

Beyond Copenhagen: Securitising Climate Change

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»» Experts generally concur that the EU has led many aspects of debate on climate change. While Europe is far from being the flawless performer on climate change that it is sometimes portrayed as, it is certainly the case that EU climate change and broader environmental policies have progressed significantly in recent years. This is the strand of overall energy policy that has received most attention and gathered most momentum. Indeed, the worry is that EU energy policy has become overwhelmingly a climate change policy. It is in consequence insufficiently 'securitised'.

The December 2009 Copenhagen summit will agree new targets, new mechanisms and funding – even if not for the moment in the form of a binding treaty. But in political terms this may all be something of a diversion. The broader politics of climate change are not essentially about such target-setting and large-sweep negotiations. One of the main imperatives beyond Copenhagen will be to incorporate the geopolitical dimensions of climate change fully into a broadened external energy security policy. On this matter, Europe is a laggard not a leader.

A NEW GEOPOLITICS OF ENERGY?

The European Union still needs systematically to address a question that will be pivotal in future decades: what will be the security effects of the shift to a low carbon economy? So far, debates on 'security and climate change' have focused on two issues. First, a still vague assumption that scarce resources will breed conflict. Second, the growth in numbers of environmental refugees, leading to debates over whether

HIGHLIGHTS

- The EU needs urgently to build systematic consideration of the strategic impact of climate change into its mainstream foreign policy decisions;
- Dealing with the security dimension of climate change is still seen narrowly as a question of diversifying energy sources;
- The broader question of how climate change is likely to fundamentally challenge what we mean by security remains to be addressed.

»»»»» these should enjoy similar legal rights to political refugees. But there is a pressing need to refashion security policy to take into account factors related to climate change in a far broader and more detailed manner.

Comprehensive energy security cannot now be conceived in terms of an illusory independence from imports. Climate change re-opens the whole issue of what 'security' actually means. Various European ministries now talk of 'climate security'. The UK foreign office has created a new post to assess the security policy implications of climate change. But governments have done relatively little to nail down what this really means and how to pursue it. In his recent book, *The Politics of Climate Change*, Anthony Giddens laments the absence of a 'geopolitics of climate change'.

The EU published a paper in 2008 on security and climate change that recognised the latter as a potential 'threat multiplier'. This paper acknowledged that the EU had not yet addressed the foreign policy dimensions of climate change, as a magnifier of conflict, migration, border disputes and radicalisation. The December 2008 update of the European Security Strategy does talk more about the links between climate change and security than did the original 2003 strategy.

However, diplomats express frustration that little has been done in concrete terms since then to give substance to the call for European security policy and climate change policy to 'talk to each other' on a far more integral basis. Little scenario planning is incorporated into strategic decision-making on just what degree and type of conflict climate change trends are likely to produce. European foreign policy carries on as normal. No tangible adaptation can be discerned preparatory to the geopolitical time-bomb of climate change.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy budget for energy security is a miserly 20 million euros. The EU has no single Energy

Representative with a remit that embraces both climate change and security. The External Action Service to be formed under the Lisbon Treaty to guide EU security planning will have no formal role in energy questions.

The EU is not taking the kind of preventive strategic action that is needed now, not in twenty years time. Experts say that some conflicts, like that in Darfur, are already in essence resource conflicts. And yet the European Security and Defence Policy is still delinked from debates over climate change. If, as many predict, the instability unleashed by climate change will require more and different kinds of military interventions, it must be of concern that there is so far no sign of preparation for this.

The US Department of Defence is well ahead of European governments, having carried out a number of planning scenarios during 2009. Many in the US advocate an 'energy NATO'. Europeans may rightly be concerned that this would send unhelpful signals to oil producing states, but they are hardly offering their own fully worked out alternatives. The EU needs to do more on the security dimensions of climate change if it is to head off pressure for NATO's new strategic concept to include an unduly militarised approach to energy security.

