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von gabischlag

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Kommentare (0)

Energizing Security: NATO's Quest for Energy Security

von Gabi Schlag

At least since the 1980s, a scholarly debate on the very meaning of security has structured the field of (Critical) Security Studies to a large extent (see [Working Paper #1](#)). Today, many new concept such as human security and societal security are prominent anchors in academic and political debates directing our attention to the non-military aspects of security, in particular to the manifold insecurities people (and not only the state) face. The call for energy security is one prominent example.

After the catastrophe in Fukushima, the quest for less risky energy technologies remains a major challenge for many Western societies. However, energy security has been a prominent topic for decades now, for instance since the oil crisis in 1973 and 1979. Already in 1969, NATO member states initiated talks on energy security and established a Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS). The North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest decision making body, "welcomed the start on co-operation in the development of supplemental energy sources through the use of solar and geothermal energy". [\[Source\]](#) The aim of CCMS was to address non-military issues of security, providing pilot studies and expertise on environmental, social and health matters. The question of energy was mainly framed within the broader movement of environmental security focusing on the development of alternative technologies.

Energy security has explicitly risen on NATO's agenda since the mid 1990s. The Strategic concept of 1999 outlines that the "Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including acts of terrorism, sabotage and organized crime, and by the *disruption of the flow of vital resources*" (italics added). The new strategic concept, officially adopted in 2010, even calls for the development of a "capacity to contribute to energy security, including protection of critical energy infrastructure and transit areas and lines, cooperation with partners, and consultations among Allies on the basis of strategic assessments and contingency planning". [\[Source\]](#) Hence, one mission goal of Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's patrolling of sea routes in the Mediterranean, is to keep them open and safe. [\[Source\]](#)

This steady process of widening NATO's security agenda might not be surprising for experts. In 2006, the Atlantic alliance organized a forum on energy security in Prague as a get together of representatives of the alliance, states, science and industry. The background of escalating disputes between

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the Ukraine and Gazprom had quickly moved energy on the European security agenda. The final communiqué of NATO's Riga summit in 2006 declares: "We support a coordinated, international effort to assess risks to energy infrastructures and to *promote energy infrastructure security*. With this in mind, we direct the Council in Permanent Session to consult on the most immediate risks in the field of energy security, in order to *define those areas where NATO may add value to safeguard the security interests of the Allies* and, upon request, assist national and international efforts." [Source] (italics added).

The specification of NATO's role – its "added value" to safeguard the security interests of the Allies – was clarified by a report two years later [Source], including enhanced cooperation in order to protecting energy infrastructures. While NATO publicly proclaimed a growing responsibility for energy security, differences between the USA and EU member states remain. Germany's recent turn to "green energy" certainly intensifies these different world view between the transatlantic partners where resources are not only an issue of cooperation but also of (economic) competition.

While military security between East and West has moved off the security agenda, the quest for energy, also rooted in the 1970s, has increasingly moved on the security agenda of NATO and the EU. NATO has just recently organized a conference on "Innovative Energy Solutions for Military Applications" in Vilnius. Ambassador Gábor Iklódy, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, said: "We are not investing in energy saving and environmentally friendly technologies because they are 'politically correct'. We are investing in them because they make sense: they are the key to success in our military missions". [Source] However, whether the distribution and supply of energy really poses a security issue remains an open and highly contested question. On the one hand, linking energy to security certainly raises the stakes and opens new ways of cooperation between the NATO member states. On the other hand, many critics are troubled by the idea that the Atlantic alliance which is still a primary military alliance (compared to the EU and the OSCE) could be engaged in militarized conflicts over natural resources.

The meaning of energy security, one might be tempted to conclude, has tremendously changed in NATO's security discourse since the oil crisis in the 1970s. Then, the quest for energy was represented as a challenge for modern societies in order to address non-military issues of security, a development we commonly associate with the widening of a security agenda. Today, the availability of energy resources and the protection of supply routes is regarded as part of *military* security, including the aim and success of missions abroad. Hence, the issue-specific widening of a security agenda might go hand in hand with the persistence of those practices which prioritize security over politics.

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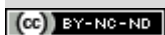
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