

Preface to Korean edition of *Energy Security: For What? For Whom?*

When experts and politicians use the term “energy security”, what do they mean? Whose security, and what kind of security, are they talking about? There are many kinds of security: the security of manufacturers to have enough cheap fossil fuels to continue making profits; the security of armies who need oil to power their military machines; the security of homeowners wanting to keep warm in the winter; the security of farmers hoping to be able to continue collecting enough fuel for cooking; the security of global citizens seeking to avoid the agricultural catastrophes and social dislocations associated with climate change; and so on.

For the Korean state, energy security appears to revolve largely around investment in overseas fossil fuel projects that aim at supplying what geographer Mazen Labben calls the “militarized world market” for oil, gas and coal, as well as the maintenance of domestic nuclear energy plants. Korea has also become active in overseas agrofuel projects and the land appropriation that they entail.

This conception of “security” – which is the same as that adopted by most national states, above all in the industrialized world – is obviously full of biases and contradictions. While “securing” the ability of business to accumulate profits through cheap energy for mechanized manufacture, speedy transport and mass consumption, mainstream national and international energy policies are creating unsustainable *insecurities* for the majority world.

This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the US and Europe. It is estimated that between 1976 and 2007, the US military alone spent an average of US\$225 billion per year solely on oil supply protection in the Persian Gulf. Few could argue that the militarization of the Middle East that this figure represents has made the lives of the peoples of the region – or even of the globe – more “secure”.

Yet the point applies much more broadly. For example, the unequal exchanges required to keep Korea's power plants humming and its labour “productive” can only be enforced through the forcible undermining of livelihoods in places like Burma, with its Shwe Gas Project (boasting the involvement of Daewoo International and the Korean Gas Corporation), or Indonesia, with its agrofuel projects promoted by Samsung C & T Corporation. More broadly, the Korean state's commitment to promoting further fossil fuel development – like the commitment of states in Europe, North America, and Japan and elsewhere in Asia – is endangering everyone whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by climate change. In many ways, to subsidize such trends in the name of “self-development” is in fact to undermine autonomy on the local level; to support them in the name of “energy independence” is the very opposite of promoting “security”.

While it questions dominant notions of “security”, the present report also tries to go further, by exposing some of the elite biases inherent in dominant conceptions of “energy” as well. The “energy” that most politicians talk about today, we have discovered, is really a very recent invention centred on the business imperative to control and increase the productivity of labour. “Energy”, as the term is usually used today, is a way of commensurating and mobilizing a range of formerly context-specific activities in order to maximize the capacity of human bodies to make stuff and the ability of business to accumulate capital. Insofar as the imperative toward endless accumulation is a threat to the human future, the “energy” practices that are associated with it are never going to become sustainable or democratic, nor to be compatible with most kinds of “security”.

Our research has brought many surprises that have challenged our own thinking about energy and security. Its biggest lesson for us, perhaps, has been how little we understand such seemingly everyday

concepts, and how much more we need to investigate them. Public discussion of ideas such as those contained in this report has only just begun, and we expect that the contributions of ordinary people in Korea as well as other countries will be crucial in trying to evolve a better understanding of how to achieve a shared and survivable energy future.

Larry Lohmann
Nicholas Hildyard
The Corner House
April 2014