

Review - Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet

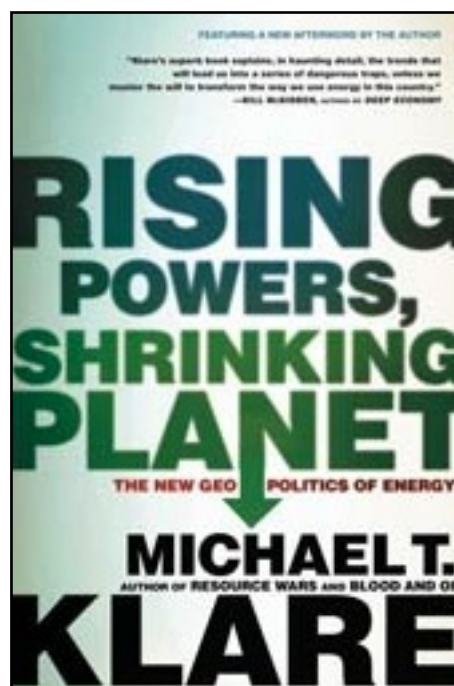
Written by Luke M. Herrington

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LUKE M. HERRINGTON, JAN 9 2012



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In *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy*, Michael T. Klare asserts that the world's reliance on fossil fuels will eventually lead to increased geopolitical tensions. This, he believes, is attributable to a number of factors. First, great powers like the United States (U.S.) are heavily reliant on fossil fuels. This is especially the case with regard to the U.S. military, which has increased its oil consumption from one gallon of petroleum per soldier per day in World War II, to sixteen gallons per soldier per day in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. is heavily reliant on "airpower and mechanized ground forces," and other countries, such as China, Japan, and India, seek to emulate the Pentagon's dependence on high-tech weaponry (11). This guarantees that global demand for fossil fuels will increase over time, and it adds an element of danger to the situation. Surely, countries in need of energy resources will become competitive, especially given the needs of their defense apparatuses.

Additionally, the rise of territorial, economic, and demographic giants, like Brazil, and China, "contributes to the intensity" of the global struggle for energy resources (12). In part, this is because demand for energy is increasing the leverage of "energy-rich states like Kazakhstan and Nigeria" (10), many of which are notoriously unstable, or are situated in dangerous parts of the world. This, of course, is worsened by the fact that the era of easy oil may well be over. Oil extraction is expected to become increasingly difficult, and increasingly expensive, for "it will be buried... in more hazardous environments, or in more conflict-prone, hostile regions of the planet" (13). Some also view the perceived emergence of blocs, maintains Klare, with a wary eye. Take, for example, China, which has been trying "to establish a constellation of friendly states" in Central Asia, in order to gain access to the region's energy reserves. Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the region, the United States and Europe have financed a pipeline from the Caspian Sea to Turkey, in an effort to secure their own energy interests in the region. Klare notes that the great powers are "edgy," and "competitive," a problem he insists hints "at future scenarios of conflict (21).

Why is this so troublesome? Well, Klare views the race for energy as a type of arms-race, a "zero-sum contest that... can only lead to conflict among the major powers" (30). Its effects are already being felt. In 2005, the Defense Department issued a report suggesting that China's unyielding quest for energy resources was increasing Sino-Japanese tensions in the East China Sea—something with major ramifications, given Japan's and the U.S.'s attempts to balance the Chinese militarily, particularly the People's Liberation Army Navy, or PLAN.[1] Furthermore, Asia is polarizing as a Chinese led bloc of states, represented by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and a U.S.-Japan led bloc that could metastasize into an anti-China alliance, increases the risks for war. Klare worries that opposing military blocs have historically "aggravate[d] tensions and suspicions, giving any minor incident that arises the potential to spark something far more dangerous" (234-236).

The New Energy Order

In spite of the tensions caused—or exacerbated—by the world's reliance on fossil fuels, there are other ways in which the competition for energy resources is altering the structure of global power. First, as alluded to earlier, oil wealthy states like Nigeria and Kazakhstan, are learning to leverage their natural resources to increase their prominence vis-à-vis the great powers. For example, Saudi Arabia has the largest known oil reserves in the world, and has thus been able to purchase "some of the world's most sophisticated arms" from countries like the U.S. In another case, Sudan has made cozy with its largest oil consumer, China, thus limiting the efficacy of UN intervention in Darfur (16-17).

Second, there is an economic dimension to this "new international energy order." Klare divides the world into "energy-surplus," and "energy-deficit states." In this dichotomy, states like the U.S., China, and Japan, are forced to pay higher prices of energy imports.[2] Quite obviously, this increases the relative wealth of the energy exporting states (further increasing their influence). Positively speaking, this could be a large benefit for the developing world. Huge sums of wealth have been transferred to Russia, and Abu Dhabi and Dubai emerged from the desert as financial powerhouses for the same reason (14-15). Concordantly, this is acting as an accelerant for globalization. Recall that many petro-states have used their new found financial resources to purchase major shares in U.S. banks, and financial corporations. For example, in November 2007, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority obtained a whopping \$7.5 billion share of Citigroup (15).