A range of challenges present themselves. How should Europe seek to secure access to renewables? Will the 'scramble for oil' be replaced with a 'scramble for renewables capacity and technology?' Which third countries should the EU help to develop renewables, and on what terms? How will the move to low carbon economies affect the geopolitical map? How will it shift power relations? How will it reconfigure the global supply chains that underpin so much of the world's relative relations of power and influence? In thirty years time will we be fretting about a collapsing Russia as hydrocarbons dry up, and instead be dealing with empowered African states, harvesting huge amounts of solar energy from the desert?

Or, as some experts maintain, is it in fact mistaken to start planning on the basis of a major shift in power away from the prevailing energy superpowers of the Gulf? There is little evidence that such questions have received priority and sustained attention at the heart of EU strategic thinking.

The EU needs an energy policy that begins systematically to address all these challenges. Instead, what it has at present is an environmental policy, pursued separately to strategic deliberation. Indeed, Europeans make great play of the fact that they avoid the over-dramatisation and over-securitisation of energy

issues that pervades US perspectives. Europe's energy discourse certainly warns against the mentality of seeing energy security in terms of a zero-sum battle for the last drop of oil. And it is right to do so. But many in Europe currently fall prey to the mistaken

perception that the low carbon economy will spirit away the complicated entanglements of international energy security. European policy appears to share much with the familiar environmentalist motif, 'Loft insulation *is* foreign policy'. This is a serious mistake. In fact the politics of climate change will usher in a whole new structure of interdependencies and difficult strategic balancing acts.

Academics talk of 'securitisation' in generally pejorative terms. They criticise securitisation as a label under which governments exaggerate threats as a means of enhancing their own arbitrary powers. European governments are accused, in particular, of having over-securitised the issues of migration and Islamic radicalism in this sense. But in the case of external energy policy the problem is the opposite: the

EU and its member states have unduly eschewed the intrusion of 'hard' geopolitics into their environmental policies. This is an area where more rather than less securitisation is required. This does not mean zero-sum 'hard security' distorting environmental policy. But it should entail a climate change vector being factored in systematically to the EU's external partnerships. And this needs to be aligned to a vision of how climate change is likely to affect international political dynamics over the medium- and long-term.

BALANCING RESOURCES

On the road to this conjoining of geostrategy and climate change policy, finite funds must be balanced wisely between conflicting objectives. Debates in the EU have centred on the wisdom of using resources for energy diversification. In this vein, the EU still spends too large a part of its resources in accordance with a logic of 'strategic balancing'. Tempering the strategic impact of climate change requires more resources to flow into changes of a more far-reaching nature.

The high drama involved in pipeline politics dominates the headlines. European governments remain divided over how assertively the Nabucco pipeline should be backed as a means of loosening Russia's grip on energy supply routes. Nabucco and other schemes can play an important and valuable role; they should be supported. But it is easy to exaggerate the significance of the Nabucco saga. The project is not an adequate long-term security response to energy challenges.

Moreover, European governments have become increasingly enthusiastic about substitutes such as tar sands and oil shales: these are attractive on strategic grounds by virtue of being available in countries friendly to the West, but are categorised as 'dirty' energy sources. This demonstrates that in terms of resource use there are still tensions to be resolved between strategic and climate change aims.

Climate change requires a more engaged and geostrategic foreign policy, not just renewables targets

»»»»» Of course, the most urgent call from environmentalists has been for Western states to invest heavily in renewables technology. The European Commission insists that 4 billion euros of its financial crisis recovery plan will go to forward-looking renewables projects, such as carbon capture and a Desertec project designed to extract desert-based thermal power. New funding has been made available from the European Investment Bank for the development of renewable energy technologies. Support for the broader development of renewables is becoming part of EU foreign policy. The EU is now supporting the development of alternative energy sources in places like North Africa.

But Europe increasingly prevaricates in this area of policy. Experts concur that its much-praised Emissions Trading Scheme has been of insufficient scope to provide the incentives necessary to bring new breakthrough environmental technologies to market. Investment in renewables fell in 2008 for the first time in twenty years. In mid-2009 the Commission acknowledged that the interim target to have 12 per cent of energy needs met by renewables in 2010 would not be met, and that in many member states the share of energy generated from renewable sources was actually decreasing.

