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The role of natural resources in international relations in the 20th – early 21st century

Abstract. The availability of natural resources has always been one of the most important aspects of international relations, which have historically developed as a system of interconnections between different countries. However, there is a problem of natural resource scarcity in the world, thus, it is necessary to understand how markets influence national policies and how states can intervene and regulate the balance of natural resources and energy markets, which is the relevance of the study. The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of natural resources on the development of international relations in the 20th – early 21st centuries. To achieve this purpose, the study uses general scientific and special methods: historical, synchronous and diachronic, logical, analysis and synthesis, generalisation and quantitative comparison, scientific abstraction, and comparative analysis. The study established that the United States of America, South America and the Middle East had significant reserves of oil, natural gas, coal and precious metals. In addition, as noted, at the end of the 20th century, the issue of energy security was increasingly used to define international energy policy, and at the beginning of the 21st century, energy became one of the important aspects of geopolitics and an instrument of geopolitical competition. The consolidation of economic interests realised through the exploitation of natural resources is becoming the foundation for conflicts between different countries seeking to dominate the global resource market. It is established that the policy of the United States of America in the Middle East was based on an attempt to control natural resources, and in South America - on supporting its national interests. The practical significance of the study allows exploring key issues in international relations for an in-depth understanding of the balance of geopolitical forces in the 20th – early 21st centuries

Keywords: world economy; globalisation; economic system; competition; sources of raw materials

Introduction

The subjects of international relations are political collectives, each of which is characterised by its interests, political potential, and vision of contacts with similar communities. Each of these communities occupies a separate territory and constitutes a state. The states remain independent of each other, which is sanctioned by law. On the other hand, as countries come into contact and interact with each other, they have a mutual influence. The result is a network of complex connections and relationships, cooperation, and competition. Competition frequently results in conflicts that escalate into wars, sometimes ending in the fall of some states and the rise of others. Thus, international relations are dynamic, and their history is centred on the interaction between states.

According to M. Smělá and co-authors, modern international relations reflect the totality of relations between

state and non-state actors in political, economic, and social terms. During the complex process of interaction between individual members of international relations, many structures are established that determine specific development trends in the form of cooperation or rivalry, local, regional, and global tensions, and conflicts. These trends began in the 20th century and accelerated at the beginning of the 21st century due to the dynamic process of globalisation, which is spreading across the globe and influencing the development of a new balance of power in the international arena (Smělá *et al.*, 2022).

According to C. Mlambo, each state seeks to defend its interests to obtain and enhance its means of subsistence, establish trade networks and support the production and commercialisation of its goods. The issue of natural resources, including energy, has become an emerging issue in the international arena, both due to environmental

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changes and various existing disputes between states to obtain better commercial provisions in this regard (Mlambo *et al.*, 2022).

A. Majeed and his co-authors believe that access to resources – water, land, energy – is and has always been one of the most important aspects of a state's power. However, with the growth of industry, gradual scientific and technological progress, and the transition to fossil fuels, energy resources have become the most important in the development of countries (Majeed *et al.*, 2021).

Scholars such as J. Wang, M. Shahbaz, and M. Song believe that the crucial role of oil, which was most clearly manifested during World War II, when the course of hostilities depended on its stable supply and the production of sufficiently large quantities of fuel, laid the foundation for the modern economy (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

The situation at the end of the 20th century is frequently referred to as a crisis of raw materials, fuel, and food, which is confirmed by such scholars as E. Dogan, M. Majeed, T. Luni, etc. Then, a very high rate of growth in prices for basic commodities was recorded, which is seen as an external expression of the deterioration in the conditions for the reproduction of the global economy (Dogan *et al.*, 2022).

M. Usman and co-authors argue that the discovery of rich natural resource deposits and the beginning of their export will inevitably be associated with significant changes in the structure of the countries' economies, which will mean a new path for their development. After all, the fact of finding raw materials is an opportunity for significant changes in the socioeconomic life of a country, improving the well-being of its citizens, reducing poverty, expanding opportunities, and changing global relations (Usman *et al.*, 2022).

Thus, natural resources can represent great wealth and power for those states that possess them, as they determine both domestic economic growth and political and social growth. Thus, the study of the development of international relations of countries under the influence of natural resources is of great relevance.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to determine the impact of natural resources on the development of international relations in the 20th – early 21st centuries. To achieve this purpose, the following tasks were set: to establish the balance of natural resources in the international market in the 20th – early 21st centuries, and to determine to what extent the availability of raw materials affected international relations of the United States of America, South America, and the Middle East.