Third, this could strengthen, alter, or generate new diplomatic relationships as states seek to secure their energy

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position. One way this manifests itself has already been illustrated: blocs are forming, especially in Asia, where energy-dependent great powers are trying to solidify their positions among energy-surplus states. Fundamentally, this is important because it helps the energy-deficit states create relationships with would-be suppliers, and it's not a new reality in diplomatic history. The U.S., for example, has maintained amiable ties with the Saudi royal family for nearly 60 years. The French, likewise, maintain similar relationships with their energy-abundant former colonies in Africa (20). This could alter the West's relationship with Iran, leading to a cessation of hostilities. It could also solidify an emerging bloc that consists of Iran, Russia, Serbia, and China; only time will tell, but the implications are astounding. Obviously, a number of dangers result from the realignment of energy geopolitics. First and foremost, this could place Israel within reach of a nuclear power (read: Iran), creating an entirely new dimension to the security threats of the global energy alignment. Second, some poor states will face economic collapse as their oil-revenues dry up. This could undermine stability in already dangerous regions. Third, new cartels, such as an OPEC-styled natural gas racket could further increase energy prices, eventually undercutting development (17). The list goes on.

Climate Change

This is all exacerbated by global climate change. Global warming, observes Klare, could redirect badly needed energy resources to the tasks of "constructing dikes and seawalls, rebuilding flooded towns and cities, and relocating hundreds of millions of [environmental] refugees" (59), especially those residing on small island states throughout the Caribbean. Among the additional consequences global climate change could have on the quest for energy resources, is a disruption in local ecosystems. Said differently, storms, especially typhoons and hurricanes, could become more intense, with heavy precipitation and higher wind speeds. This, combined with projected sea-level increases, is alarming for U.S. energy producers, who rely on oilrigs collected from the Gulf of Mexico, and nearby U.S. states. Already by 2005, one such hurricane, Katrina, was responsible for destroying and damaging several oilrigs, forcing "the suspension of one-third of domestic U.S. oil production" (59-60).

Climate change can also redirect precipitation. This could have serious consequences for tropical countries, which rely on hydropower. Klare notes that global warming could lead to a decline in power output from major dams, as rainfall in these areas decreases (60). Fortunately, some experts suggest that global warming may also have benefits—other than quicker tanning time—in the quest for energy. Particularly, oil in harder to reach places, such as the Arctic, might become more accessible as polar icecaps melt away. Even these efforts, however, could become more costly, as severe storm events threaten oil extracting operations in cold water zones. Global warming's greatest impact, argues Klare, is that policymakers may be forced to give more attention to the development of alternative energy resources. And, while Klare expects this to give rise to entirely new "problems and perils" (60), it's far more likely that alternative energy developments could actually help alleviate some of the geopolitical tensions caused by finite energy supplies.

Brazil, Hegemonic Stability, and the Future of the Atlantic

In many respects, Klare's account is fascinating, compelling, and even worrisome. His arguments are strong, and generally speaking, his geopolitical observations are right on (particularly the way in which China and the U.S. are being brought into competition by the world's dwindling energy reserves). While it may be difficult to find Klare's analysis truly disagreeable, he really should have given more attention to Brazil, its energy situation, and the dynamics this creates with regard to Brazil's burgeoning great power ambitions. Klare's frightening scenarios for the next global conflagration begs for further analysis here, especially through the lens hegemonic stability theory, which presupposes a cyclical transition of world leadership; as one world leader, declines, another will rise to replace it. Klare's energy analysis seems to forecast the decline of both the U.S. and China. Who stands to benefit? The Brazilians.

Consider that in the aftermath of the great recession, the U.S. government is entering an era of austerity. Simultaneously, however, the U.S. military—particularly the Navy—is ramping up its presence in the Pacific. What will happen in the Atlantic? Sure, Europe through NATO might have an expanded role there, but Brazil recently discovered prodigious offshore oil deposits along its coast. Given a shared colonial heritage with Angola, a need to protect these resources, and a power vacuum in the South Atlantic, it's not inconceivable that Brazil develop a

Review - Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet

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formidable naval presence there.[3] And, if the type of energy-driven conflict predicted by Klare comes to fruition, Brazil's energy independence could insulate it from war, ultimately leaving Brazil in an ideal position to claim the mantle of world leadership.

If readers are looking to Klare for a more thorough discussion of the ways energy might play a role in the emergence of the multipolar world, they might be better served turning to Dilip Hiro's *After Empire: The Birth of A Multipolar World*, and frankly, Anthony Giddens' *The Politics of Climate Change* features a more thorough, balanced dialogue on climate change. Nevertheless, Klare's analysis is timely, well written, and intriguing. Thus, those concerned with the geopolitics of energy would be justified in obtaining a copy of their own.

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[1] For more information on the naval balancing act taking place in the Pacific, see Luke M. Herrington, "Why the Precarious Rise of China Will Not Lead to Global Hegemony," *E-International Relations*, 15 July 2011, available from <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=10605> (accessed 15 December 2011).

[2] This could derail China's stunning economic growth. Ibid.

[3] See George Friedman, *The Next Decade: Where We've Been... and Where We're Going* (New York, New York: Doubleday, 2011); and Robert D. Kaplan, "How We Would Fight China," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2005 for a more nuanced discussion of Atlantic naval security in the coming years.

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