Book Review

REVIEW OF THE NEW MAP: ENERGY, CLIMATE, AND THE CLASH OF NATIONS BY DANIEL YERGIN

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ABSTRACT

Daniel Yergin's *The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations* provides a comprehensive analysis on the intersection of global energy landscape with the broader geopolitical and economic engagement and competition among states. Through detailed narratives and historical contexts, the author explores the transformational impact of the shale revolution, the subsequent shifts in energy dynamics among major states like the U.S., Russia, China, and the Middle East, and the intricate interplay between energy supply, demand, and geopolitical tensions. Although the book delves deeply into the geopolitical aspects, it encounters criticisms for its limited focus on certain demand-side countries, minimal attention to climate change urgency, and insufficient exploration of potential long-term implications of renewable energy transitions. Despite these limitations, *The New Map* offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between energy, geopolitics, and global security, making it a compelling read for researchers, policymakers, and readers interested in understanding the intricate web of energy and international relations in the modern world.

Introduction

Daniel Yergin is among the most respected Pulitzer-winning analysts, authors, and economic historians with a lifelong commitment to the study of energy as well as its geopolitical and economic implications. From his first book, Shattered Peace, to The Prize and The Quest, the author has offered readers with historical bases for understanding many of the energy and security challenges confronted internationally. With The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations, Yergin seeks to update these previous analyses on energy and geopolitics to the contemporary developments in the second decade of the 21st century. In particular, The New Map focuses on how the changes in global supply and demand of energy shape the overlapping energy positions among states, and how these changes in the global energy landscape reshape the current geopolitical and economic engagement and competition among states.

The book thesis postulates that the global energy landscape is no longer characterized by the concerns about how long the available energy supplies in the global market will last (i.e., "peak oil") – as most experts predicted in the last decades – but rather by how long the global energy demand will keep pace with the rise of energy supplies globally (i.e., "peak demand"). Yergin argues that global energy politics has transformed drastically since the 2000s. The supply side of energy resources is no longer dominated solely by OPEC, but also by new non-OPEC producers such as the U.S., which becomes a major oil producer. This challenges the energy positions of traditional energy producers such as Russia, which seeks to counter-balance the U.S. by expanding its energy market eastward and cooperating with China, and OPEC countries in the Middle East, which struggle to maintain their energy positions due to widespread regional instability. At the same time, the demand side has also changed with the emergence of China as one of the largest importer of the world's energy, and the growing role of renewable energy driven by global concern for climate change. Using a series of 'new maps,' Yergin illuminates these recent developments in energy and geopolitics and pinpoints areas of future transitions.

The 'New' World Maps

The new global energy and geopolitical map begins with the 'America New Map' trigged by the "shale revolution" that has reshaped the traditional oil and gas relationships by changing the role of the U.S. on the global energy market. U.S.'s discovery of "fracking" technology enables the mass production of shale oil and shale gas from Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), thereby creating tremendous opportunities for the U.S. economy (Yergin, 2020, p. 6). The move from scarcity to abundant supply allows the U.S. to simultaneously reduce imports of foreign energy supplies and lower the prices of its energy sources. Existing pipelines allow the U.S. to expand its energy distribution domestically and internationally, thereby increasing the demand for its energy, enhancing exports, and improving the trade balance. Almost overnight, the U.S. reversed its traditional role as the largest importer of foreign energy to become the largest

energy producer, overtaking Russia and Saudi Arabia (together known as the "Big Three of World Oil"). As Yergin notes, although the negative environmental effects of this technology have attracted widespread opposition, it has helped the U.S. achieve energy self-sufficiency and security, thereby shifting the balance of power in its favor and heightening its flexibility in international politics. This sets the basis for Yergin's hypotheses that changes in global energy production and consumption, and thus the subsequent shifts in global geopolitical balances, flows from this development in the U.S. energy sector.

