

# Reliance on rogue states for fossil fuels will end after a period of pain

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In a previous column, I contrasted the swift response of the world's nations to the Covid-19 pandemic with their sluggish response to the looming crisis of climate change. But who could have guessed that a new disaster would emerge that may have a significant impact on the latter?

The massive suffering and humanitarian costs incurred by Putin's invasion of [Ukraine](#) can be seen on our TV screens every evening. Leery of triggering a full-scale war between world powers, the West has adopted the approach of imposing severe economic sanctions on [Russia](#) in an attempt to contain Putin's aggression. Unfortunately, this economic war will undoubtedly have an impact on all of us.

Rather than fund Putin's war machine, a ban on oil and gas imports from Russia certainly seems a sensible step. However, many western nations depend heavily on Russia for fossil fuels and thus the price of these commodities will increase significantly, just at a time when prices were due to increase as we begin the transition to renewable energy sources.

This problem will be particularly evident in the [European Union](#), as many member states depend directly on Russia for their gas and oil imports. Indeed, Germany's decision to close their nuclear reactors left them highly dependent on Russian fossil fuel, a decision that looks ever more foolish in hindsight.

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There is a real danger that the current political situation may have a significant impact on the global transition to renewable energy. Some political groups are already arguing that governments should abandon their efforts to reduce emissions in order to protect consumers from high fuel prices.

For example, the [Net Zero Scrutiny](#) Group in London is campaigning to get the UK government to abandon the target of zero carbon emissions by 2050, arguing that it is neither achievable nor necessary. A brief glance at the members of this organisation reveals a who's who list of climate change sceptics – I would argue it is precisely because of the influence of such people that we have left it so late to address global warming.

However, there is another way of looking at the current international crisis – namely that Putin's aggression could act as a trigger to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. After all, the current situation in which the nations of the world depend heavily on a small number of states such as Russia and [Saudi Arabia](#) for their energy needs is far from ideal. Thus, the transition from fossil fuels to renewables is not only of great importance in the battle to slow global warming, it could also free the nations of the world from their dependence on a few rogue states.

## Solar cell technology

Many climate scientists and commentators have been making this point for years. Perhaps one outcome of Putin's war will be to make this point more evident to world leaders. Certainly, it seems likely that many countries will now ask whether it is feasible for the transition to renewable energy to happen more quickly than planned.

The storage of electricity generated from wind farms remains a technical problem. Should nations be addressing this problem with the same urgency as that afforded to the [Manhattan](#) project? Rather than spending millions on fighter jets that don't get deployed at the critical moment, should nations be investing their money in solar cell technology?

Another approach is the path of conservation. During the pandemic, many of us discovered (or rediscovered) that the replacement of driving with walking and cycling where possible is hugely beneficial to both physical and mental health. A welcome side effect was a marked reduction in the weekly petrol bill. This may contain the seeds for a more general approach to reducing our energy dependence, from the banning of unnecessary luxury flights to the strong discouragement of space tourism.

At the time of writing, it seems unlikely that Putin will be deflected from his grim objective of a forced regime change in the Ukraine, despite the brave efforts of the Ukrainians. If he succeeds, it will be a Pyrrhic victory, achieved at the expense of a huge tally of civilian suffering and the international ostracisation of Russia. Another outcome may be a worldwide realisation that the days of depending on a small number of nations for our energy needs are truly over.

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