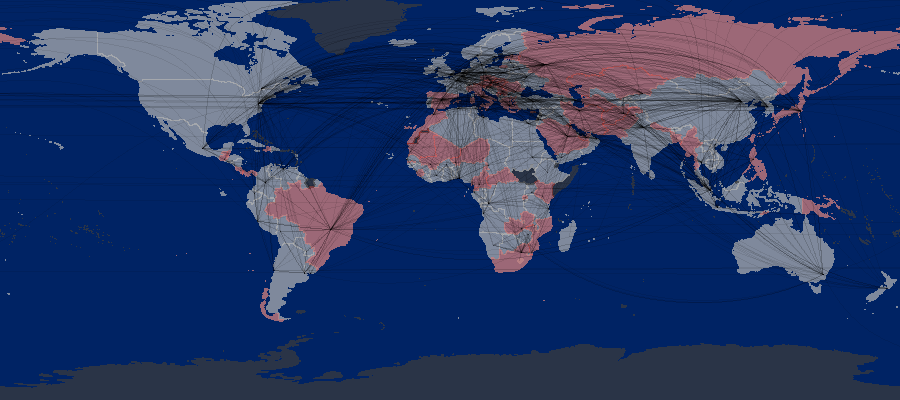
TOWARDS UNCONVENTION ANALYTICS FOR ENERGY SECURITY

Applying a data-driven computer simulation to forecasting energy security risks



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TARGET AUDIENCE: Policy analysts who are either producers or consumers of forecasts of international energy security.

**I. KEY POLICY QUESTION**

What risks to oil security are posed by cascading political supply shocks? Can they be identified using a computer simulation?

# II. EXSUM

Energy security is placed at risk when energy producers experience internal or external crises or conflicts. Crises in major consumers may also pose a risk for major producers who depend on energy prices for internal stability. The contagion of conflict from country to country increases the risk of widespread disruptions to the international oil system. Such risks may be mitigated by stockpiles and excess capacity. A computer simulation encodes these assumptions, combines them with data on the present international oil trade network, and generates ranges of notional future outcomes. It indicates that countries with limited trade relationships are most vulnerable to energy risks, that stockpiles are sufficient to address the majority of short-term shocks but that the probability of large-magnitude shocks must also be accounted for.

# III. TIME FRAME: Simulating the Long Present

The structure of the international oil markets change slowly. Major trade relationships remain largely stable from year to year, while reserves are discovered, brought online, and depleted slowly. While the root causes of crises (domestic grievances, regional instability) also change over years and decades, crises themselves can break out rapidly, with little warning. While some crises may go on for years (such as the Iran-Iraq war) others may end in weeks (the Venezuela general strike). Thus, the model simulates what I call the Long Present, the continuation of the current structure of the international oil system into the near future. Each tick of the model simulates one month, and each model run is 5 years (60 months) long, capturing the medium-term impact of short-term events.

# IV. ASSUMPTIONS

## SUPPLY SHOCKS

One key mechanism tying geopolitics to energy security is the mechanism of supply shocks. Generally speaking, a supply shock refers to a rise in oil prices due to an active disruption in production. Recent research suggests that oil prices are only loosely linked to supply disruptions [[CITE]], due to anticipation and speculation. Nevertheless, oil prices themselves are only an incomplete measure of energy security: if a major source of oil is disrupted, that oil (and the energy it contains) is unavailable. The majority of significant supply disruptions of the past decades have been driven by conflict and instability, from general strikes (Venezuela 2002-03) to all-out war (1980-88 Iran-Iraq War). It is such disruptions that this model focuses on.

*See Appendix B for more detailed overview of the model.*

# V. ANALYSIS

## DRIVERS

The model is instantiated with data representing the current state of the world, which will remain fixed throughout the course of each model run. These data represent the 'drivers' of the analysis, the geopolitical and energy environment within which countries operate. The model describes the world in the following ways:

* THE OIL TRADE NETWORK is obtained from oil imports reported in the UN COMTRADE database for 2012.
* OIL SUPPLY AND DEMAND begin at total imports and outputs. For the top 10 oil producers, I incorporate IEA estimates of their consumption of domestic production.
* POLITICAL INSTABILITY data was obtained from the Economist Intelligence Unit's Political Instability Index [[CITE]]. Probabilities are set such that a country with a Political Instability Index value of 10 (the highest possible value) has an overall 80% chance of entering crisis over a two-year period.