Materials and Methods

The theoretical foundation of the study was the main conceptual provisions, recommendations, and conclusions presented and substantiated in fundamental applied research by scholars in the field of international relations, works by leading scholars in the field of economic development, and the works of scholars on historical events of the 20th – early 21st centuries.

In the course of the study, theoretical methods of scientific research were used to identify and substantiate the deeper and more significant aspects of the historical phenomena under examination, and generally, scientific

methods of cognition were used to characterise the research process and historical events. They allowed for the systematisation of factual and historical material.

To identify the elements of international political relations and economics, the following methods were used: historical – to explore economic theories in the order of their historical and chronological origin, logical – to explore the evolution of concepts, notions, and theories, dialectical method of moving from the abstract to the specific, which includes general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction (in the process of theoretical understanding of problems), and is based on institutional and evolutionary approaches. In addition, the retrospective method was used to move from the effect to the cause, which allows adjusting knowledge about the general nature of the development of historical phenomena.

In addition, the study used a whole range of special and general scientific groups of methods, namely: theoretical generalisation (when working with literary sources and to summarise the results of the work), dialectical (to identify patterns of international relations), visual (to visualise the results of the study), grouping (to examine the totality of data), analysis (when defining the purposes and objectives of the study, and to analyse the collected information, concluding), abstraction (to determine the subject of the study), statistical methods (to express data), synthesis (to combine the knowledge gained into a single unit), scientific abstraction (in defining the essence of natural resources and international relations) and comparative analysis (to compare the results obtained).

In addition, synchronic and diachronic research methods were used to describe and analyse historical phenomena, and to explore the following aspects: natural resources as a factor in the military potential of the state, and natural resources as a cause of international conflicts.

The information base of the study includes data from the World Bank Database (World Bank, 2023), official materials and publications of the United Nations Commissions (United Nations Organization, 2023), and monographic and periodical scientific literature and the results of the author's research. The materials examined were analysed using the comparison and grouping methods, and the abstract and logical method, which was designed to examine the role of natural resources in international relations in the 20th – early 21st century.

In addition, to identify relevant issues related to the importance of natural sources of raw materials in the strategic policy of countries, and for a thorough analysis of the balance of natural resources, the study analysed the following indicators: the structure of world oil reserves at the end of the 20th century and the performance of the US steel industry over the past hundred years.

Results

Resource potential is the foundation of any country's economic development. The provision of natural resources determines the stability and spatial organisation of the territory and the dynamics and parity in the international economy.

In the early 20th century, the problems of raw materials and energy were already at the centre of international relations. The lack of resources is the threshold of global cataclysm and interstate confrontations, as the limited resources of the planet, including arable land and sources of raw materials, are a serious dilemma when it comes to the prospects for economic growth in the world.

According to scholars such as B. Graham and R. Jacob, in the early 20th century, international relations were characterised by a slow flow of goods, services, and capital. Notably, the 19th century saw the expansion of global production, trade, and rising living standards in Europe and North America. However, the First World War caused a breakdown in trade and financial ties, and the international economy collapsed during the Great Depression and World War II. Thus, as of the 50s of the last century, globalisation and the degree of integration of the world economy were at a low level (Graham & Jacob, 2019).

However, according to O. Vasilyeva and A. Libmanbc, countries such as the United States of America, Australia, Canada, and those that did not suffer military destruction were at a much higher economic level than Europe, the USSR, China, Japan and had more promising plans for future development (Vasilyeva & Libmanbc, 2020).

According to Z. Batool, the Middle East has always been considered a rich area for natural sources of raw materials, especially oil, non-ferrous metals, potash, chromites, etc. Thus, large oil deposits were discovered in the early 20th century in Persia and Kuwait. However, it soon became apparent that the entire region around the Persian Gulf and the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys in Iraq is abundant in these natural resources, and of high quality (Batool *et al.*, 2020).

As for the United States, according to N.F. Crafts, the country is capable of providing itself with gas, oil, uranium, gold, iron, titanium, silver, phosphorites, boron ores, potash salts, and other minerals (Crafts, 2000).

Natural resources and the ability to use them have always played a prominent role in the economy of each country. Thus, South America can be considered a rich global region. An example of this is Colombia with its abundance of resources (gold, silver, platinum, emeralds, oil, etc.), Brazil, where ferrous and non-ferrous metal ores are mined, Argentina with deposits of oil, natural gas, and brown coal, and Venezuela, a leader among countries with large oil reserves, which is rich in natural gas, diamonds, gold, iron ore, and coal (Fig. 1) (World Database).

