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Book Review

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## Book Review on Political Geography: "The New Map" of Yergin

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### Abstract

This book review delves into the pages of Daniel Yergin's "The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Conflict of Nations" and reveals the profound geopolitical implications viewed through the prism of political geography. The pages of the African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, not only contribute to the advancement of the discourse of political geography but also provide a resource that enables geography students to broaden their horizons and develop a deeper understanding of the complex dimensions of the field.

**Keywords:** *Global energy landscape, Geopolitical implications, New map, Political geography, Review*

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## 1. Introduction

Book reviews play a critical role in helping readers navigate the vast literary landscape. They provide incisive assessments, insights, and critiques of important works, directing potential readers to valuable sources of knowledge and enriching discourse on important issues. Consequently, political geography is a central field of study that examines the complicated relationship between geography and politics. It addresses how physical landscapes, boundaries, and resources influence the political decisions, power structures, and conflicts that shape our world.

Writing more than half a century ago in his book "*Change and Habit: The Challenge of Our Time*", Toynbee (1966) offered insights into the strategies civilizations employ when faced with adversity. One of these strategies is zealotry and fanaticism, an ominous warning of potential problems in certain regions, including Afghanistan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Elekes, 1969). Historians possess the unique ability to look backward into the future, much like influential writers who can forecast forthcoming events. Toynbee argues that humans have dangerous habits that are not instinctive but habitual. The most dangerous of these is the inclination to war— a choice for which he believes there are alternatives, but which are often overlooked, leading to unnecessary violence and incompetence. His critique of tribalism or nationalism, of the "us" versus "them" mentality (refer to Berreby, 2005), becomes a central concern, highlighting the dangers of such narrow views (Juraev and Ahn, 2022). To combat these dangerous habits, virtue theory encourages the adoption of new

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habits and inspires hope in man's capacity to change. In this vein, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855), another visionary, expressed that a single person can draw attention to impending doom but is unable to single-handedly save an entire age, drawing parallels to the Cassandra problem from Greek Mythology, where Cassandra's warnings went unheeded (Kaufman et al., 1977; Makolkin, 2002).

Against the background of these historical findings, Daniel Yergin's *"The New Map"* proves to be an extraordinary and indispensable contribution to geography. Daniel Yergin (born in 1947) is a preeminent authority on energy and has received acclaim for his works such as *"The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power"* (1991) and *"The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World"* (2011). This latest work *"The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations"* (2020) is a kaleidoscopic overview that meticulously examines a wide range of geopolitical developments encompassing both contemporary and historical events.<sup>1\*</sup> In this fascinating work, Yergin artfully weaves together energy dynamics, national rivalries, technological metamorphoses and the ever-present spectre of climate change. A prominent figure at the helm of IHS Markit (*Ibid.*, p. 359), a respected energy research and information company, Yergin's acumen shines through his incisive analysis of oil and gas – a fundamental bedrock of the global energy landscape that exerts an indelible influence on the future trajectory of our world (*Ibid.*, p. 359). Through this study, *"The New Map"* reveals unprecedented insights into the pioneers of the transformative US *"shale gale"* responsible for reshaping energy dynamics (*Ibid.*, pp. 25-33).

In his quest to understand contemporary geopolitics, Yergin deftly dissects Russia's *"manoeuvres"*, seamlessly drawing connections to its historical use of Marxist-Leninist ideology as a geopolitical tool (*Ibid.*, p. 125). The book also looks at China's strategic energy *"manoeuvres"*, with a particular focus on its activities in the highly contested South China Sea—a crucible of utmost importance in today's geopolitical fabric. At the heart of the narrative is an exploration of power—a multi-layered concept that encompasses the literal energy that drives transportation, industry and urban centres (*Ibid.*, p. 346), as well as the political power nations wield to shape their economies, international trade patterns and global interactions (*Ibid.*, pp. 91-123). *"The New Map"* deftly navigates the delicate balance between open market paradigms and protectionist impulses, illuminating the intricacies of cooperative relationships and confrontations on the world stage. This work addresses the interplay of energy, politics and climate change—an intricate web that unfolds a comprehensive examination of the evolving energy landscape and its profound impact on geopolitical structures (*Ibid.*, pp. 301-306). Scholars, policymakers, and attentive readers will find these pages invaluable insights into the labyrinthine forces shaping global geography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Daniel Yergin's masterful prose, fortified by rigorous research, gives this book undeniable significance and elevates it to an indispensable addition to the corpus of political geography and global energy studies. In *"The New Map"*, Yergin skillfully illuminates the profound interactions between energy and politics, charting the course of evolving world order in the crucible of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitical arena (*Ibid.*, p. 15 and refer to Yergin's *"The Prize"*).