Against this background, Yergin describes how the rise of the U.S. as an energy powerhouse overlaps with, or even threatens, other major powers, sometimes with dangerous geopolitical implications. On the supply side, the most direct impact is on the traditional energy producers: Russia and the Middle East. The tectonic expansion of the U.S.'s influence in global energy politics has reshaped 'Russia New Map' with their tensions rising to a level not witnessed since the end of Cold War. Vladimir Putin perceives Russia's energy reserves as a premier source of its power and a key to restoring Soviet-era great power position and regional dominance (Yergin, 2020, p. 91). Thus, Tergin notes that the emergence of the U.S. as an energy supplier poses a direct economic and geopolitical threat to this contention. Economically, while Russia is heavily dependent on its oil and gas exports – especially to Europe where it is the largest supplier – and often relies on these resources as leverage for political objectives, the increased supply of and demand for U.S. shale oil and shale gas diversifies the energy market and jeopardizes Russia's European energy dominance. Geopolitically, threat flows from the U.S. displacing Russia's relative position as the largest energy producer. In pursuit of geopolitical rebalancing, Putin ramps up Russia's pipeline networks by creating alternative routes to Europe that bypassed potential conflicts in traversing other countries. Most importantly, Russia continues to pivot eastward and establishes strategic alignment with China as an alternative to the weakening European market. Yergin sees this growing Sino-Russian cooperation as a counter-hegemonic force opposing the U.S. The result, he argues, is a new cold war between the U.S. and the Sino-Russian alignment.

Looking at the new 'Middle East New Map,' Yergin compellingly illustrates how the role and international perceptions of the Middle East as a primary world oil provider have been challenged by the successes in American and Russian energy production, as the region continued to be fractured by regional instabilities. While the U.S. was one of the largest oil and natural gas importers in the Middle East, improved energy security at home has drastically reduced U.S. engagement in the region. This contributed to declining demand for Middle Eastern energy, which is further jeopardized as Russia pivots to the east and increases energy exports to China – the biggest oil consumer of oil from the Persian Gulf (Yergin, 2020, p. 157). At the same time, the arbitrary national borders drawn by the former colonizers through the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement determined the unequal energy distribution. As Yergin argues, the Middle East is characterized by constant contestation between regional powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran (and their allies) and Islamic extremists who struggle for power within failed states of the region – with the importance of energy resources looming over the horizon. As the region

continues to be stunned by oil collapses, their disparate influences and political instabilities undermine any possibility of a unified effort to balance global supply with plummeting demand caused by increased competition from non-OPEC producers. In the end, so long as oil and gas remain the paramount global energy sources, the region will look to confront new challenges of diversifying its economies for future oil demand vulnerability while old challenges persist.

On the demand side, U.S. expansion beyond the Western hemisphere risks direct collision with the rise of China as one of the largest economies and a global power expanding its influence across Eurasia. According to Yergin, 'China New Map' is about its power projections across all sectors – economics, geography, technology, politics, and military – while continuing its pursuit of energy security. Rapid economic development and rising domestic energy demands have largely made energy consideration one of China's foreign policy priorities. Accordingly, as Yergin argues, Chinese efforts to stabilize energy supplies from its trading partners are manifested in its Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI). It gives China maritime control over the South China Sea, strategic checkpoints along the Indo-Pacific region as well as the rail and roadways across Central Asia into Europe. Specifically, Yergin emphasizes the regional tensions accompanying the controversial Chinese maritime claims. Its insistence on the absolute national sovereignty of the South China Sea and its attempts to strengthen naval resources in the Indo-Pacific – all based on the distribution needs and potential offshore energy reserves – has attracted contestation from regional powers such as India, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Vietnam as Chinese claims undermine their energy security (Yergin, 2020, p. 143). These Chinese claims are also at odds with the U.S.'s strategic "pivot to Asia" that reassure Asian countries of U.S. commitment to regional security. Yergin seems right, then, to identify BRI as Chinese global ambitions to offer the world an alternative to the U.S. hegemony, while creating for itself immediate commercial and diplomatic opportunities – a fitting confluence of energy, economic, and geostrategic aims of the sort that Yergin highlights throughout the book.

