

BOOK REVIEWS

The New Continentalism: Energy and Twenty-First-Century Eurasian Geopolitics

Kent E. Calder

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012,
416 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-17102-0 \$38.00

This book by Kent Calder successfully demonstrates the growing geopolitical ties between oil and gas producers and consumers around the central Eurasian continent, which spreads from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and the former Soviet Union to India, China, South Korea and Japan; this vast area he terms the New Silk Road. According to Calder, these ties are being institutionalized, a development he terms the ‘new continentalism’. This is brought by a series of critical junctures in geopolitics and the growing economic needs of oil and gas producers and consumers in the region. These junctures signify major policy changes caused by international or domestic factors, such as, the oil crises of the 1970s; Deng Xiaoping’s Four Modernizations in China, which started in 1978; India’s financial crisis, which led to economic reforms from 1991; the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991; and the rise of Vladimir Putin in 1999. These subsequently brought about a series of politico-economic realignments; nationally, regionally, and internationally, a pre-requisite to the rise of the new continentalism.

As Calder and many others point out, Asian economic growth has been fueled by a strong demand for energy, in particular for oil and gas in recent decades. The region consumes roughly 40% of the world’s production and

produces, trades, and consumes more and more energy, especially driven by high economic growth in China and India. Currently, *per capita* energy consumption in Asian economies is low, especially compared to that of Western industrialized societies, but it has a high propensity to increase. Furthermore, over roughly half the world's population lives in the New Silk Road area, which will see energy consumption continue to grow in the region as a whole. Calder terms major oil and gas producers such as Russia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, and Saudi Arabia as petro-states. He argues that since we are entering a new era of continentalism in Eurasia, the newly formed geopolitics of the New Silk Road should be reconsidered seriously.

His focus on energy provides us with a critical angle for the new continentalism, since oil in particular is a strategic commodity required for military defense and national security and also because it is a vital necessity for economic growth and betterment of life which all citizens demand, regardless of being in a democratic or authoritarian political system. All leaders, even in the authoritarian states of Eurasia, are increasingly pressed to look after the well-being of their citizens and cannot afford to ignore energy matters. Energy security and trade, therefore, develop into critical processes, where high and low politics interact in the socio-political and economic system.

The growing energy demand of major consumers such as China and India will increasingly be met by consolidation of sea lanes, and by expansion of continental pipelines. Petro-states in the New Silk Road have almost two-thirds of global proved oil reserves and about 70% of proven gas reserves. Energy trade between major energy producers and hungry giants in the New Silk Road therefore gives us a fresh insight into the increasingly overlooked geopolitical developments on the Eurasian Continent.

Theoretically, the book in review is stimulating, as it attempts to incorporate geopolitics, that was an integral part of the classical realist theory of international politics, which was dominant until the early Cold War years. In the era of the 'balance of terror', where weapons of mass destructions can affect every citizen, and even great powers beyond national borders, geopolitics has been given less attention, as many analysts of international affairs believe geopolitical boundaries and physical separation mean less today as natural fortresses against attacks by enemies. A renewed geopolitical perspective incorporated in this book reconfirms the importance of this discipline, in analysis of international relations in general, and especially new developments on the Eurasian continent today.

The case of energy transportation continues to be challenged by geographical features. Oil and gas cannot be transmitted in virtual reality,

unlike democratic ideas via the internet, but has to be delivered physically, by pipelines, trucks, railroads, or ships. The physical nature of oil and gas requires good infrastructure of roads, bridges, and harbors for sea lane transport. As some petro-states such as Russia and Tajikistan have neither such easy access nor well-developed infrastructure for delivery to its neighboring major consumers such as China and India via sea lanes, the construction of transcontinental pipelines is a viable alternative. This, however, requires vast long-term investment. As a result, these producing and consuming states need to develop friendly long-term relations, based on well-defined contracts, to make pipeline construction viable from an economic viewpoint. Calder predicts that energy relations in the New Silk Road lead to further continentalism, and eventually, the transformation of this region, including political integration. Such a tendency will be strengthened especially because these petro-states, including Russia, are selling more and more oil and gas in the region, while they are also importing more from within the region. The result, he argues, is further economic integration, fueled by more trade in energy resources and industrial goods within the region.

This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in energy politics, continentalism, and world orders, as it provides a unique angle on the new and important developments in the Eurasian continent. The critical views advanced by Calder need to be taken into consideration, that is to say, for both major petro-states and consumers in the region, relations with the West continue to be important and cannot be ignored in any debates on national security, trade, or investment. The fact remains that both Russia, the major petro-state, and China, the big energy consumer, trade more with the industrial nations of the West, rather than between themselves or with the Silk Road countries. Energy security is very important for China, but unless it can sell its products, it can neither pay its energy import bills nor require large amount of energy. China's trade with Japan and Korea is large, but it needs to resolve major political disputes with Japan and other countries before it can institutionalize the new continentalism.

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doi:10.1093/irap/lcu009