## 2. Discussion

One of the most pressing challenges we face today is the continued existence of the *"war economy"*, a concept Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) forcefully warned against at the end of his dedicated military service. During his career, he witnessed first-hand the symbiotic relationship between the military and the arms industry, which led him to warn us about the rise of the military-industrial complex (refer to Cohn, 2012). This intricate connection has resulted in an exorbitant military budget for our nation, diverting resources that could be used for far more useful endeavours (refer also to *"Farewell address by President Eisenhower, January 17, 1961"*). The roots of this staggering military spending can be traced back to the aftermath of the devastating air raids in Germany that helped create the situation we face today. It is crucial that we recognize that we must break away from the archaic reliance on war as a means of resolving conflicts. As Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz (1780-1831), the famous European war strategist, noted, the war in the past was seen as a continuation of politics by alternative methods. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the use of force to achieve political goals is no longer effective and its historical effectiveness remains questionable at best. Currently, military spending is a widespread issue (refer to Juraev and Ahn, 2022). Some countries, such as Pakistan and certain Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, allocate significant budgets to their defence sector

<sup>1</sup> Yergin, D. (2020). *The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations*. New York, Penguin Press. LCC HD9502.A2 (ebook). LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020002300>

\* Note: In this article, we will adopt the abbreviation *"The New Map"* for the book to address its lengthy title. Consequently, when referencing the work in subsequent citations, *"The New Map"* will be represented as *"Ibid."*.

(refer also to [Hasbani, 2006](#)). Interestingly, despite these substantial military investments, some countries hardly use these resources themselves. Instead, they seem to “subsidise” Western industries, which raises questions about the reason for these immense budgets. During the Gulf War, for example, these countries did not actively use their armed forces and relied on outside intervention, particularly from the United States (refer to [Hyams et al., 1996](#)).

Reflecting on such analyses, we have to face the reality that these excessive budgets are being used inefficiently. It is unfortunate, however, that society often avoids addressing this problem directly. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that this unsustainable situation cannot last forever. I personally believe that we must take action to correct this situation. Daniel Yergin’s works, including “*The Prize*” and “*The New Maps*”, are reminiscent of the wars fought over oil in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is no doubt that oil has become the “*lifeblood*” of our modern technological society, and for many its value even surpasses that of “*human blood*”. It is also imperative that we question the war economy and re-evaluate the enormous military expenditures that are common today. As a species, we must recognise that war is outdated and ineffective as a solution to the conflict. Instead, we should promote diplomatic and peaceful means of resolving differences and focus on investing resources in ventures that truly benefit humanity. In this way, we can strive for a more harmonious and prosperous future for all.