Equally alarming in the demand side of energy, Yergin warns, is the substantial progress the world has made toward sustainability and technological improvements in search for renewable energy alternatives arising from the concerns about climate change. In terms of sustainability, Yergin points to various environment-related agreements such as the Paris Accords, which attempt to achieve "greener economies" by developing wind and solar energy as potential alternatives to fossil fuels. Some states have even started to impose stricter policies to limit the use of fossil fuels to reach these 'green' targets. In terms of new technology, the declining importance of transportation in demand for fossil fuels is reflected in the rise of ride-sharing as a replacement for private transport, and the development of autonomous vehicles, and electric vehicles (EVs). However, Yergin is unconvinced by the swift diversion away from fossil fuels as he believes that this energy innovation is less literal than figurative. A serious challenge is raised in that many developing countries are likely to continue to rely on fossil fuels than invest in more expensive renewable energy initiatives. He writes, "for Europe to achieve its targets, per capita emissions will have to decline to the level of India, where per capita income is $2,000 per

year, compared to Europe's $38,000" (Yergin, 2020, p. 391). He is also skeptical of the ambitious rates promised by net-zero targets – such as the U.S. aim to be powered entirely through renewable energy by 2030 and European Union's "Net-Zero Carbon" by 2050 – for, any energy 'revolution' is a gradual process that can take a very long time to materialize (Yergin, 2020, p. 388). Thus, Yergin writes that peak oil demand may have arrived, but it is less about the viability of these alternatives and more about the consequences of the geopolitical clashes among nations. Despite globalization and economic interdependence, he concludes that the world will remain increasingly fragmented as the new global map will be redirected from time to time –while fossil fuels will likely remain at the heart of this ongoing energy mix.

Critical Assessment

Overall, while most reviewers are often reluctant to declare any book flawless as no book can be all things to every reader, The New Map approaches these ideals. It offers readers timely and comprehensive narratives of the current energy outlook – why it matters, how it works, and how it affects global geopolitics today – while simultaneously accounting for subsequent challenges and uncertainties associated with these transformations. The most persuasive part of this book is its analysis of the shale revolution and its far-reaching economic and geopolitical implications. Yergin illustrates how the new global energy map is characterized by U.S.'s switch from being a consumer to a supplier that increases competition for the traditional suppliers, Russia and the Middle East, while China emerges as the biggest market for energy. This book also shows how such a phenomenon translates into clashes not only between OPEC and non-OPEC countries, but also among these states – New Cold War between the U.S. and Sino-Russian alignment, and OPEC+, for example. The discussion of the implication of new technology and climate change may be lacking, as argued later, but Yergin deserves credit for explaining how the growth of viable substitutes can undermine global demand for fossil fuels despite being skeptical of this potential.

First of all, there is a missed opportunity in Yergin's discussion of the imperatives of the shale revolution in the U.S., which is also its Achilles' heel. While he discusses the challenges confronted by the shale revolution, such as environmentalists' opposition to the adverse environmental effects of fracking technology and political opposition (legal ban) on pipeline reconstructions, he neglects the practical challenges of shale production on the ground. A serious challenge is raised that it is still common for shale wells' output to lose its luster after a few years of production, which requires oil and gas companies to continually explore and drill new wells for production to keep pace with the growing demand for U.S. shale energy. With a hindsight 2022 view, it is clear that assumed U.S. leadership following this unconventional revolution may be coming to an end as the current Biden administration work to reduce U.S. oil production by shutting down many pipelines, notably the Keystone XL (Brown, 2021). As a result, Russia and Saudi Arabia may soon catch up to retake their leading positions as U.S. energy production declines in the face of internal challenges.

While one may expect any analysis of the importance of this revolution to begin with major American oil and gas producing companies, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and others are entirely excluded. His main subjects are the shale frackers and entrepreneurs such as George Mitchell and Mark Papa. They are undoubtedly important for their innovations in fracking technology; however, they matter not as individuals but as a collective, which together allows the U.S. to envision its energy dominance, not energy dependency. Yergin may be right to point out that the U.S. grand vision to expand its sphere of influence beyond the Western hemisphere is made possible by this energy dominance, but it can only be achieved and sustained if the U.S. knows how to use it effectively. Yet, Yergin is relatively silent on what the U.S. grand strategy would be in achieving these ends. Perhaps he is reluctant to discuss the controversy of the U.S. grand strategy since War on Terror, or he is undecided by polarization in the U.S., or because such strategy may be lacking throughout the Trump administration, when his book was written.

