

The US presidents on LNG exports to the EU: Market dominates

Michaela Hrabušajová and Matúš Mišík

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Bratislava

Contact: matus.misik@uniba.sk

Summary

Changing global energy market is introducing new dynamics as the United States (US) become a significant liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplier to the European Union (EU). [Our research](#) attempts to contribute to the effort of uncovering motivations behind a creation of this new supply relationship. By introducing the geopolitical and market dichotomy, based on the grand theories of International Relations, we examined whether the main driver behind this setup is driven by economic opportunities or geopolitical thinking. The analysis of the official communication of the US presidents and their closest collaborators from 2009 to 2022 revealed that the US's exports of LNG to the EU were mostly prompted by market-oriented arguments. The presidents emphasised cooperation and framed energy security as a product of a functional market, they did not view the export of LNG predominantly in terms of geopolitical struggles.

Introduction

The global energy market is dramatically changing. Many states developed strategies how to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources to mitigate climate change, thus altering the way energy is produced, transported, utilised, and conserved. However, geopolitical crises sometimes trigger major shifts even in the 'traditional' fossil-fuel energy sector. This energy sector had been, until 2020, considered 'stable' as the direction of its development was clear – phasing out the fossil fuels in favour of renewables. However, COVID pandemic (that started in 2020) and especially the Russian invasion of Ukraine (that started in 2022) have highlighted the importance of energy security and the ability of fossil fuels to safeguarding it. At least for some EU member states; others, on the other hand, doubled down on renewables as a solution (not only) of energy security challenges.

At the same time, as a direct consequence of Russian war efforts, the European Union (EU) acknowledged energy supplies from Russia a liability and decided to phase them out. First in a step-by-step 'sanction' mode, but in Spring 2025 the Commission announced plans to phase out Russian energy sources until 2027. This created a lucrative opportunity for other possible suppliers as a sizeable European energy market was suddenly looking for large volumes of supplies from new (non-Russian) sources. In research published in [Energy Research and Social Science](#) we ask how the United States (US) approached such opportunity in Europe.

Over the last more than a decade, the US adopted a new role in the global energy market. After the shale gas revolution of 2000s and especially early 2010s, the country became a significant liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter, looking for new markets to expand beyond Asia, its traditional buyer. Indeed, data shows that the US became a major energy exporter to Europe after the start of the Russian invasion. Yet, what numbers doesn't show is what was the US reasoning for doing this. How are they perceiving the export of LNG to Europe? Does the US consider it to be just a market opportunity? Finding new locations for their LNG export? Or it is a utilitarian move to serve

the US national interests by lowering the Russian influence in Europe by replacing the role of the traditional main energy supplier in the Union's energy market?

Our research tried to look at the US perspective on these questions by analysing the White House official communication about LNG exports to the EU. We looked at official press statements of the US presidents and their closes collaborators that were published at the White House official webpage. This provides us with an overview of what the US presidents claim about the export of US LNG to the EU, although we acknowledge the importance of other communication channels, especially the social media.

Geopolitical and market dichotomy

To determine the US approach to export of LNG to Europe we developed two main theoretical positions – geopolitical and market. The geopolitical approach is embedded in realism, a major theory of International Relations. Within this perspective states rely on themselves to secure energy supplies. Access to energy supplies as well as protecting energy infrastructure are national security goals because steady flow of energy is important for a state's survival. Energy independence is desirable as a way to maximize survival chances because energy supplies can be weaponized by exporting countries. Thus, not being dependent on foreign supplies lower the chances of threats to survival. The geopolitical stance thus sees energy supplies as a way to advance national interests. So, not only can other states (realism does not believe in the importance of other actors) hurt the state by weaponizing supplies to mandate their agenda, but the state itself can promote its own interests if it's able to export energy, therefore strengthening its position in the world. Thus, from this perspective, export of LNG to the EU can strengthen the US position as the global energy actor and help its allies against common enemy (i.e. Russia).

