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ExxonMobil Announces Bid for Afghan Oil Fields

By John Glaser
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ExxonMobil has filed an application with the Afghan government to bid on a group of Afghanistan oilfields containing an estimated 1 billion barrels of oil and gas.

The official “expression of interest, said Alan Jeffers, a spokesman for Exxon, ”is part of our ongoing evaluation of oil and gas resources around the world.” Bids are due in late October and winning bidders will be announced in late 2012.

Exxon’s decision is unexpected, since many corporations have been reluctant to officially bid on Afghanistan’s natural resources because it has been perceived as highly speculative. Issues of security and lack of infrastructure compound corporate skepticism.

One possible explanation is that there are potential geo-political matters at play. China’s state-owned China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) and India’s ONGC have also filed to bid for the oilfields. Given Washington’s belligerence toward a rising China of late, Afghanistan could very well become a point of geo-political competition between world powers.

Afghanistan already signed a deal late last year with CNPC for the development of oilfields in the north, a project expected to earn billions of dollars over two decades.

This isn’t the first sign of foreign power exploitation of Afghanistan’s natural resources. In November of last year, “the Pentagon’s Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO), in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey, announced” it would begin training

Afghan geoscientists to collect, process, and exploit valuable “mineral resources” and “rare earth elements” in Afghanistan.

Earlier Pentagon estimates “identified at least \$1 trillion in mineral resources, fossil fuels, and rare earth elements within Afghanistan.”