Most significantly, Yergin's stances are unclear, and this indecision has a price. He raises concerns about tensions with China and believes that U.S. cooperation with China is more likely than with Russia, but it remains a simple identification without elaboration. In Russia, too, he simply states that relations are becoming dangerous, but does not describe the extent of this danger nor elaborate on an alternative. He is, regardless, right to point out that growing Sino-Russian alignment, especially in energy trade and defense cooperation, can be a dangerous counter-hegemonic force against the U.S. power. However, Yergin needs to realize that their relationship is not without challenges. At the very least, they are not formal allies – there are no binding treaties to govern their relationship, although they called each other 'strategic' partners. For example, while Russia has maintained good relations with India by supplying most of its arms, China has historically engaged in multiple disputes over its border issues (Maizland, 2022). Most recently, since Russia started its military operations in Ukraine early this year, China has not supported the former's activities nor has it opposed them. Thus, while their relationship seems strong at the onset, close examination raises doubt about this.

In addition, geopolitical narratives are stronger in the analysis of the great power – i.e., the U.S., Russia, and China – and the tensions among these countries, than the discussion of maps of the Middle East, where it seems to lose a narrative focus. In more than 100 pages, Yergin provides readers with a superb primer on key events across the continent as it relates to energy distribution among the Middle Eastern countries. From the creation of the state of Israel, the Iranian revolution, Iraqi invasion to the more recent "Arab Spring," Iranian nuclear deal, as well as the ongoing struggle related to civil wars in Syria and Yemen, Islamic extremism and Sunni-Shia divisions, he has offered readers with enough historical background to understand the complex energy and security challenges in the Middle East. Yet, the wide analysis of these events has left readers wondering whose map exactly is Yergin concerned with. Considering his concern about oil and natural gas development, it is hardly surprising that his argument in this section revolves around power competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran – the most significant regional energy power hubs – and the inclusion of all the above events is only meant to illustrate the historical importance of this competition. He seems to be arguing that such

competition lies at the heart of the region's inability to unify its efforts in the face of the oil collapse since 2014.

Most contradictory in this section is the attachment of 'New' to the maps of the Middle East. Unlike the previous maps where there are relatively new developments – shale revolution for the U.S., new pipeline networks and pivot eastward towards China in the case of Russia, and the economic rise of China as the biggest energy importer – the Middle Eastern maps seem more like the continuation of "old" trends and an overview how the 20th-century history of the region affects its contemporary security outlook as it relates to energy politics. The detailed narratives of the effects of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement on regional energy distribution are a solid example of this contention. Little is new about the Middle East except for the major natural gas discoveries in Israeli waters. Even this account is barely discussed and included only in relation to Yergin's assertion of the unequal regional energy distribution.

Another, perhaps major, missed opportunity is related to the precedence given to the major oil and gas-producing countries that risk overlooking some important stories in the demand side of the equation. Yergin's thesis postulates that the concern today should be about whether the energy demand can continue to keep pace with the growing abundance of energy supplies globally. The question then is: if the central theme lies in the demand for energy as supply increases, why does Yergin focuses primarily on energy producers? Yes, he illustrates that energy supplies are rising, but he misses an important emerging producer: Australia. Over the past two decades, it has become "a substantial net exporter of energy, including coal and natural gas, with net exports equating to over two-thirds of production" (Australian Government, 2022). Particularly lacking is the demand side. The only significant actor Yergin emphasizes is China, which is considered the demand center for global energy. Europe, as one of the largest energy importers, is also accounted for, but in a limited fashion compared to China. He argues that U.S. energy development success following the shale revolution has diversified the energy for Europe and reduced demand for Russian energy, but what would be useful for readers is the nature of this effect. A question worth asking is whether the reduced demand or imports of Russian energy in Europe correlates to the rise of Europe's demand or imports from the U.S. If the answer is yes, then it is true that the U.S. is the cause of plummeting European demand for Russian gas, and if the answer is no, Yergin argument needs further consideration because U.S. shale revolution then has fewer effects on Russia. Also, China and Europe are no doubt the biggest importers of global energy – perhaps this explains they are the only countries Yergin examine in his book – but other emerging demand-side countries might include India and Japan, who are major power in their respective region and has risen both economically and militarily in past decades, and other less-developed countries (LDCs) in Africa and Latin America. Thus, it can be argued that focusing on the maps of the Three Great Powers and the Middle East largely misses the global implications Yergin seeks to highlight throughout the book.

