



Roberto Cantoni. *Oil Exploration, Diplomacy, and Security in the Early Cold War: The Enemy Underground.* Routledge Studies in Modern European History Series. New York: Routledge, 2017. 290 pp. \$149.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-69290-9.

Reviewed by Jeremy Kuzmarov

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Robert Cantoni's study is valuable in reminding historians of the centrality of oil prospecting to broader diplomatic intrigues during the Cold War and of the intimate connection between hydrocarbons, international diplomacy, surveillance, and energy security. As resources became key to national security, states began investing extensively in what Cantoni calls a strategic information collecting apparatus capable of penetrating the secrets of the earth. This resulted in major innovations in the geo-sciences and other techno-scientific knowledge and also in the study of ocean currents and climate change.

Cantoni's focus is on France and Italy, two countries that sought to use national petroleum reserves to heighten their global standing and established central government agencies for oil exploration, which invested considerably in oil prospecting. After the discovery of oil and gas in Algeria and central Africa by *Compagnie française des pétroles* (CFP) and *Bureau de recherches de pétrole* (BRP) in the mid-1950s, the French government made it an imperative to protect those resources from the penetration of non-French companies, in particular British and American firms, and to increase production as rapidly as possible in order to achieve energy autonomy. Together with the development of a nuclear pro-

gram, this was seen as a principal way of repositioning France among the great powers. Enrico Mattei was a key figure in Italy who promoted the expansion of international oil exploration as head of Italy's National Hydrocarbon Authority (ENI) from 1948 to 1962. A primary goal was to bolster Italy's prestige and bring it out from under the yoke of the United States, which had reestablished dominance of the oil market after World War II and had used Marshall Plan funds to help US companies penetrate Europe.

The intersection between energy interests and national intelligence services was exemplified in France by the career of Pierre Guillaumat, the postwar fuels minister who served in the Gaullist secret service in Algiers. Cantoni notes that Guillaumat used his comrades in the secret service to manipulate politics in former French African colonies and to launch military operations designed to secure French oil interests. Surveillance of rival prospecting was carried out and a corps of French technicians was trained to facilitate independent exploration operations in North Africa and Algeria. The latter became the venue for a secret multinational competition for control of hydrocarbons undergirded by a parallel race for techno-scientific expertise in seismology and geophysics. Mattei at one point was threatened by

the Far-Right French Secret Army Organization (OAS) after he had passed secret intelligence to the Algerians in exchange for a promise that he would be allocated exploration permits after the war. Later, just prior to a scheduled meeting with Algerian nationalist leader Ahmed Ben Bella to sign a contract for oil extraction, he died in a mysterious plane crash that some have claimed was perpetrated by the secret wing of the French intelligence service.

Cantoni's fourth chapter looks at how innovations in exploration geophysics resulted in an overproduction of oil from the 1950s until the oil crisis of 1973 and decline in world oil prices. Soviet oil production rose exponentially in this period as well, resulting in their exportation of oil to Western Europe at prices significantly lower than those prevailing on the international oil market. Sensing an opportunity, Mattei struck a deal with the Soviet trade minister as part of his strategy of international expansion in which ENI would provide synthetic rubber, steel pipes, and equipment for pipelines in return for the purchase of Soviet oil. The French were upset as they had wanted to supply the Western European market with oil extracted from Algeria. The special assistant to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Theodore Achilles, went so far as to suggest Mattei's physical elimination (though the plan never went forward), and the United States later placed an embargo on Soviet oil pipes and pipeline technology.

Cantoni has written an interesting book that illuminates the importance of secret competition over oil as a cornerstone of Cold War geopolitical rivalry. Rather than presenting a unified European bloc, he shows considerable competition between nations for technological supremacy and control of the "black gold." Mattei comes across in the book as an especially shrewd operator who was defiant of the United States and France. He in turn came to be regarded like Third World revolutionary nationalists, as a threat to be eliminated or coopted.

Historians of the Cold War such as Odd Arne Westad have forced us to reconsider the Cold War as one of continuity from earlier epochs of Great Game competition—a point of view reinforced in Cantoni's narrative. Non-state and peripheral Third World actors like the Algerian Liberation Front (FLN), rather than being passive victims of Great Power manipulation, were quite shrewd in exploiting the scramble for resources for their own benefit. This is exemplified in the secret deals Ben Bella struck with Mattei and other foreign operators, which helped finance the nationalist struggle.

Cantoni might have drawn more directly from Westad's analysis to better articulate the continuity between the Cold War scramble for oil and other resources and that of earlier epochs, and in turn emphasize how the threat of communism was at times conveniently invoked to extend Western interference in the Third World and to strengthen corporate power. Cantoni's frame is that of the Western quest for security; however, the term "security" can be considered misleading if we consider the exploitative aspects of oil extraction, the imperial behavior of the United States in its establishing a vast network of military bases, and the fact that an element of greed was at play.

Another flaw is that relatively short shrift is given in analyzing the internal workings of major oil companies driving foreign policy intervention, the surveillance wars, and the background of the scientists who were involved in the development of oil extraction technologies. It would be interesting to gain a better understanding of who some of the major scientific innovators were in the oil extraction industry and what their motivation and connection with the government and intelligence agencies was. The focus on France and Italy, while novel, would also benefit from comparison with other major players in the scramble for control of the world's oil wealth and a discussion of the mis-

givings that Third World nationalists developed about many of their operations.

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