So when we turn to Daniel Yergin’s Book, “*The New Map*”, we embark on a compelling journey through political geography. Examining the shale revolution in the United States offers invaluable insights into the transformative power of energetic progress to reshape global energy dynamics and geopolitical realities. This new landscape has given the US a prominent position in the global energy arena, transforming traditional energy relations and geopolitical dynamics internationally. Yergin boards on a compelling journey through the realm of political geography, illuminating the intricate interplay between global energy dynamics and geopolitical realities. The introductory examination of the shale revolution in the United States offers valuable insights into the ways in which advances in energy can trigger seismic shifts in traditional power structures (*Ibid.*, pp. 9-12). The *shale boom* has not only bolstered oil and gas supplies but also catapulted the US into a prominent position in the global energy arena, reshaping traditional energy relations and geopolitical dynamics. From a geographical perspective, this phenomenon reflects the profound impact of energy resources on the national and international balance of power (see also [Mocarquer et al., 2009](#)). The book takes an in-depth look at the geopolitical complexities of Russia and China and uncovers their different energy strategies and alliances (*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; pp. 63-67). Russia’s strategic orientation towards the East, driven by unresolved border disputes following the collapse of the Soviet Union, is a critical factor in its energy aspirations (*Ibid.*, pp. 35-46). Yergin’s nuanced examination shows how Russia strategically uses its oil and gas resources as geopolitical tools, influencing regional and global dynamics. In parallel, the spotlight on China’s ambitious “Belt and Road” Initiative offers a compelling geographical perspective on the transformative nature of energy-driven investment strategies (refer to *Ibid.*, Chapter 25). This initiative has far-reaching implications for global political geography as it reshapes economic cooperation and strategic partnerships across regions.

The book’s focus on the energy transition and climate change makes for lively debates that also touch on critical geographical aspects. Yergin acknowledges the undeniable progress made in the field of renewable energy, but also offers a perspective on the gradual transition to a green energy paradigm. From a geographical perspective, this argument stimulates discussions on the complexity of reconciling ambitious net-zero targets with the evolving geopolitical landscape (*Ibid.*, Chapter 42). Geographical approaches such as energy geopolitics and environmental determinism come into play when analyzing the complicated relationship between energy transition, climate change and policy choices. Critics raise concerns about the urgency of climate action and its potential impact on political geography and international relations in light of the changing geopolitical landscape. “*The New Map*” is a timely and important contribution to political geography that sheds light on the emergence of a new global order shaped by energy revolutions and *geopolitical manoeuvres*. The concept of an unfolding “*energy cold war*” between China and the US provides a compelling context for understanding the geopolitics of energy competition (*Ibid.*, Chapter 29). Moreover, Russia’s skilful use of energy as a political lever highlights the powerful influence of energy resources on statecraft and regional power dynamics (*Ibid.*, Chapter 9).

So, “*The New Map*” is an erudite and comprehensive exploration of the intricate connections between energy transition, geopolitics and climate change from a geographical perspective. Yergin’s masterful prose serves as a scholarly compass for scientists, policymakers and readers alike, enabling a deeper understanding

of the profound implications for political geography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the world navigates the dynamic forces shaping the global energy map, Yergin’s work offers invaluable geographical insights and fosters critical discussions about the geopolitical implications of energy developments in an ever-changing world. Therefore, “*The New Map*” is a comprehensive and compelling analysis of the connections between global energy trends, geopolitics, and climate change. This review acknowledges the importance of Yergin’s work but also addresses the criticisms of the book, particularly the perceived focus on the US and the limited consideration of developing country perspectives. Overall, Yergin’s timely exploration of the dynamic energy landscape and its geopolitical implications is a valuable addition to the literature on political geography and global energy studies.

### 3. Main Points in “*The New Map*”

Yergin’s “*The New Map*” focuses on the complicated interplay between energy resources, geopolitics and climate change. As a geography enthusiast and student, reading this book will provide you with invaluable insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape related to the global energy paradigm. To highlight the important political geography issues covered in this book, I have compiled a table summarizing the key points and their implications.

| Table 1: Key Political Geographic Points |                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Key Point in the Book                    | Geographical approaches                                                                                                             |
| The Shale Revolution                     | “Energy Geopolitics”: e.g. how energy resources and their distribution can influence, etc.                                          |
| Russia’s Energy Geopolitics              | “Geopolitical Leverage”: e.g. Russia’s strategic pivot to the East, etc.                                                            |
| China’s Belt and Road Initiative         | “Geo-economic Strategy”: e.g. how countries use economic policies, such as investment in infrastructure and trade initiatives, etc. |
| Climate Change Policy and Geopolitical   | “Environmental Determinism”: e.g. how environmental Implications challenges, global power, etc.                                     |

Table 1 summarizes the main political-geographical points discussed in “*The New Map*” and offers invaluable insights to students of geography. By examining the shale revolution, students gain a comprehensive understanding of how energy innovation can change global power dynamics (see also [Blondel et al., 2021](#)). Analysis of Russia’s energy geopolitics highlights the importance of energy as a geopolitical tool and shows how nations can use their resources for influence (refer also to [Casier, 2011](#)).