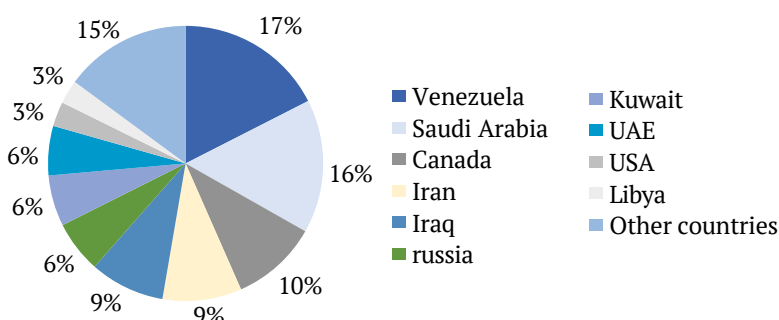


Figure 1. The structure of world oil reserves at the end of the 20th century

Source: World Database

Already in the early 20th century, steel became the most important industrial product and the backbone of modern technical civilisation. The rapid growth of the steel industry in the US, USSR, Japan, and European countries in 1950-1975 was largely driven by the arms race and post-World War II reconstruction. As for iron ore reserves, at the end

of the 20th century, the largest resources were in the USSR, the USA, Canada, and Brazil. At the beginning of the 21st century, international trade in ferrous metallurgy products gained significant momentum, which contributed to the levelling of global quality standards and major changes among producers and consumers (Fig. 2) (World Database).

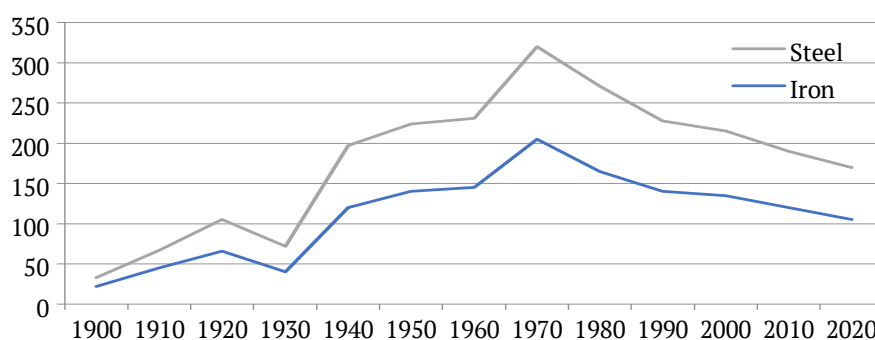


Figure 2. US steel industry performance, million tonnes (1900-2020)

Source: World Database

M. Dunne notes in his scientific works that starting in the mid-20th century, the oil demand began to grow, especially when the US's resources began to decline due to demand from the growing economy of the US military and the lack of access to oil threatened economic collapse. Therefore, US policy towards the Middle East has never been accidental. This region was perceived as key to the realisation of US strategic interests. Over the next decades, it was geopolitics determined the strategic purposes and interests of the United States in the Middle East. The US-Soviet rivalry for influence during the "Cold War" significantly contributed to the intensification of the US government's interest in this part of the globe, both in declarative and practical terms. Since the end of the Second World War, the Middle East has been forever inscribed in the dominant concepts of US foreign policy (Dunne, 2000).

Before the Second World War, the US interest in the Middle East was limited to economic issues. The American presence in the region was the result of the activities of private international companies related to energy and the financing of Jewish emigration. Only World War II Reassessed American political opinions on the Middle East. Oil has come to be perceived as a strategic resource necessary for military and economic activities and as a guarantee of US security.

J.H. Michaels argues that US policy towards the Middle East was closely connected with the global, political, and military doctrine of the United States. Three of the American foreign policy doctrines proclaimed in the post-war period were specifically related to the Middle East and adjacent territories (the Truman, Eisenhower, and Carter doctrines), while the fourth, Nixon's double pillar policy, was addressed specifically to the Gulf states: Iran and Saudi Arabia. The purpose of all the doctrines was to protect the strategic, economic, and political interests of the United States in the region, especially in the face of changing socio-political conditions in the Middle East and the potential expansion of the USSR into this territory (Michaels, 2011).

