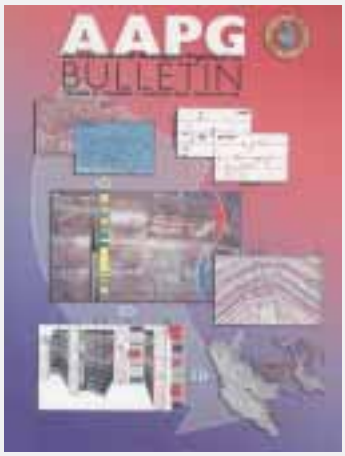
Rejected!

Most of us would bluntly say that geology has nothing to do with politics. We tend to believe that geological research is independent of political constraints.

This is of course not true. We know from the days of the Cold War that exchange of ideas between the East and the West were restricted, and both sides complained because scientists could not move freely between the two rivalling sides.

Now we are faced with a new "Cold War", and four geoscientists have unintentionally ended up in the midst of it. The scene is the Middle East. Iran, to be specific.

The story goes like this: Last fall a paper about the structural geology of the Zagros Fold-Thrust Belt, an area that contain major parts of the Iranian oil reserves, was submitted to AAPG Bulletin ("The AAPG Bulletin is a technical journal that is recognized in the industry as the leading peer-reviewed publication for information on geoscience and the associated technology of the energy industry," according to their own web-site). The paper was written by representatives from the National Iranian Oil Company, the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology, Iran, the Shahid Beheshti University, Earth Sciences Faculty, Iran, and Centre for Integrated Petroleum Research, Norway, i.e. 3 Iranians and 1 Norwegian.



The authors were later notified that the paper had been accepted following a normal peer-review. Then everything became silent. The authors heard nothing, and instead of receiving a proof, a new letter arrived from the AAPG Science Director.

The message was clear and simple: The paper could not be published.

After having conferred with AAPG legal counsel, the director notified the authors that "we cannot publish your paper because the United States government restricts publishers from publishing papers that have an affiliation with the government of Iran."

The director adds "your paper is interesting and well written. I am sorry for the inconvenience caused to you by allowing it to advance to this stage before we became aware of this governmental restriction."

Scientists should be even more sorry. As well as the society at large. It is hard to believe that a scientific article with a pure geological content has to be withdrawn because of political restrictions.

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The Source Exposed

The North Sea Graben has produced substantial quantities of oil and gas since the early 1970's. The US Geological Survey has estimated that it still contains 2.2 to 14.8 billion barrels (350 million to 2.4 billion m^3) of undiscovered oil, entirely offshore within the territorial waters of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.

The source rock of this petroleum system - deposited in Late Jurassic to earliest Cretaceous time - outcrops in England, and the type locality we find in Kimmeridge Bay on the southern coast (Dorset). The Kimmeridge Clay Formation can here be studied in detail. In this same area there are several oil fields, including the giant Wytch Farm. This field is, as it turns out, sourced from older shales (GEO ExPro No. 5/6, 2005).

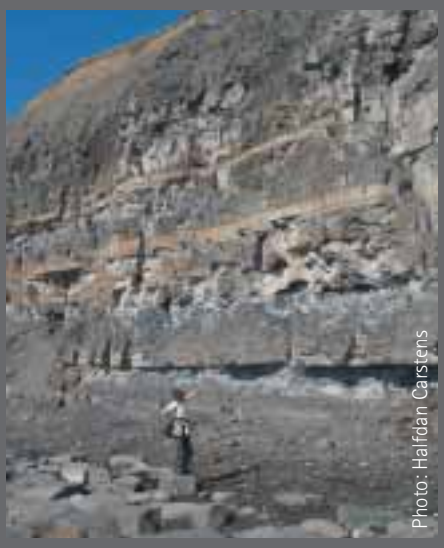

Photo: Halfdan Carstens

The Kimmeridge Clay Formation is responsible for billions of barrels of oil and gas produced from sandstones and carbonates in the North Sea. Most geoscientists dealing with petroleum geology of this prolific province are aware of it. The question is if people outside our own ranks also ought to know this?