There are two special cases, contagion and assistance, which remain fixed throughout each model run but may change between them, in order to model different ideas of how the world works:

* CONTAGION is the spread of instability or conflict. The topic of whether (and how) internal unrest spreads from country to country is still under active debate within the political science literature [[CITE]]. Thus, the model explores both futures where conflict contagion occurs and when it does not.
* ASSISTANCE here is the ability of major oil exporters to rapidly increase production in order to counterbalance loss of secure oil elsewhere in the system.

## VARIABLES

Energy security is determined by many variables that change over time. Some of these variables are under countries' control, some involve the complex interactions between countries, while others still depend on the varagies of chance and science. Only a small subset of these variables have been incorporated into the model to date, but there is no reason that more could not be included as well.

### MODEL VARIABLES

* CRISES are the key variable that determines each country's energy security at different times. In the model, crises arise at random as described above: countries cannot intentionally affect or prevent them. Theoretically, however, a country's ability to prevent crises is factored into its stability index. Thus, crises can be treated as occuring when these efforts fail.
* LENGTH OF CRISES is randomly drawn from a power law distributions. Powe laws are known to characterize inter-state conflicts, terrorist attacks, financial crises and other complex events. Power laws have small-magnitude events more likely than large-magnitude ones, with an important caveat – the large values remain possible, and in fact may be arbitrarily large.
* ENERGY SECURITY is a measure of a country's current condition, rather than a variable that is strictly under its control. Nevertheless, a country's energy security is an input into several of the following variables, and so I will describe these measures here first. Energy security is measured in two ratios:
  + **Import Demand / Supply** is the primary measure of energy availability. It is simply the ratio of a country's (fixed) total demand to the sum total of its imports from countries that are not currently in crisis. The baseline for this ratio is 1. As oil sources enter crisis, the ratio will increase, as demand outpaces safe supply. If another country increases its oil production (as described below), the ratio may dip below 1. This captures situations when a release of reserves may in fact create a glut of oil, particularly in countries which are less affected by ongoing crises. If the ratio rises above a predefined threshold, a country is considered to be experiencing a SUPPLY SHOCK.
  + **Export Demand / Supply** is a measure mostly relevant to large oil exporters, and measures the ratio of overall production-for-export to the demand by trade partners who are not themselves currently in crisis. This measure is primarily in place to capture the risk posed to major exporters by demand shocks [[CITE]], which risk pushing the price of oil below a break-even point [[CITE]].
  + In addition, the model tracks a global **Current Demand / Current Supply** ratio: the sum of demand from all countries not currently in crisis divided by the sum of all exports from countries not currently in crisis. This is meant as an approximate proxy for the price of oil.
  + OUTPUT RESERVE refers to countries' ability to *rapidly* increase oil output in response to a crisis. The main country for which this is relevant is Saudi Arabia, which has claimed an ability to increase output by up to 25% if needed. This ability is modeled as follows: if country B imports oil from country A and experiences a supply shock, AND country A is not itself in crisis, A will increase its output with a probability equal to B's share of A's exports. Thus, the more important B is to A, the greater the likelihood that B will assist it. The production ramp-up is temporary, and will cease as soon as A ceases to experience a supply shock. Since oil is fungible, this temporary increase in production affects not only the country in supply shock, but all of A's trade partners.
  + CONSUMPTION OF DOMESTIC PRODUCTION refers to the fraction of domestic consumption coming from domestic production -- in other words, the fraction of demand that is secure from external supply shocks. While treated as fixed in the model (at least from run to run), in reality this is a variable that many countries do have control over. In practice, this variable is primarily relevant to countries where oil production is large relative to domestic demand. Note that making this tradeoff is not simple: it requires long-term investment in refining and storage capabilities, and may involve giving up some of the financial and geopolitical benefits of oil exports in exchange for the increased insulation from external crises.

