

ENERGY (IN)SECURITY AND THE IMPACT ON SECURITIZATION RELATIONSHIPS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN*

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The term 'energy security' primarily refers to the ability of states to have uninterrupted access to energy at affordable prices without significant and unexpected price fluctuations. This definition is clearly more suitable for the energy 'receiving' states but not necessarily the 'producing' ones. For the latter, energy security could also mean to be free from threats that would jeopardize the ability to have control of and/or secure: (i) ones' resources, (ii) the means of extraction and (iii) the transportation facilities and (iv) one's storage facilities. What makes however energy security much more important than the security of any other commodity or service – such as for instance uninterrupted access to potatoes – is that it can profoundly affect a state on multiple levels, ranging from state security, to the functioning of society and, obviously, to the economy.

Energy security is an evolving concept that has become more complex over time. It is thus not surprising that it is examined and analyzed in a multidisciplinary manner with the focus revolving around sovereignty, 'robustness' and resilience with roots in political science, natural sciences and engineering and economics respectively. This need for multidisciplinary analysis also lies in the fact that the primary state needs for, and implications of, energy security have not remained static over the years. For instance, the first decades of the 20th century energy security focused on the states' ability to have sufficient supplies for their armies, whereas at a later stage energy security for developed countries was necessary in order to support their industrialization. In the latter case energy security focused on economic growth rather than state security, without of course discounting the importance of energy for non-economic reasons during the same period or the importance of a strong economy for any state's security.

The fact that the increasing demand for oil coincided with the decolonization period, coupled with the fact that most developed states were not self-sufficient in terms of energy production, meant that these states had to satisfy their energy needs from territories that were no longer under their political influence. Inevitably, energy insecurity is perceived as an existential threat – and can thus be securitized as a referent object – in the political, military and economic sectors and cannot be analyzed independently in only one of the three sectors. On the

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contrary, it is imperative that such analysis takes place in a cross-sector manner taking into consideration the political, economic and military impact energy (in)security has on the securitization and security bilateral and regional relations. The 1970's oil crisis is indicative of the need for such a multisectoral analysis. The industrialized states' need for energy security and the elimination of related threats forced the former to seek uninterrupted supply through the perpetuation or 'creation' of stable regimes, which they would not hesitate to support or oppose with extraordinary measures in political, financial and military ways as is evident from the military interventions in the gulf region and what seems to be the unwavering political, military and financial support of Saudi Arabia and other friendly regimes.

The importance of energy security, unlike the security of other commodities or services, is unique for three additional reasons (besides the fact that it has a multi-level impact as described above). The first two reasons deal with the characteristics of energy *insecurity*, namely those of imminence and immediacy. The third is in regards to the inherent ability of energy to have a multiplier effect – positive or negative – on the existing securitization inter-state relations in the political, economic and military sectors.

Energy insecurity has the characteristic of imminence as it could develop at any given time, many times without much warning, and is frequently subject to factors that are completely unrelated to energy per se. For instance, political and economic sanctions on Iran for its nuclear ambitions could potentially lead to global energy insecurity. Similarly, the political reconfiguration of the Middle East and the regime changes in the Post-Arab Spring period could lead to the disruption of decade-long energy agreements, creating sudden existential threats for a number of states.

Energy insecurity is also characterized by immediacy, meaning that the impact of energy interruptions is immediate and potentially severe if the receiving party has no alternatives. The 2009 Russia – Ukraine gas dispute is indicative of how immediate the impact can be for a country with no alternative energy options. With the press of a button Russia brought Ukraine to a halt creating economic and social havoc to its neighboring state, but also anxiety and insecurity to the EU, given the latter's significant dependency on Russian gas. Inevitably an economic issue – as was the dispute between Russia and Ukraine for the gas prices and debts – became an existential threat for the rest of Europe and was thus securitized accordingly. That said, the issue was not treated as an economic threat but rather as a political one; indeed, the EU threatened Russia with political repercussions and extraordinary measures that could lead up to the 'breakdown of political relations'.

The third characteristic of energy is the latter's ability to act as a 'multiplier factor', meaning that it can heighten or diminish the intensity of securitized relations between states on political, economic and even military levels. State relations characterized by intense securitization in the political and military sectors (e.g. Israel, Palestinian authorities, Lebanon) will tend to worsen when the energy factor is incorporated in the equation. Conversely, energy can intensify desecuritization or keep escalations at a minimum if the environment is already desecuritized or 'not very' securitized.

The 'new' Middle East in the post-Arab Spring period coupled with the newly found energy sources in the Eastern Mediterranean will test the limits of how influential energy security can be. One case worth following is Israel, which will sooner or later rely less on the Egyptian gas as it will become self-sufficient. Whether the diminished energy dependency will have a positive or negative impact on the two states' relations cannot yet be determined. On one hand it can potentially reduce the (increasing) Egyptian voices asking for harsh measures against Israel. On the other hand if energy is the 'glue' that holds the securitization relations at a low level, then the absence of such variable (energy) could more easily lead to heightened securitization in the political and even military sectors with unknown outcomes.