H.G. Huntington, in his study of the international economy, notes that by the end of the 20th century, prices for raw materials and foodstuffs began to rise significantly around the world, and the financialisation of the economy, which involves the transformation of goods into specific financial assets in demand, is emerging. It was in 1973-1974 that the "oil price shock" caused an almost fourfold increase in oil prices, and oil-importing countries found their import costs to be significantly higher (Huntington, 2017).

R.J. Samuels notes that the United States of America is the country whose military commitment to ensuring the stability of the global energy market is the most visible. Thus, President Carter, proclaiming a new foreign policy doctrine in 1980, officially announced that the United States was ready to use all necessary means, including the military, to protect its strategic interests in the Persian Gulf region. Earlier, in 1945, President Roosevelt assured the King of Saudi Arabia that the survival and security of the kingdom were in the interests of the United States. In exchange for protection, the Americans gained access to rich oil deposits. Referring to this historic pact, in 1990, Secretary of Defence Richard Cheney recognised it as a key factor in US intervention in the region and openly added

that the most important reason for US military intervention was the country's energy resources (Samuels, 2023).

US-led forces tasked with monitoring and protecting strategic waterways were present in all key oil transit regions, from the Persian Gulf through the Indonesian archipelago and the South China Sea to the Mediterranean. In addition, the United States is strengthening the safe transportation of raw materials by land. For example, in the Caspian Sea region, at the initiative of the Bush administration, the Americans are seeking to establish a special detachment of US troops - the Caspian Guard - to guard the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Another example is the establishment of AFRICOM (U.S. Africa Command) in February 2007. This step means that Africa's strategic importance for the United States is growing. Ensuring the stability and security of African countries through military presence, including in oil production and transit regions, will be even more important for the United States, as it intends to import about a quarter of its oil imports from the continent by 2030 (Liu *et al.*, 2020).

Notably, at the beginning of the 20th century, the relationship between society and nature was purely economic and commercial. The interaction was established between states based on large-scale exploitation to respond to the demands of a society that required more and more goods and resources, to strengthen the culture of progress based on material things.

In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the issue of resource security continued to be a factor in relations between different states. Thus, the trade rapprochement between China and South America is emerging, which indicates success in strengthening and diversifying international relations. In addition, it provides grounds to believe that a fundamental step has been taken for uniform economic growth focused on increasing investment in resource exports to Asian markets, a new and large resource that may represent a new territorial dispute over the so-called "blue gold", i.e., water.

According to J. Scarfi, in the 1940s, the United States began to finance the study of strategic mineral deposits in South America. And since the end of the Cold War, South America has undergone significant political, economic, and social changes. In the 1980s, South America's cooperation with the United States was the most important, as the United States accounted for 45% of imports and more than half of investments. It was based on the Monroe Doctrine, announced in 1823, which was intended to provide the principles of US policy towards South American countries, making the United States the leader in the region's international affairs (Scarfi, 2020).

The scientific works of E. Bah and M. Aaditya noted that in the 1990s, South American countries began a process of systemic transformation and implemented several economic reforms that had a positive impact on the growth of their importance in international relations. Brazil - the largest American country, is considered a developing country and acts as a regional power. South American countries such as Chile and Mexico, or in Central America, Panama, are striving to become increasingly important players in the market of international economic relations, and South

American cooperation is intensifying not only with the region's conventional partners but even with the European Union. The agreement on the establishment of a joint free trade area in the first decade of the 21st century, signed in 1995, is a testament to this fact (Bah, 2011; Aaditya, 2020).

Notably, against the backdrop of global integration and intensification, international relations are intensifying, resulting in accelerated growth in global production, international flows, the emergence of industrialisation, and the emergence of new players in international relations. However, notably, it is industrialisation that is causing political confrontations that may pose a threat to future economic success in the early 21st century.

Thus, natural resources had a significant impact on the development of international relations in the 20th - early 21st century, as they were the foundation for partnerships between different states, and energy resources are key elements of foreign policy in states' efforts to expand their influence abroad.

Discussion

Land and its resources are valuable assets and sources of economic, social, and cultural development and wealth for any country. Together, soil, water, and natural resources are of great significance to those who own them.

Thus, Y. Kusunose and M. Tufail, along with their co-authors, note that a country, due to its natural resources, gains advantages that allow it to weaken the enemy or make it dependent on itself. The current importance of energy resources in the era of energy transformation and the role of hard and lignite coal in the global balance is changing. Therewith, new technologies, and renewable energy sources are developing, which are becoming increasingly important and will determine the future of the energy sector in the long run, as established in the study (Kusunose *et al.*, 2020; Tufail *et al.*, 2021).