China’s Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates the importance of energy-driven investment strategies and allows students to examine the geopolitical implications of infrastructure projects and their impact on global trade and politics. Finally, the book’s examination of climate policy links climate action to geopolitical shifts and promotes a deeper understanding of how environmental concerns relate to international relations (see also [Colombo and Soler i Lecha, 2021](#)). “*The New Map*” presents a rich picture of political geography and highlights the profound connections between energy, politics and climate change. By absorbing these key points and pedagogical insights, students of geography can develop a nuanced understanding of the forces shaping today’s geopolitical landscape and contribute meaningfully to discussions about the evolving global energy order.

### 4. Conclusion

The selection of “*The New Map*” by Daniel Yergin as the focus of this book review article is underpinned by its profound importance in the field of political geography. The book contains a comprehensive analysis of the evolving global energy landscape, focusing on the interplay between energy resources, geopolitics and climate change. As energy continues to be a fundamental driver of political and economic developments around the world, understanding its impact on national power relations and international relations from a geographical perspective is crucial. Geographically, energy resources play a central role in shaping the dynamics of nations and regions. The shale revolution in the United States described in this book is an excellent example of how the

abundance of domestic oil and gas has changed the country's position in the global energy market. This shift from energy import dependence to energy exports led to significant geopolitical implications. Understanding such changes is important for understanding how energy can influence geopolitical power shifts and shape national and international policy decisions. Moreover, examining Russia's strategic orientation towards the East and its use of energy as a tool for geopolitical influence highlights the complicated relationship between energy reserves and "political manoeuvring". The case of China's Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates the transformative impact of energy-driven investments on global economic cooperation and political influence, offering valuable insights into the geopolitical implications of energy strategies. This study therefore aims to fill important gaps in the literature on the multiple linkages between energy, geopolitics and climate change from a geographical perspective. While there are numerous analyses of energy markets and political events, few studies offer a comprehensive geographical assessment of how energy developments influence global power dynamics and international relations. Incorporating geographical theories and approaches will provide a deeper understanding of the spatial dimensions of energy policy. For example, concepts such as energy geopolitics can shed light on how energy resources function as geopolitical capital and influence the behaviour of states. In addition, the application of environmental determinism can provide insights into how access to certain energy resources affects a nation's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and how this vulnerability can influence geopolitical strategies.

In addition, from a geographical perspective, the book provides an in-depth analysis of the geographical distribution of energy resources and the impact of this distribution on regional and global political landscapes. For example, the abundance of shale resources in the US has changed the country's energy profile and led to regional and international shifts in energy trade. Similarly, Russia's vast energy reserves in the East have influenced its geopolitical interests and alliances in the region. Real-world examples of energy-driven geopolitics can be found in Russia's use of its oil and gas supplies to exert influence over neighbouring states and China's strategic investments to secure vital commodity trade routes through the Belt and Road Initiative. These examples illustrate how energy resources serve as strategic capital, with potential implications for regional stability and global power dynamics. All in all, the reason for focusing on "The New Map" in this book review is its great relevance to political geography. By examining the interplay between energy transformations, geopolitics and climate change, the book fills critical gaps in the geographical literature and offers valuable insights for understanding the spatial dimensions of global power dynamics. The inclusion of geographical theories and analyses enriches the study and provides a comprehensive understanding of how energy resources shape political strategies and shape international relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Besides that, on the big screen of global geopolitics, Daniel Yergin's "The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations" as a shining beacon illuminating the intricate interplay between energy dynamics, climate pressures, and the reshaping of nations. As the African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences seeks to promote a deeper understanding of the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape, this book review provides an invaluable lens through which readers can explore the book's profound insights and empower them to recognize Africa's central role in this complicated web. By embracing the wisdom of these pages, readers can not only enrich their perspectives, but also actively shape the future of their continent amid global geostrategic currents.

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