And neither does Europe have a particularly good story to tell on its contribution to the global spread of renewable energy technology. The scale of climate change financing forthcoming for developing countries is so far pitiful. The EU appears far more concerned with preserving its own competitive edge in renewables technology. In 2008 the Commission committed 300 million euros through the EU's Global Climate Change Alliance with developing countries, an amount the EP and most commentators have decried as derisory. The World Bank has noted that the financial crisis is already leading European donors to cut back on investment in renewables in the developing world. Investments generated under the Clean Development Mechanism set up by the Kyoto protocol, have fallen dramatically in 2009.

It has become apparent in recent months that the EU is playing hard-ball on its contribution to climate financing. Germany and other member states have ensured that the EU has held back from making a firm offer of the amount it will provide for global climate financing. It is on this question that environmental NGOs have most strongly excoriated the EU for a lack of vision. Prominent NGOs accuse European governments of reducing environmental funds for the developing world in order to fund massive payouts to European oil and gas giants under the EU's 5 billion euro financial crisis recovery package.

Tempering the strategic disruption of climate change requires closer attention to the way that climate financing is actually spent. Some energy experts now fear that European governments are staking far too much on boosting renewables capacity in third countries when they should be taking on board the fact that temperatures will rise significantly whatever targets are agreed at international summits. They say we are blinded by targets aimed at capping temperature rises at 2 degrees Celsius, when we should be preparing to adapt to the massive disruption that will inevitably occur even if a rigorous set of targets is agreed at Copenhagen. In the jargon of climate change experts: we need more of a balance between mitigation and adaptation. The EU has done very little on the latter. There was some focus on adaptation at the 2008 Bali conference and an Adaptation Fund has been running under UN auspices for several years. Part of EU climate funding is going to adaptation. But the amounts are negligible, still at under 50 million dollars annually.

The external dimension of adaptation requires a much tighter link to development policy. European development funding will be required to assist poor and vulnerable countries in such planning. So far this is not happening. Rather, the EU is focused on offering a more immediate deal to developing countries: European capital and firms help enhance renewables capacity, and in return such ini-

tiatives directly export back into European markets. Such trade-offs will undoubtedly help. But they also reflect thinking that appears blind to the ruptures and instability about to hit the developing world, whatever is decided at the international level in set-piece negotiations like those at Copenhagen. And indeed blind to the extent to which such ruptures will cause acute security headaches for Europe itself – quite apart from their prejudicial effect on development targets in the south. In a context of finite resources, some diplomats lament that new funding for alternative energy sources within Europe has diverted resources away from stability-enhancing development assistance in energy-rich states, especially in Africa.

To strike the right balance in all such questions, the EU needs to resolve a divergence that lies at the heart of its prevarication on the strategic dimensions of climate change. A fundamental, almost philosophical divide exists within Europe on the respective roles of the market and the state. For some governments and experts, addressing the geopolitical dimension of climate change lies essentially in taming the market. For others, the market is seen as the optimal driver of political and economic adjustments to climate change.

It is certainly the case that the shift to low carbon will vastly increase the role of the state. But most EU member states are going too far in questioning the role that the market should play. The EU is tilting increasingly against the market. In the summer of 2009 the Commission opened infringement procedures against 25 member states related to energy market protectionism. Calls have become more audible for a carbon tax to be imposed on imports into the EU market. A shift in preferences can be detected from market- to taxation-based approaches. These trends threaten to menace the market dynamics that can be effective in selecting between the many different forms of renewables and mitigating zero-sum geo-strategic planning.

In sum, three areas of concern arise: the lack of detailed scenario planning on climate change impacts within mainstream EU foreign and security policy; a short-termism in the use of resources; and an overly zealous downgrading of market dynamics. European governments are failing to realise that tackling climate change requires a more engaged and geostrategic foreign policy, not just renewables targets. The bargaining dynamics of environmental and security of supply issues will increasingly overlap. These two areas of policy will gradually come to form a seamless whole. The EU has to date been remiss in preparing for this inevitability.

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