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BOOK REVIEW

HAND BOOK ON THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION
By

DANIEL SCHOLEN

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Mirza Kamil Beg*

The global energy system is undergoing interconnected disruptions that are reshaping markets, geopolitical relations and energy security. Three transformations are central to this changing landscape. The "shale revolution" has restored the United States to its position as the world's leading oil and gas producer, altering established patterns of global energy trade. The expansion of the global Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) market has created greater flexibility in energy supplies while generating new dependencies, with US LNG becoming increasingly important for Europe following Russia's weaponisation of gas exports. At the same time, the accelerating transition towards a low-carbon energy system is creating new geopolitical challenges. China's dominance across key low-carbon supply chains, from raw materials to solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles, has raised concerns in Europe about a shift in dependence from fossil fuels to Chinese technology and resources. These developments are unfolding amid geopolitical fragmentation, changing alliances and the emergence of new forms of energy cooperation.

It is within this turbulent context that Daniel Scholten's *Handbook on the Geopolitics of the Energy Transition (2023)* situates itself. The book seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the global energy transition is reshaping geopolitical relations. It

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achieves this by bringing together existing research, presenting conceptual and analytical tools, and examining detailed case studies across different technologies, sectors and regions.

The book is organised into four parts encompassing thirty chapters, with each addressing a different dimension of the subject. The theoretical foundation is established in Scholten's introductory chapter. Part I, "Energy Geopolitics and the Energy Transition," provides essential background on the evolution of energy markets and the contemporary dynamics of the transition. Criekemans (Chapter 2) adds conceptual clarity to terminology that is often used loosely within the field.

Part II, "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back," examines the geopolitical implications of the transition as an ongoing and uneven process. Pronin´ska (Chapter 7) discusses changing relations between energy producers and consumers, while Smith Stegen, Kusznir and Riederer (Chapter 8) examine the evolving geopolitics of energy transport. Milchram and Skalamera (Chapter 13) contribute a thought-provoking research agenda concerning the geopolitical dimensions of energy justice.

Part III, "New Technologies, New Interdependencies," moves towards the emerging architecture of low-carbon energy systems. It broadens the discussion beyond renewable sources, including wind and solar energy in Chapters 15–16, to cover hydropower, biomass, geothermal energy, hydrogen and nuclear power. Part IV, "Recalibrating Energy, Industry, Foreign, and Security Policy," examines case studies across countries and regions. The section moves beyond the major powers to consider Southeast Asia (Chapter 25), the Middle East and North Africa (Chapter 28), and sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 29). This geographical breadth allows the volume to consider how the energy transition is experienced across regions with different resource endowments, political structures and levels of economic development.

One of the key strengths of the book lies in its acknowledgement that the global energy transition is a dynamic, contested and uneven process. This distinguishes it from Scholten's earlier work, *The Geopolitics of Renewables (2019),* which placed greater emphasis on the technical features of a renewable-based energy system. The new volume treats geopolitics as a process unfolding in real time, one

that remains marked by uncertainty, competing interests and continuous change.

The book's discussion of the concept of "winners and losers" is equally important. Scholten points out that the transition creates distinct opportunities and challenges for different technologies and nations at different stages of development (p. 14). Van de Graaf's Chapter 10, for instance, provides a thoughtful examination of how petrostates are adapting to declining markets and revenues. The chapter challenges straightforward narratives of decline and highlights the capacity of resource-rich states to adapt to changing energy conditions.

The book also examines issues that have received comparatively limited attention in discussions surrounding critical raw materials and the strategic rivalry between the United States and China. The inclusion of biomass, hydropower and nuclear energy, along with case studies from India, Australia, Latin America and Africa, gives Parts III and IV particular value. The wider geographical and technological coverage enables the volume to move beyond a narrow concentration on renewable energy and the major centres of geopolitical power.

Some conceptual constraints are worth considering. Scholten acknowledges that the book adopts a conventional understanding of geopolitics, with a focus on interstate relations shaped by material and technical factors (p. 8–9). This approach risks underestimating the influence of non-state actors, including multinational energy companies, which continue to exercise considerable influence over global energy politics. Energy companies possess significant financial resources, technological capabilities and infrastructure networks, allowing them to shape patterns of investment, supply and market access. Their role deserves greater attention within a geopolitical framework concerned with the transformation of the international energy system.

A second limitation emerges from the book's theoretical framework, which tends to present politics as a response to structural and technical changes rather than as a force that can actively shape the direction of the energy transition. Political decisions frequently influence the geopolitical foundations of the energy system. US-China energy relations and Europe's changing position towards Russia following

the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 demonstrate how political choices can alter established patterns of energy trade. Decisions concerning sanctions, energy security, trade restrictions, infrastructure development and strategic partnerships can reshape markets and supply chains even when underlying technological conditions remain unchanged.

Despite these limitations, *The Handbook on the Geopolitics of the Energy Transition* is an important and relevant scholarly resource providing researchers, analysts, and policymakers with a deep, multi-disciplinary understanding of how energy, geography, and politics interact at a time of climate crisis and systemic transformation of the energy system. ■

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