

Click to read: [Energy Security - What role for NATO? - NATO Research Paper No 29, October 2006.](#)

This paper by Dr Andrew Monaghan provides an extremely good overview of the energy security dilemma that is a primary issue for NATO governments and the European Union. He offers a basic and straightforward definition of energy security as 'sufficient resources at affordable prices'. The paper identifies areas of concern that are causing these governments to feel vulnerable about energy security and foreign energy suppliers. It examines a potential role for NATO that would be compatible with the EU's agenda and the role of other institutions. More importantly, the paper highlights the complexities of the issue and raises questions that governments need to address as a matter of urgency together with the pitfalls to be avoided.

The underlying premise of the paper is that the sustainability of energy reserves is now more a question of politics than geology. The issue here is not about the extent of energy resources or the increasing consumption of China, but about the political stability of states that have resources, access to those resources and the fear of terrorist attack on the global energy infrastructure. In addition, there is anxiety that states may use energy resources for political leverage following the Russia-Ukraine problems of January 2006. The focus of the paper is mainly about relations over energy with Russia as the leading producer and exporter of gas and second largest for oil.

The reasons given for some European states looking for NATO involvement are quite credible in that they reflect the internal dissension and mistrust that has bedevilled the EU for years and who have no wish to see national energy policies suborned by a Brussels-led integrated foreign and security policy. However, in this instance there may be good cause as the EU member states have different energy mixes and transit means, whilst remaining quite diverse in their use of different energy types and sources.

The desire to involve NATO has manifested itself in a Polish proposal to create a new agreement binding NATO and EU members to act together and provide mutual assistance in the face of a threat to energy supplies. The paper does not evaluate that proposal per se but uses it as evidence in support of a US proposal to discuss the merits of a NATO policy, strategy and contingency plans at the North Atlantic Council.

Page 2 of 3

The overt justification for a NATO role is well made on the basis that a threat to energy security affects the stability of member states, whilst terrorist threats, accidents and disasters have a military and civil defence aspect. Because the US is a global player in energy, any discussion would inevitably take on a global dimension and the analysis demonstrates the mutual benefit of locking-in the US. There is further sound analysis and argument with respect to the positive relevance of NATO's partnerships and regional initiative programmes involving energy producing and transit regions, as well as the importance of Turkey's aspirations to become an energy hub and major artery for supplies to Europe. In this context the prospective EU membership of Turkey will be a major factor.

The paper makes suggestions for practical activities that NATO could undertake in association with political dialogue, although the sourcing of the necessary military assets and funding are not mentioned. Training and advice on infrastructure protection along with development of emergency management capabilities are obvious elements. Perhaps more controversial is the suggestion by SACEUR that NATO could provide security in unstable areas for key parts of the energy chain, air surveillance and naval protection for gas and oil routes, and protection of facilities against terrorism or piracy. His opinion that this "is not a problem we can walk away from much longer" is well supported by the arguments and reasoning in this paper.

Quite rightly the paper highlights limitations, problems and pitfall areas to NATO involvement. Not least are the difficulties of Central Asian politics and their inconsistent policies as well as the well-developed links of some eastern European nations with Russia. The problems the EU has in achieving support for a coherent policy from its member states could equally be true for NATO for the same reasons.

The paper provides a good insight into the differences in approach by the US and EU to Russia that could undermine a unified NATO policy. The US has the freedom to be far more robust against Russia's attempts to become an 'energy superpower' whereas the EU has to maintain equitable relations with Russia and would rather address energy security as a market matter and not a military one.

There are many outstanding issues and unanswered questions, some of which are quite fundamental. If NATO adopts a role in energy security, would it work as an alliance (presumably the author means as a mutually supporting entity) or as a forum to create ad hoc coalitions (much as it does now for 'out-of-area' operations)? What priority would energy security have in NATO's priorities? From a political perspective it would be critical that

Page 3 of 3

NATO's role is very carefully defined so that its intentions are not misunderstood. Indeed, if its role is seen as regional and not issue orientated it could undermine European energy security. Certainly, Russia would be suspicious of any such moves by NATO unless it was made abundantly clear that NATO was not attempting to isolate Russia but only to achieve stated limited energy goals. It is clear from the arguments portrayed in the paper that if all the concerns are addressed and any role for NATO is well defined and not over-ambitious, then NATO could perform a useful role in energy security, justified by the valid military concerns.

This excellent paper is recommended to the widest possible readership interested in the UK's future energy security and that of the wider western alliance.