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In the name of energy security: the struggle over the exportation of Israeli natural gas

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The concept of energy security is open for manipulation and various interpretations.
- Each definition of energy security was anchored in different ideologies, goals, policies and legitimizing factors.
- Numerous discursive means were used to portray energy as a security matter.
- The coupling of energy with securitization rhetoric was working against cooperative efforts.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to place the notion of energy security under critical scrutiny by unpacking how different actors manipulate the term through the mobilization of existential language as a prism for creating securitization discourse. Through an examination of an Israeli inter-ministerial committee charged with developing national policy regarding newly-discovered natural gas reserves off the coast of Israel, the study finds that the concept of energy security is open for manipulation and various interpretations. While some actors stress environmental acceptability and independency as pillars of energy security, others prioritized supply reliability and geopolitical benefits associated with gas exportation. Each definition of energy security was also found to be anchored in different ideologies, goals, policies and legitimizing factors. The coupling of energy with securitization rhetoric was ultimately determined as working against cooperative efforts, as committee conflicts intensified and suggested institutional measures became disproportional.

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1. Introduction

Energy discourses are increasingly being saturated with existential language, evident by the persistent broadcasting of terms like oil weapons, energy independency and energy choke points in political speeches, scholarly articles and current energy policies worldwide. For example, the Electricity Market Reform initiative proposed by the UK's Department of Energy & Climate Change as part of its current Energy Bill targets investment for "ageing energy infrastructure" that will "help keep the lights on" throughout the country (DECC, 2013). In the U.S., "energy independency" is being touted as the only way that American "vulnerability" to foreign "supply disruption" can be avoided (CBO, (2012): 6). Scholars attribute this broad-scale conceptualization of energy as a security issue to what many perceive as escalating geopolitical tensions in oil-producing regions coupled with

the rise of new energy consumers in Asia, a global over-reliance on oil and an expected depletion of fossil fuels (Bielecki, 2002; Cherp and Jewell, 2011).

The nexus between energy security and other policy issues (such as climate change and trade relations) (Kruyt et al., 2009) has resulted in a further broadening of energy security to capture various energy-related insecurities. In the US for example, the Obama Administration recently announced of its plan to implement an Energy Security Trust, which will address some of the insecurities that climate-change poses (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) while limiting the influence that foreign oil producers have on national decisions (Greene, 2010). As an "umbrella term" for international security, economic development and political relations (Ciută, 2010: 126), the energy security concept nicely weaves together disparate policy issues into one basket.

Despite this profusion of energy security policies, there is little consensus regarding the meaning of the concept (Ciută, 2010; Kruyt et al., 2009) due to its transposable nature (Alhaji, 2007; Littlefield, 2013). Disagreement over what element of energy must be secured is common, as the concept may indicate the securing of physical

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supplies at affordable prices (IEA, 2013a), a reduction in dependence on external suppliers (Bang, 2010) and/or the strengthening of market regulations due to free market inefficiencies (Bohi and Toman, 1993). A lack of consensus over the beneficiaries of energy security is increasingly heard as well, as some scholars and institutions advocate focusing energy security efforts towards vulnerable local communities (e.g. Vivoda, 2010) while others promote energy security at the nation state level (e.g. International Energy Agency).

Given this all-inclusive yet indefinite character, the concept is consequently said to facilitate policymakers in agenda setting processes through the conflation of public energy elements and the “malleability” of the term as rhetoric (Littlefield, 2013: 779). Similar studies on the exploitation of the energy security concept (e.g. Bang, 2010; Rogers-Hayden et al., 2011) confirm that the concept's ambiguity and interchangeability allow for the manipulation of the term to influence energy security policies accordingly.

The literature on energy security is considerable given its transposable and indefinite nature, with increasing research focusing on energy security as a concept (Alhajji, 2007; Kruyt et al., 2009), as a policy process (Bang, 2010), and on associative terminology that reflects for example the accessibility of energy services (Jansen and Seebregts, 2010) and their interplay on the global market (Gillingham et al., 2009; Greene, 2010). By far less extensive is empirical research on how the concept's “polysemic” nature (Chester, 2010: 893) is exploited for the benefit of its invocators, though notable studies on how the media frames the concept (Swiatkiewicz-Mosny and Wagner, 2012) and how it influences public perception exist (Corner et al., 2011). In fact, current securitization literature identifies a gap in the implications of securitization processes (Roe, 2012; Wæver, 2011). This indicates that there is a need for empirical investigation into the ramifications of using “interest-driven and emotion-laden terms like...energy independence and energy sustainability” (Littlefield, 2013: 787) in the name of energy security, for what purpose and by whom.