### OUT-OF-MODEL VARIABLES

As noted above, many variables that influence a country's overall energy security are not included in this model. Some of the major ones:

* NON-OIL ENERGY: Diverse energy sources (coal , natural gas, nuclear and renewables) are likely to reduce the impact of oil supply shocks, while also introducing different risks and vulnerabilities. Countries may also actively seek to rebalance their mix of energy sources in order to mitigate risks. Thus, energy diversity is likely to decrease the overall energy risk estimated in this model.
* OIL TRANSPORTATION: This model does not incorporate the routes that oil takes from exporters to importers, and the chokepoints present on those routes (e.g. the Straits of Hormuz or the Panama Canal). This suggests that the model presented here will underestimate the systemic risks posed by crises in these regions.
* INTERVENTIONS: Major oil consumers in particular are likely to take action to mitigate many major risks to their oil imports, even far from their own borders. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the 1991 Gulf War, waged at least in part to avert a more serious crisis in Middle Eastern oil production. This is partially captured by the model, to the extent that it may randomly generate sets of crises corresponding to such scenarios, and that they are likely to be of short duration. However, the likelihood of intervention may be driven by a large variety of factors and diplomatic, military and geopolitical considerations wholly exogenous to the oil trade. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether the model is over- or under-estimating the risks by ignoring interventions. However, I argue that given this uncertaintly, the model generates a range of scenarios wide enough to implicitly incorporate the range of consequences of intervention and non-intervention.
* SYSTEMIC CHANGES: While the international oil system changes slowly, it does change. The volume of reserves grows and shrinks, trade relationships change, and countries become more or less risk-prone.

### WILD CARDS

While most systemic changes are likely to take time to take effect, there are several 'wild card' scenarios that would likely rapidly reshape the system outside the envelope of the Long Present. These include:

* SIGNIFICANT GEOPOLITICAL REALIGNMENTS involving major oil producers and reshaping the trade network and instability risks (e.g. an end to Western sanctions on Iran).
* MAJOR CONFLICT, such as a war between the US and China, may substantially shift global demand, put major shipping routes at risk, and potentially change the trade network as well.

## MODEL ANALYSIS

Each run of the model yields one simulated future scenario – one possible alternative outcome. Repeated runs yield a range of possible outcomes, which I analyze to estimate different potential energy security futures.

### GLOBAL OUTCOMES

Overall, the peak of the distribution of estimated energy security metrics across all scenario-months is close to 1 – a balance between supply and demand for secure crude oil. This is comforting, both in terms of the model’s validity and its predictions: it does not anticipate massive future oil shocks. The model yields scenarios of both excesses and shortfalls in secure supply compared to demand, but not in equal proportions – supply shortfalls are more likely, and more extreme, than major demand shocks. Specifically, global demand outpaces supply by a factor of 25% or more in XX% of scenario-months, while supply outpaces demand by the same factor only XX% of cases. More extremely, supply outpaces demand by 50% or more XX%, compared to XX% for vice versa.

I also characterize the path each scenario takes across its 60-month run by examining the average demand-supply ratio, and its variance (how much it deviates from that average). There is only weak correlation between the two: some scenarios see high ratios but low variance, where energy supplies are insecure but *stably* insecure, while others see averages close to 1 but high variance, with wild swings between excess demand and excess supply.

Examining the traces of specific scenarios allows us to see that extreme swings are generally unstable -- ratios spike up or down, but quickly revert back towards the mean. I observe approximately 2% of scenarios where worldwide supply or demand deviations of over 50% that persist for over one year of the simulation.

### COUNTRY-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

There is a wide distribution in the mean and variance of supply ratios of different countries across all the model realizations. Not surprisingly perhaps, the most vulnerable countries tend to be smaller and poorer, while the least vulnerable countries are more likely to be developed. There are some surprises: for example, Venezuela is an extremely high-risk country despite being a major oil producer. This may be due in part to missing data on Venezuela's consumption of its own production; however, it also highlights that domestic production is not itself a sufficient guarentee of energy security. To a much greater extent than for the global-level analysis, country-specific variance correlates strongly and positively with mean supply ratios. This means that for individual countries, uncertainty and insecurity go hand in hand.

Overall, the United States oil supply ratio is most likely to be close to 1. However, there is approximately an 8% probability of a serious supply crisis (ratio > 2) occuring at least once in the timeframe of the model, and a ~1% probability of a catastrophic crisis (ratio > 4). In comparsion, China has a slightly larger probability (10%) of smaller supply crises, but under no scenario experiences shocks as extreme as the US's most extreme ones.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

* The energy security situation of any specific country does not necessarily track with global energy security.
* Diversity in both imports and exports is vital to energy security.
* Reserves and excess capacity help mitigate the risks of the majority of crises.
* Policymakers should be prepared for low-probability, high-impact events, particularly those arising from multiple simultaneous political crises.
* Computer simulation provides a method of extracting quantitative information from a qualitative understanding of the world, and can generate ranges of scenarios and future outcomes.

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