

## **EU IN THE GLOBAL ENERGY SECURITY COMPETITION**

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BELFER, Mitchell A. *Dropping the Anchor: An EU Naval Approach to Energy Security*. Prague: PROTIS, 2010. 117 pages. ISBN 978-80-7386-064-6.

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It is rather unusual that a book on naval aspects of geopolitics gets published in the Central Europe. *Dropping the Anchor* is one of the few that made it. Kudos for the work goes to Mitchell A. Belfer, currently Head of Department of International Relations and European Studies at Metropolitan University Prague. His academic interests include alliance theory and European approaches to external security provisions.

These are uncertain times when it comes to energy security. This goes for major powers such as the United States of America as well as for small actors like Slovakia. These heterogeneous examples clearly demonstrate two approaches of securing energy needs of nations. In the case of the United States the oil and gas fuelling the economy comes from all around the world. Apart from domestic sources in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska it keeps arriving from the Middle East, the North Sea, the Bay of Guinea, Indonesia or Venezuela. On the other hand, Slovakia as a small country with limited possibilities of diversification of the energy mix is trying to engage other members of the EU and become a part of a Europe-wide energy consumers' alliance with tools to pressure suppliers and transit countries, most notably Russia and the Ukraine.

An archetypal example of neorealist writing, not typically present in the EU policy discourse, the book presented in this review is focused on a scenario in a not-so-distant future. The EU powerhouses eventually join forces with smaller EU member states after they realize the need to gather resources for economic and military activity from all around the world. In this scenario, in order to gain a

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higher degree of energy security, the EU as a unitary force is acting to establish control over the key oil and natural gas sources and naval transit routes. In many instances this approach is innovative, since it puts emphasis on the future trends many people fail to grasp. The book identifies four crucial advantages the EU possesses, which are: “1) *naval capabilities*; 2) *a wide maritime alliance network*; 3) *a strong economic and financial base*, and 4) *an advantageous geopolitical position*.”

These advantages should provide the basis for a new geopolitical Grand Strategy of the EU in the global energy security and dominance game.

*Dropping the Anchor* consists of five parts, further elaborating on this topic. In the initial part the author describes the importance of geopolitics and the gradual long-term nature of the geopolitical developments. He identifies thirteen key areas in the world, which the EU controls directly or indirectly, and which may serve as outposts in ensuring the fulfilment of the EU energy strategy. These thirteen keys are adjoined into six strategic piers.

Pier 1 is described as the North and Baltic Seas Pier. Keys included in this pier are Copenhagen, Denmark and Dover, UK.

Pier 2 can be described as the Mediterranean, with key EU bases forming a triangle with tips in the British territory of Gibraltar; Alexandria, Egypt and Istanbul, Turkey.

Pier 3: The Indian Ocean Pier. The strategic keys in this area are Dubai, UAE; the state of Djibouti and the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

Pier 4 is located in East Asia and marked by two key allies of the EU, the city-state of Singapore and the problematic island of Taiwan.

Pier 5: The Caribbean Pier. This area is generally described as the Caribbean Sea and the Panama Canal.

Pier 6 is delimited in the area between the GIN (Greenland, Iceland, Norway) Gap and St. Lawrence Island, USA.

Creating networks of strategic keys has traditionally been the domain of military and geopolitical thinking. This was clearly demonstrated in the recent US interventions in the Gulf and Afghanistan. Involved were a combination of factors: formal alliances, quid pro quo such as arms transfers and economic aid, political cross-pressures on key states such as Saudi Arabia, international norms about pre-emptive military actions, and fear of retribution by Iraq and terrorist organizations. Similar incentives would probably be used to create the EU energy security keys network.

In the introductory description of the EU politics after the World War II the book emphasizes geopolitical nature of all major developments and steps the Union has taken in order to expand and promote the interests of its member states. Most of the current debates put emphasis on the cohesion and financial stability as the main issues of EU politics. Others are trying to draw a line between Europe and the rest of the world. *Dropping the Anchor* identifies energy security as the main objective of the EU Foreign and Security Policy. In order to acquire control of resources and naval transport routes, the EU will have to take on a global role. In this position it will have to expand its interests. Similarly to the policy of the United States, the EU will have to be able to maintain a military force with global reach. In order to do this, it will need to control a set of geopolitical nodes, from which it will be able to exercise its power effectively. Mitchell Belfer identifies these at the end of the first chapter and elaborates on their importance in the most interesting and the most controversial fourth chapter of this book.

The first chapter of the book is dedicated to energy security in general. It points out four crucial strategic objectives, related to energy security. Of those two are related to extraction of hydrocarbons, namely controlling them and controlling the means of extraction. Another strategic objective is to control the means of transportation. Finally, in order to saturate their energy needs, states also need to maintain adequate means of storing resources. These objectives, formulated some 35 years ago, are still valid today. Moreover, they have become more closely analysed with the introduction of new actors into the global energy security competition. This chapter, although short, summarizes the most important strategic and geopolitical objectives for any nation trying to secure its hydrocarbon resources. On the other hand, not every nation can fulfil these objectives, which leaves small and less influential countries vulnerable to energy shortages. A clear example was the 2009 Ukrainian gas crisis, which left several EU nations without gas for an extended period of time.

Challenges to the EU energy security are the topic of the second chapter. In the first sentence it states a comparative disadvantage of the EU, compared to the United States, Russia or China, when it comes to securing the sources of hydrocarbons, extraction tools, means of transportation and storage. It is dependent on import, most notably from Russia. It needs to diversify supply. A fierce energy competition is taking place between the EU and other major energy consumers, but also within the Union. With its push towards linking

moral issues with business it has a disadvantage compared to China or Russia. With the lack of military force to control sources and transportation routes, it lags behind the United States. But not all hope is lost yet. As Belfer interestingly points out, *“the perception of the EU as a ‘weak’ actor stems from its lack of political will – not capabilities – to unabashedly pursue a foreign policy based on geopolitical interests.”* The text carries on with a list of energy-related challenges posed by the allies of the EU and its adversaries.

The third chapter, as mentioned earlier, is the one describing the individual piers, on which the EU energy security should rest. All of the piers are controlled by the EU countries or its allies. The reasoning behind the strategic importance is unclear in some instances. In the second chapter of the book the author identifies the United States as a potential challenger to the EU energy interests. However, in the third chapter the US plays a role of a strategic ally. In this capacity Belfer neglects or ignores the energy interests of the United States. He views it as a kind of a strategic leverage the EU has over its adversaries. This may confuse and mislead the reader into thinking that the EU itself is on par with the United States in terms of military capabilities. While highly desirable, this is a medium to long term objective rather than the current state of affairs.

All in all, *Dropping the Anchor: An EU Naval Approach to Energy Security* is one of the better works on geopolitics in the European contexts. The pier division is a very good idea and the bold thinking behind the European "world domination" strategy is extraordinary. The piece is well researched. The only problem of the book seems to be that it is partially written too generally, as if it was intended for undergraduate students. Packing a concept of EU energy security into just over 100 pages provides a basic overview, but the detail level is lacking in some aspects. In other parts, the blurring of past, present and future theoretical and practical considerations, makes it difficult to grasp author's ideas. I recommend this book to the general public to become more familiar with contemporary issues in geopolitics. It is not a textbook, rather an intriguing essay on the future of EU energy security. Therefore, it may also be interesting for EU policy-makers in order to better understand the complex nature of energy security in an age of global uncertainty, struggling United States, rising China and India, and the EU trying to find its place in global affairs.