

New Security Frontiers: Critical Energy and the Resource Challenge

Edited by SAI FELICIA KRISHNA-HENSEL
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This book is not about Cyprus. It discusses a global issue with a number of thematic and geographical areas not including Cyprus. Nevertheless, recent developments in Cyprus, such as the explosion in the naval base of Mari in the summer of 2011, the vibrant public discussion regarding Cyprus' initial decision to import gas, and the subsequent discovery of significant gas deposits offshore the island and the promise of further finds, in conjunction with an Israeli-Cypriot energy and geopolitical alliance in the making and the geopolitical shadow that problems with Turkey thrust upon the region, make this book of great relevance to Cyprus.

At a second level, being a member of the EU, Cyprus is directly involved in the debate on European energy security and sustainability. The EU has yet to clear out its priorities and devise an energy security strategy that will be truly sustainable and will mitigate the risks emanating from increasing prices and overt dependence on external suppliers. As amply argued for in the book, energy security is faced with a number of threats, and dealing with some of them may only serve to exacerbate concerns with regard to others. A holistic reading of the situation then, incorporating as well the developmental and geopolitical impact of these policies on third states, is in demand for the European family, of which Cyprus is a comparatively young but very active member.

In particular, the new role Cyprus is most probably going to acquire as a gas exporter in the next few years is positive from an economic and geopolitical point of view; however, that it concurrently engages Cyprus in a specific geopolitical reconfiguration of alliances, creates new potential difficulties (or opportunities?) for the resolution of the Cypriot problem, and perpetuates the EU's shift to natural gas which may, by means of discouraging more radical policies for the reversal of climate change, have adverse effects for the environmental and sustainability goals of the EU in the near future.

This book is an important contribution to the overall debate on energy security and sustainability. It is situated within scholarly literature that does not see security in anachronistic, monolithic territorial and military terms, but examines how specific issues can become urgent concerns for security. Consequently, it identifies itself more with neo-liberal understandings of international relations that view a wide range of state and non-state actors as contributing to the global arena, as well as with constructivist ideas that highlight the importance of the political

culture of different states, securitisation processes and the significance of the intersubjective element in international politics. At the same time, the shadow of realism is also evident in the discussion of geopolitics, national strategies to retain control of critical resources, and neo-colonial national projects that aim to ensure food security through land deals in the developing world. The book spans the fields of energy politics, geopolitics, international relations, economics, development and sustainability studies to give a holistic account of new sources of unrest in the twenty-first-century landscape. It also features a global array of case studies covering all corners of the world. As a result it will be of great interest to all members of the academic community working on global politics and how they are shaped in the twenty-first century, and particularly to those researching energy politics, and/or engaged in security, developmental and environment studies.

The book situates the debate of 'new security frontiers' in a historical juncture of an energy transition. Every energy transition involves winners and losers and causes a reconfiguration of power and geopolitics. The world is now facing the need to make the transition to a lower carbon economy. Chapter 2 begs the question of how this transition will be effected, what its impact will be on global players and how security risks can be mitigated. As chapter 3 demonstrates, various players take upon different tactics to ensure their energy security. Examples of countries as diverse as Denmark, Brazil, China and Bangladesh show different pathways to energy security that are contingent upon both the societal and material background of these countries, as well as upon their political culture. Nevertheless, a central issue for energy security is how one can balance between the need to mitigate the risks emanating from climate change and the need to secure ample, affordable energy supplies. There are trade-offs between these aspects of energy security with different scholars situating themselves in different spots along this continuum. Chapter 4 makes a strong point for capturing the middle ground, namely intensifying efforts at energy efficiency that will serve satisfactorily, according to the author, both overarching goals. Chapter 5 argues that the belief that a switch away from fossil fuels will terminate all kinds of external dependencies is fundamentally flawed and naive. Less use of fossil fuels means higher consumption of a number of other critical resources, many of which are concentrated in a few places, are scarce and thus create new chains of dependency. Ironically, an abrupt and not cautious environmentally-driven switch away from fossil fuels might well exacerbate, not improve, energy security for a number of states.