In the middle of the 20th century, the globalisation of the economy emerged, which was associated with the necessity to solve several socio-economic, political, scientific, and technical problems. It is a global problem of war, along with environmental, energy, fuel and raw materials, demographic, and food problems.

The results of the study are confirmed in the scientific works of J. Rahimi, who notes that in the first half of the 20th century, there was a development of American interests and political, military, and economic participation in the Middle East. In the US military plans of the second half of the 1940s, the Mediterranean area and the Middle East were listed as priority areas along with Western Europe and Japan. They emphasised their raw material value, which should remain beyond the reach of the USSR (Rahimi *et al.*, 2021).

According to M. Pesaran, the planning of the post-war era was based on several assumptions, the main ones being that the United States would emerge from the war economically strong, while European countries and Japan would be economically devastated and would require a lot of time and resources to recover, and that multilateral cooperation within the institutional structures of states would remain an important aspect (Pesaran *et al.*, 2001).

T. Vonyó argues that in the period after the end of World War II until 1973, the world economy was characterised by the growth of international trade, and there was freedom of financial flows among industrialised countries. After all, during the 1960s, private capital flows between the United States and European countries began to grow rapidly. However, due to rising inflationary pressures, commodity prices began to rise in 1972-1973. It, however, was associated with structural disruptions in the economy (supply and demand, deterioration of reproduction conditions on a global scale, etc.), as demonstrated by the results of the study (Vonyó, 2019).

J. Scarfi notes that South America entered the era of industrialisation around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but the subordination to a narrow specialisation, namely the production of raw materials for export, resulted in its dependence on the international economic situation, and a severe decline in industrial production in 1929-1933 led to the collapse of the region (Scarfi, 2020).

In addition, the study correlates with the scientific statement of R. Łaciński, who determines that the reason for the development of the international order in Latin America may be the geopolitical and economic rivalry of supra-regional or world powers. The United States is at the top of the list of forces that can influence geo-economic and geopolitical relations in Latin America, as the European Union, burdened by many internal problems, has less and less to offer Latin America (Łaciński, 2017).

However, as Z. Su and Umar D. Xu along with their authors, already at the end of the 20th century, economic integration in Latin America changed its meaning from the policy of state protectionism to the liberalisation of international trade and economy and an important aspect was its accession to a single world economic complex and the growth of internal regional cooperation (Su *et al.*, 2021; Umar *et al.*, 2022).

U.K. Pata believes that there is a strong correlation between natural resources, international relations, and the understanding of global security. First of all, the energy interests of the largest and most influential consumers in the global energy market are driving them to increasingly intervene with armed forces in those parts of the world where oil and gas are supplied to the world market, such as Africa, Asia, or the Middle East. Such involvement usually appears as protection of raw material transit routes. Secondly, the high demand for hydrocarbon fuels and the simultaneous competition for them among importers is a factor that largely determines the emergence of conflicts over raw materials in these regions. It is the most vivid expression of the connection between energy relations and other areas of international relations, including war and peace, which is confirmed by the study (Pata, 2021).

The results of the study are echoed in the works of B. Charbonneau, who argues that at the beginning of the 21st century, the world's leading industrialised countries, which accounted for 15% of the world's population, controlled more than 70% of the world's resources, production, trade, and consumption. Therewith, some of them openly ignored the interests of other countries and humanity in general, such as the United States, which consumes the

lion's share of the world's fuel and energy resources and, therewith, withdrew from the Kyoto Agreement on Environmental Cooperation. The events in Iraq in 2003-2007 demonstrated that the United States considers it quite possible to use military force in the struggle for global resources (Charbonneau 2021).

In addition, energy is an essential resource. Several scientists such as B. Graham, L. Yuping, M. Usman, etc. agree that global energy demand began to grow at the beginning of the 21st century and will continue to grow rapidly. The energy security of the state is an interdisciplinary, multifaceted, and strategic issue, especially in times of change, challenges, and threats. In the political context, geo-economic rivalry includes energy resources and economic instruments used to achieve strategic purposes, which is reflected in the study (Graham *et al.*, 2019; Yuping *et al.*, 2021; Usman *et al.*, 2022).

Although the purpose of future global competition will remain to secure access to oil and gas sources and transportation routes, its scope will expand significantly, and it can occur on many fronts, in different regions of the world, and between different subjects. Moreover, the more countries seek to gain strategic access to sources of raw materials, the greater the risk of destabilising developing countries.