Given these research gaps, this study seeks to determine how energy security is socially constructed as a discourse, by which actors it is mobilized, for what purpose, and to some degree, its implications on decision making processes. The study takes a regional perspective of energy security and makes use of recently published discussions of the Tzema Committee, a working group with the mandate to determine between two policies: achieving energy security via gas exportation versus a gas reserve policy, two courses of action with differing impacts on Israel's energy economy and the region's stability.

The study commences with a review of the literature on energy security and a short presentation of the key elements of securitization theory, paying particular attention to energy security as a social construct. This is followed by a section in which Israeli energy availability and the political setting are reviewed along with the case study. The methodology is then outlined, with a thorough consideration of the primary variables identified as constructing energy securitization made available. Subsequently the results of the study are presented, confirming that energy security is utilized differently as an agenda-setting mechanism for contrasting policies based on exportation or domestic stockpiling. Finally, the discussion and conclusion follow, providing an in-depth analysis into the interplay between energy and security, and its implications on decision making processes.

2. What is energy security?

2.1. Historical foundations

Originating out of the industrialization of society, the energy security concept has traditionally been associated with the “safety and source diversification of energy fuels and services” (Sovacool

and Brown, 2009: 7). Initially the strategic safeguarding of fuels was embodied by the military's need for oil, exemplified for example by Britain's decision to convert its navy from coal to oil in World War I for tactical purposes (Yergin, 1988). Following World War II, in which oil-based fuel for militaristic operations had already become the standard, energy security broadened to include fuel supplies for industrialized services increasingly dependent on motorized transportation (Cherp and Jewell, 2011).

With the nationalization of much of the Middle East's oil industries, the 1970s oil embargoes effectively threatened industrialized countries' continued economic development and political stability (Yergin, 1988). Aware that foreign policy goals intertwined with supply dependability, the energy security concept gradually shifted away from strict oil supply reliability and towards diversification. Many industrialized nations thus sought to reduce their “dependence on oil imports” by both demand management and “through increased domestic oil production, substitution away from oil and improved energy efficiency” (Bielecki, 2002: 238). For many countries in the Middle East (excluding Israel), of which many were oil producers, the energy security concept thus entailed the capability of inflicting political and economic hardship on Western nations dependent on petroleum, as the oil embargoes effectively operated as “oil weapons” (Yergin, 1991: 597).

2.2. Contemporary understanding

More contemporary notions of energy security have been formulated as a result of increasing energy system complexity in a globalized energy market. As the decades that followed the oil embargoes of the 1970s witnessed reductions in oil prices due to technological advancement and economic liberalization (Bielecki, 2002), energy systems became susceptible to threats beyond supply accessibility. Concerns for environmental integrity (namely as climate change) coupled with economic deregulation increased trepidation over the ecological limits of energy resources and the affordability of energy as a market commodity (Cherp and Jewell, 2011). An increase in system complexity and magnitude – exemplified by nuclear advancement and energy production capability for example – also exposed the energy sector to vulnerabilities not seen before. Concerns over technical failure, natural disasters, and terrorist activities accordingly became integrated into the consideration of energy security as a concept incorporating notions of supply diversification, resiliency to shocks in the system, and communication and integration in a globalized market (Yergin, 2006).

As a result of this widening conceptualization, contemporary energy security is often an embodiment of four interrelated pillars, or the four A's: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and affordability (APERC, 2007). *Availability* pertains to the classical notion of geological or physical availability of energy resources. Thus the quantifiable analysis of energy supplies incorporates the availability of short and long-term reserves and the type of resource under question. *Accessibility* signifies the political, economic, and technological “barriers” to ensuring that energy supplies remain accessible (APERC, 2007: 19). Factors that influence accessibility may therefore incorporate the geopolitical relations between exporting and importing nations and the technological innovation needed for specific resources. Accessibility thus features elements of energy independency as a means to addressing supply fluctuations (Greene, 2010). The *acceptability* of energy security concerns the rejection of certain energy security elements based on the potential environmental and societal impacts that the production, consumption and depletion of a resource may cause. Finally, the *affordability* of energy security integrates the volatility of pricing for energy production and services due to market inefficiencies (Chester, 2010). Affordability implies that energy must be cost-effective as an input into the production of energy services

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