Energy security is as much about technological breakthrough, economic considerations and environmental sensitivities, as it is about geopolitics. While political considerations appear in all chapters and are dealt with as significant variables, the theme of chapter 1 is to give a geopolitical account of energy issues. Resource nationalism, the emergence of national champions, political interests tied up with economic aspirations all mean that geopolitics remains a fundamental parameter in the debate on energy security. Chapter 1 highlights the sustained significance of geopolitics in energy issues throughout recent history and presents briefly the case of Russia (similar cases could also be, indicatively, China, Venezuela and Qatar among others) where geopolitical considerations and goals drive to a significant degree the national energy strategy.

Before the conclusions, the last two chapters 6 and 7, have a more specific and narrow focus, but serve to complete the debate on critical security issues pertaining to resources. Chapter 6 discusses water-related problems. The case of the Prata Basin features the centrality of water considerations. The theoretical and historical analysis presented is extremely valuable for stressing the possibility, contrary to mainstream literature that prophecies water wars and water-induced conflict, of cooperation in such critical issues.

Chapter 7 features a comprehensive analysis of the latest trend in the issue area of food security. After the food crisis of 2007–2009, a number of mighty developing states (as China and Saudi Arabia) contracted huge deals with emerging states in Africa in order to grab extensive pieces of land that would cater for the food security of their own populations. These raise a number of ethical, practical, legal and sovereignty-related issues and have been bluntly described as neo-colonial packages that help the strong states, but will serve to further impoverish the destitute peoples of Africa. Since the approach to respond of international institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is rather deficient and inadequate, major concerns are expressed for future food security crises in the least developed parts of the world and their potential negative impact on peace, stability, order, development and migration.

The book presents an invaluable wealth of facts and information thus examining the issue of energy and critical resources security within a broad historical context. Each chapter makes a strong point within the framework of the main argument of the book, namely what are the security implications of the quest for, and scarcity of, energy resources in a global environment that is under increasing pressure from the rise of the global temperature, overpopulation and environmental degradation. The diversity of methodological tools used (case studies, comparative analyses and interviews) offers a remarkable richness of empirical material and highlights different aspects and policies for tackling energy and critical resources security threats. Although most chapters are quite specific and narrow in focus, and are therefore somehow loosely connected with each other within the framework of such a vast area of study, they all convincingly support the overarching argument of a very ambitious project, namely to uncover the breadth and depth of security threats stemming from the availability, affordability, use, distribution and environmental hazards inherent in the use of critical resources. The book is commendable for its balanced analysis that does not give in to the temptation to illustrate a critical resources-induced conflict-torn world in the near future. It appreciates the potential for differentiated strategies, as well as common projects, that can bring desirable results and avert the potential for conflict.

The analysis would perhaps profit from a greater focus on a global governance perspective, since the object of analysis is fundamentally global in scope and transcends national borders. Furthermore, under the light of bleaker predictions for climate change and the ability of the planet to withstand such changes, it would be worth considering the current challenges within a more ecologically sensitive framework. These considerations, however, could well already be in the minds of the contributors and might serve as the rationale for further research in this extremely interesting and fundamentally important thematic area for the future of the world.

At a global level, the world is at a critical crossroad. It needs to urgently address the threat of climate change in a global system that is undergoing a substantial shift towards the East in the economic sphere and a hesitant reshuffling of global governance patterns with the aim to render it more representative and thus more efficient; facing sustained nuclear threats; witnessing expanding spirals of the economic crisis; and, facing the need to cater for an overgrown, but still rising, human population. This amounts to nothing less than an unfathomable list of challenges. Due to their intimate interconnections they can only be tackled efficiently as a sum, not individually. The basis of a holistic solution is the designation and implementation of the indispensable energy transition, which can only be premised upon comprehensive concerted action among a wide array of state and non-state actors alike. Although the book offers only partial pathways to this transition (it does not set the goal, to be fair, to suggest a holistic solution), its contribution to the analysis and appreciation of the difficulties and risks this energy transition entails is essential.

Cyprus, as a member of the developed West and the European Union, the pioneer actor in environmental issues, is all but indifferent to this debate. Cypriot policy-makers would be prudent to reflect upon the challenges set by a tightening global energy and critical resources market and environmental pressures that make an energy transition to a lower carbon economy mandatory. These should be reflected upon within the framework of a problematic geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the economic crisis of the Eurozone that subsequently poses limitations to the EU's capacity to finance this energy transition.

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