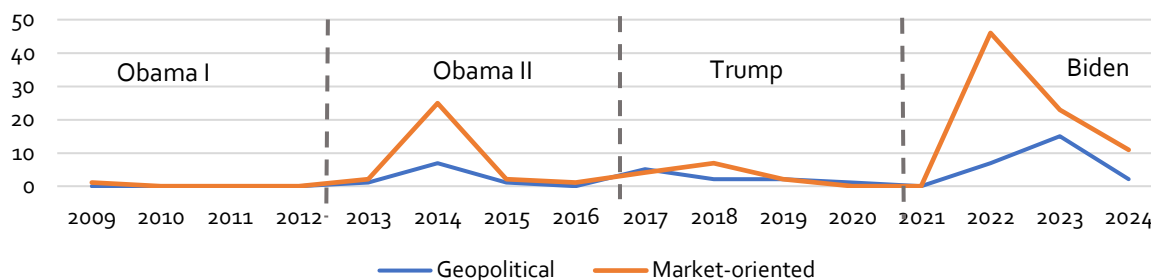
The second perspective, the market approach, stems from the liberal theory of International Relations and hence doesn't share such a bleak perception of energy (or human nature in general). This approach treats energy sources as a commodity, not a tool of (geo)political influence. A core assumption of liberal theory is that states can trust each other within an international arena. Hence creation of shared norms and rules is possible; this can even lead to the development of international institution that guide behaviour of actors within the international arena. This is why the market approach believes that energy market can provide energy security: competition prevents an exporting actor from monopolizing (and thus weaponizing) its leverage over the market. Furthermore, regulation secures fair and trusting treatment. In fact, liberals believe that interdependence is not a weakness, but a peace-check. A state A is not going to attack its major customer, state B, as this would hurt state's A own economy and vice-versa. All of this translated into an assumption about the position of the US regarding its LNG export to the EU means that LNG from the US is a competitor to Russian natural gas supplies and will win within the market rivalry.

Main findings

So, where the US lands in this dichotomy? Analysing the data from the White House official website from 2009 to 2024 (we also included the last 20 days of Biden's administration in 2025) we find out that the White House (i.e. presidents and their closes collaborators) was not discussing LNG exports to the EU very often (Figure 1). But when it did, the White House was usually adopting the market approach, regardless of the political party (although details are very important here).

The White House official communications on this topic were relatively limited during the selected period. However, this has two significant exceptions: the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine that started in 2022. While on other years LNG export to the EU is barely mentioned more than nine times, there were significant spikes in 2014 (32) and 2022 onward before declining again in 2024 (53 and 34 in 2022 and 2023, respectively).

Figure 1: Number of statements on LNG exports to the EU by US administrations



Source: Authors, based on the official White House website

Note: Two market-oriented statements in 2017 belong to Obama II

Giving a closer look at what was the White House saying when it was talking about the LNG exports to the EU we find out that natural gas export to the EU was perceived dominantly through the market prism. Market approach was prevailing in all covered administrations (Obama I & II, Trump I and Biden administrations). The primary narrative emphasizes cooperation and frames energy security as a product of a functional market. Other statements frequently highlighted the importance of diverse energy supply sources as the key to ensuring EU energy security. The main message of the White House communications was as follows: diverse energy sources, particularly US LNG exports, are positioned as critical tools for helping allies to address their energy security challenges. Such message was presented also during the two main geopolitical crises linked to EU's energy security – the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the 2022 onward full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The market approach was dominant in all covered administrations; albeit the Trump administration was almost 50-50 in the market-geopolitical ratio. Still, this is a sign of bipartisanship that is uncharacteristic for current US politics marred by polarization. A stark difference between pro-fossil fuel Trump Republicans and pro-renewables Democrats (and some Republicans) shows that energy policy is not shielded from this phenomenon. Therefore, a consensus on LNG exports presents a unique exception.

Limitations of this research and future research

It is important to note that focusing solely on the White House official communications (its website) is not giving a full picture. While the White House covers official statements or press briefings, the US presidents and their close collaborators can communicate by other means. They can talk to traditional media or use their social networks accounts. The White House is also not the only relevant actor in the US energy diplomacy. Congress as well as the US departments of commerce, energy and state are also important. Indeed, the case of sanctions of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline shows that the US Congress is a crucial actor. Hence, analysing the US Congress' approach to the LNG exports would provide a fuller picture of perception of US policy makers.

Applying the geopolitical – market dichotomy on the EU could answer the question if the US tendency for market approach isn't simply an effort to meet the 'customer's' preference as the EU is generally perceived as a market-oriented actor. Therefore, future research should look into this issue. Similarly, a continuation of the analysis considering current second Trump administration and future administrations would reveal a vitality of a bipartisan market approach that is unique considering current polarisation of the US politics. A future analysis of other major LNG exporters to the EU could reveal if is the US approach distinctive or following a general trend among exporters to the EU. Furthermore, analysing all major global exporters of LNG would show if a market approach were a prevailing stance or specific to the EU region.

Additionally, major US energy companies are not state-owned (but are important actors from the perspective of liberal theory of International Relations). Yet, examination of the official White House communication offers an overview of one of the most important actors in the US politics. It reveals what they want to talk about and how they want to do so without media editing.

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency Grant No. APVV-23-0032 ["External Carbon Security in the Decarbonising European Union: Creating a Common EU Energy Voice"](#).