

Session 1: Shifting Views on Energy Security

Panellist:

Prof James Tang
(University of Hong Kong)

Assoc Prof Mely Caballero-Anthony
(Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies RSIS, NTU)

Asst Prof Youngho Chang
(Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies RSIS, NTU)



(L-R: Prof Tang, Asst Prof Chang and Assoc Prof Caballero-Anthony)

The current model of energy security, as Daniel Yergin had aptly pointed out in *Foreign Affairs* (2006), focuses primarily on how to handle any disruption of oil supplies from the producing countries. Indeed, his argument would have resonated with the traditional notion of energy security, which has been based on the affordability, accessibility and adequacy of energy supplies as national and global challenges. Since oil price volatility has a direct fiscal impact on the socioeconomic well-being of nations and societies, energy security in the pure economics perspective, deals largely with the securing of energy supplies. The traditional approach to energy security – privatisation, liberalisation and competition – has all worked well in the past.

However, new challenges such as the post-9/11 security environment as well as climate change issues straddle beyond economics and they are poised to change the traditional landscape of energy security to include the physical security of energy-related infrastructure, as well as mitigating the effects of global warming. As such, this metamorphosis in the notion of energy security would require the collective effort of the global community to not only ensure the continued availability of reasonably-priced energy resources, but also to combat the environmental effects of energy use, for instance. However, little progress has been underway for the transition from competition to cooperation among states in the energy field. Energy security in this sense is more than a price and supply issue but also has geopolitical ramifications since energy, national and international security are tightly interwoven.

Oil had traditionally shaped and has been interlinked tightly with foreign policies, especially those of major powers if we delve into examples of China's deft use of 'energy diplomacy' – sometimes to the chagrin of Western counterparts in particular in dealing with energy-rich pariah states shunned by the latter – or the Russian 'energy geopolitics' in Europe, skilfully using its energy exports as a means to advance its foreign policy agenda. Even for Japan, which has been relying on the free market for energy supplies, had come to conceive pragmatism in the face of intense competition, such as by China, to secure oil through increased use of diplomacy in the Middle East. Lastly, the alleged motive of securing energy supplies by the US through armed intervention, such as the Iraq War in 2003, has been hotly discussed.

However, the participants of the conference did have slightly differing views on the future paradigm for energy security. One proffered the term 'cooperative competition' to describe the path taken by most nations for the present and future of energy security, although energy security has been viewed differently among developed and developing, oil producing and consuming nations. Nevertheless, in view of the emerging challenges, the paradigm shift of energy security would revolve around energy, environment and security as its main pillars. In exploring this paradigm shift in energy security, the following questions could be worthy of further analysis: 1) to what extent should energy security be re-conceptualised in view of non-traditional issues such as climate change; 2) are old energy security issues being revisited or are there new issues being uncovered; and 3) can a framework for rethinking energy security be plausible?