The actions of states to ensure energy security is an important factor influencing their foreign policy and relations with other countries. However, the scale and intensity of these activities depend on the specific international context, including relations between importers and exporters, market trends, and the level of awareness of countries about potential energy security challenges and threats. As a result, energy resources, being at the centre of interests of countries, especially superpowers, on the one hand, allow redefining their relations and contribute to the establishment of regional alliances, and on the other hand, they are becoming the subject of international competition in many regions of the world. For these reasons, the structural changes that occurred at the beginning of the 21st century in the international energy market, along with the growing scale and intensity of threats to energy security and the increasing level of interdependence between individual market participants, have serious geopolitical consequences.

Conclusions

Natural resources have always been considered real or potential sources of wealth and have become important for states, and the issue of resource endowment has been one of the most important prerequisites for political stability and economic development for countries.

By the end of the 20th century, access to natural resources was becoming increasingly important in international relations, which caused conflicts that eventually became part of the globalisation process. Thus, since the 1970s, oil producers have decisively entered the international arena, and fluctuations in natural resource prices have encouraged or deterred states from initiating conflicts.

Energy and geopolitics have always been closely connected. In the 20th century, access to natural resources determined the possibilities of resolving and, therewith, settling major conflicts. Oil has become the main energy resource in developed countries after the Second World War, especially in transportation and manufacturing, as about 40% of global energy consumption is accounted for by oil, which dominates the commodity market.

Throughout the 20th century, the security and wealth of the United States were based on a strong economy, military superiority, promotion of open trade, economic cooperation, and building regional security systems. Notably, the availability of significant military force and the demonstration of determination to use it unilaterally in any region of the globe is considered a prerequisite for protecting US national security interests and spreading American influence globally.

The Middle East was besieged by international conflicts related to oil and gas production. For many years, the United States has been trying to influence strategic areas of the Middle East in an attempt to control natural resources.

The US policy towards South American countries was based on subordination and adherence to the principles imposed by Washington, which in practice manifested itself in the establishment and support of dictatorial regimes in which the United States openly pursued its national interests.

Thus, the dynamic growth of the demand for limited natural resources is increasing, which may increase tensions between states competing for them. The practical significance of the study allows tracing the main aspects in the development of international relations of the 20th - early 21st centuries to understand the alignment of geopolitical forces under the influence of natural resources. Prospects for further research may include an in-depth study of the impact of natural resources on international relations between Europe and Asia and consideration of ways to overcome resource shortages.

Acknowledgements

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Роль природних ресурсів у міжнародних відносинах у XX – поч. XXI ст.

Анотація. Забезпеченість природними ресурсами завжди була одним з найголовніших аспектів міжнародних відносин, що історично склалися як система взаємозв'язків між різними країнами. Проте у світі існує проблема дефіциту природних ресурсів, тому необхідно зрозуміти як ринки впливають на політику держав, і як держави можуть втручатися і регулювати баланс природних ресурсів та енергетичні ринки, що становить актуальність дослідження. Мета дослідження полягає у тому, щоб визначити вплив природних ресурсів на формування міжнародних відносин у XX – поч. XXI ст. Задля досягнення мети використано загальнонаукові і спеціальні методи: історичний, синхронний та діахронний, логічний, аналізу та синтезу, узагальнення та кількісного порівняння, наукової абстракції, порівняльного аналізу. В результаті дослідження встановлено, що Сполучені Штати Америки, країни Південної Америки та Близького Сходу характеризувалися наявністю значних запасів нафти, природного газу, кам'яного вугілля та покладів цінних металів. Також зазначено, що в кінці XX століття питання енергетичної безпеки все частіше використовується для означення міжнародної політики в енергетичній галузі, а вже на початку XXI століття енергетика стала одним з важливих аспектів геополітики та інструментом геополітичної конкуренції. Закріплення економічного інтересу, реалізованого через експлуатацію природних ресурсів, стає ґрунтом, з якого беруть початок конфлікти між різними країнами, які прагнуть домінувати на світовому ринку ресурсів. Встановлено, що політика Сполучених Штатів Америки на території Близького Сходу базувалась на спробі контролю за природними ресурсами, а у країнах Південної Америки – на проведенні підтримки своїх національних інтересів. Практичне значення дослідження уможливорює дослідити ключові питання у міжнародних відносинах задля поглибленого розуміння розстановки геополітичних сил XX – поч. XXI ст.

Ключові слова: світова економіка; глобалізація; економічна система; конкуренція; джерела сировини