia. He is living in Germany since February 2013 in order to research the German and Japanese reactions to the Fukushima nuclear accident. He is interested mainly in energy policy, but also protest movements and the influence of Energy on society and governance.



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