

Beyond the Macondo Oil Disaster



The significance and consequences of the Macondo well spill must be analyzed in light of the geological moment of conventional oil resources in non-OPEC countries, whose production has stopped growing. This is leading to the acceleration of non-conventional production, including deepwater oil development. Moving into waters over seven kilometers deep not only creates all the possibilities for causing spills, with their adverse environmental consequences, but also implies high production and other costs, derived from a series of non-quantifiable externalities that it will take decades for the environment to heal, if those habitats are recoverable at all.

The competition for the world's remaining oil reserves not only instigates military strategies to ensure future supply for the powerful nations. Diplomatic differences are daily occurrences, and the Macondo spill produced several in bilateral U.S.-Great Britain relations, which had to be overcome so the historic "special relationship" between these two powers could prevail. This difference revealed that the implications of an oil spill can touch, among others, the most important actors on the international stage, like nation-states. Oil corporations, with their characteristic productive de-territorialization, have economic power, since their financial circumstances can have an impact not only on the nation of origin, but also on the economy of the countries where they operate.

Finally, the possibility of oil spills touches Mexico because of its incursion into offshore areas and its expectations of developing Gulf of Mexico deepwater resources. Given a scenario of oil spills, this could leave the country up in the air because of the costs and legal suits it would have to face. This shows the need for preventive regulation using different approaches and measures by the bodies involved; but it also brings up central issues for the nation's future, like the country's continuing to force its productive capacity to maintain the rhythm of exports; the very strategy of moving into deep waters, given that there is no evidence of proven reserves; and the insistence on maintaining the fossil-fuel-based energy paradigm in order to guarantee capitalist accumulation.

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