The most controversial part of The New Map lies in Yergin's underappreciation of the importance of climate change and renewable energy. This is highly observable considering the fact that only less than a quarter of the book looks at the complex issues related to these phenomena. When climate issues are thrust upon his attention, he alternates between emphasizing their importance and then dismissing environmental activists as obtrusive. He is right to be skeptical about the overly ambitious net-zero targets – especially those set by the Western powers – and that not all states have equal wealth and capability for a low-carbon future, but that does not mean climate change is insignificant in a geopolitical sense, as he believes. For example, worldwide heat waves this summer that have caused wildfires globally are a classic representation of the urgency of climate change. Geopolitics has plagued global agreements for years, and this is something that needs to be acknowledged more explicitly.

Yergin clearly does not have a strong interest in the issues of climate change, and thus it should not come as a surprise that he evaluates the viability of potential substitutes purely through prices or government regulations rather than through actual environmental cues such as displaced population or melting iceberg. Yergin's skepticism about the optimistic transition rates to renewables may have been misplaced. In many respects, governments, especially from the powerful states, have been making steady progress towards making renewable energy such as wind, solar, and electric more cost-competitive. Notably, a few months after the publication of The New Map, BP, one of the world's leading oil and gas companies, announced its strategic plans to reduce oil and gas production by 30–40% and reallocated most of its capital for developing clean energy (Nasralla and Bousso, 2020). More importantly, the Chinese government has heavily invested in solar equipment manufacturing in the past decades to drive down costs for solar energy with reasonable success. Today, China dominates the solar sector.

All these show that progress towards cheap renewable energy is more rapid than Yergin acknowledges. Continued efforts to reduce the cost of this form of energy may stand to become a second revolution of the sort achieved by the shale revolution, and the current geopolitical balance may again be transformed as petrostates eventually decline as electro-states rise. Many states, especially those on the demand side, stand to benefit from such development. In particular, it may allow importers of energy – i.e., China, Europe, and other developing nations – to reduce their dependence on global energy supplies and achieve energy self-sufficiency and security. At the same time, energy suppliers such as the U.S. can invest in developing necessary technologies and infrastructures to take advantage of these new opportunities. Yergin's book could benefit from more discussion of the long-term implications of these energy transitions.

However, these shortcomings do not necessarily render The New Map irrelevant, although more enthusiastic treatments of the subject matter can make it more compelling for the general audience. Rather, it is quite the opposite; his substantive watch on the energy market trends constitutes a master narrative of seemingly complex contemporary events. It may have been wrong to complain about the lack of narrative coherence. Maybe Yergin is not trying to

provide a one-size-fits-all solution to contemporary issues, but simply introducing and reminding readers about the important intersection of energy with geopolitics and economics. Researchers in energy economics can take cues for context and motivation and may find convenient points of entry to new questions. Environmentalists have spent little time seriously engaging with the geopolitical implications of their advocacy, and The New Map can fill in this gap. Therefore, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in a quick knowledge update on the changes in the global energy markets and their geopolitical implications.

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Zin Mar Khing is a recent graduate, holding both undergraduate and graduate degree in international relations at Webster University. She has presented her research Covert Operations: Means or Ends at the annual Peace and Conflict Resolution Conference, while pursuing her undergrade degree. Her academic interests and research focus on conflict management, ethnic conflict, international organizations, democracy, and human rights issues.

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The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.