

# The Role of BP and NATO in the Militarization of Azerbaijan

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The oil and gas sectors in Azerbaijan have boomed since the end of the Soviet Union, bringing economic development and high GDP growth over the past three decades. Two main side-effects of this development are the over-reliance on natural resources industries and the tensions between the interests of state and private international actors. As energy has become the main source of income and thus, the major enabler of kleptocratic networks within the country, the state, which is strung through with these networks, has declared a matter of national security “the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price” (IEA 2022). Any threat to energy resources and infrastructure is equivalent to a threat to the status quo and the survivability of the kleptocratic network. This understanding of energy security has led to Azerbaijan’s increased militarization in recent years.

However, the non-state dimension of energy security, i.e., the energy security concerns of private international actors, is often overlooked. In the case of Azerbaijan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Security (NATO) and British Petroleum (BP) strive to be, respectively, guarantors and providers of energy security. The militarization of Azerbaijan is as much a product of the interests of these international powers as it is those of state actors. Both BP and NATO have participated in securing energy: they have financed the protection of the infrastructure that enables the trade of natural resources, and effectively promoted and normalized a more aggressive orientation toward infrastructure security in Azerbaijan. The critical study of the securitization of energy in Azerbaijan demands a more complete view of the

militarization of the country over the last two decades.

This paper conducts a critical review of the energy security provider structure and emphasizes how international actors have influenced the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in 2020. The first section presents the conventional view of energy security with a focus on state actors and the various overlaps in distribution networks and services offered by governmental providers of energy security in the country. The second and third sections of the paper present Aurora Ganz's work in her book *Fueling Insecurity* (2021) and reviews her analysis of NATO and BP's role in energy securitization and militarization in Azerbaijan.

## **1. Critique of the conventional view of energy security**

As defined by the International Energy Agency (IEA), energy security can be measured by the four A's: availability, accessibility, affordability, and acceptability of energy supplies. For energy-rich countries who wish to satisfy the needs of their Western clients, energy security is thus intrinsically linked to neoliberal principles, namely market liberalization and profit maximization (IEA 2022). For a country such as Azerbaijan that only opened its market to international clients in the mid 1990s, energy security is approached as equivalent to the survivability of the neoliberal market, an understanding which does not incentivize the state to focus on more efficient ways of securing energy, such as the standardization of security practices or the allocation of public resources (Ganz 2021).

Research and policy since 9/11 have also turned towards a defense-based definition of energy security as concerns over terrorism and sabotage against energy infrastructure have risen over the last twenty years. This branch of research conceptualizes energy as the creator and enabler of geopolitical structures which are prone to violent conflicts, social instability, and or political disputes (Mansson 2014).

In this conceptualization, energy is thus at once the goal of (securing uninterrupted access to energy sources), the means to (using energy dependence as leverage), and/or the reason (escalating tensions due to energy issues) for conflict (Mansson 2014) The presence of energy sources creates the conditions for conflict, implying that threats to energy stability are unavoidable.

The view of energy security as intrinsically prone to conflict, in turn, normalizes the need for the continued deployment of military and paramilitary forces in and around energy infrastructure (Ganz 2021). For instance, the terrorist attacks by Houthi groups operating in Yemen on Saudi Arabian oil-processing facilities in 2019 led to the deployment of the US military to secure the country's energy sources (Jones et al. 2021).

Other research accounts for the political, societal, and cultural dynamics surrounding energy. Energy securitization is defined as the political process that identifies a threat, creates measures to address said threat, and prioritizes security and the interruption of ordinary political power (Buzan et al. 1998). How an event becomes a threat is thus a political process by which an actor frames an object or event as a threat that needs to be addressed with a discourse that creates said threat (Waeber 1996). Securitization theory recognizes the insecurity created by viewing security as an equivalent of defense against a constructed and 'securitized' threat based on othering, control, and coercion. However, securitization theory still fails at providing a comprehensive definition of energy security.

Most contemporary academic research on the militarization of energy-rich countries since the early 2000s analyzes the state as the main or only decision-maker in identifying the threat and implementing the security policies and practices that address these threats. In turn, research on Azerbaijani security policies tends to view the state alone as the source

of militarization. Such analyses disregard the internationalized and privatized dimensions of energy security because they fail to capture the more complex network of state and non-state interactions that lead to the country's militarization.

In *Fueling Insecurity*, Aurora Ganz (2021) views energy security as an assemblage of national and international, state and non-state elements that each have a role in securing energy and in turn, in the diffusion of a normalized, proactive use of force from energy security to other domestic and international political issues. Both state and non-state actors provide energy security, each with a different notion of energy security and different objectives. In Azerbaijan, when these groups' objectives and security practices oppose each other, the proliferation of influencing actors creates a space of contestation and negotiation. At the same time, market logic dictates the need for a militaristic energy security among all actors. Shared economic interests act as a catalyst for coordination among all actors and thus, the harmonization of security practices.

Energy security in Ganz's definition is viewed as a complex configuration of national and international, global and local, and private and public interests, discourses, and policies. As a result, energy security practices often overlap from agency to agency, extend military logic to civil issues, and legitimize the deployment of military solutions outside wartime and beyond energy security itself. In turn, the maximization of militaristic energy security exacerbates the use of control and oppression, creating insecurity (Balzacq et al. 2010).

## **2. Review of state actors in energy security in Azerbaijan**

Before analyzing the role of private and international actors in energy securitization in Azerbaijan, it is useful to look into the state actors that have political and economic

interests in merging energy and state security. The analysis of national security discourse here is based on Azerbaijan's National Security Concept (2007), Military Doctrine (2010), and Maritime Security Strategy (2013).

The role of the state in energy security has been intrinsically linked to the survival of the regime as both Heydar and Ilham Aliyev have acquired their political legitimacy through the liberalization of the energy industry and the interweaving of politics and business (Ganz, 2021). Securing energy is not only about addressing threats to energy, but also determining who is the power within the country.

In all three of the official documents cited earlier, national security and energy security are merged as energy resources are depicted as 'crucial' and 'integral' to Azerbaijan's national security. This link between the two implies that a threat to energy is a threat to the state and vice versa. This discourse enables government agencies to use the same logic to increase state legitimacy within the population or with international organizations. Different versions of the same discourse are adapted for diverse audiences with calls for security policies that include 'defending', 'controlling', and 'patrolling' energy resources.

The physical security of oil and gas industry infrastructure is listed as one of the main objectives of national security. Article 13 of the Military Doctrine suggests unresolved conflicts of a military-political nature, including those caused by aggressive separatism (i.e., the Nagorno Karabakh conflict), endanger energy and transport infrastructure. Furthermore, article 18 of the same document emphasizes the importance of military power for countries rich in oil and gas resources as these resources can lead to the escalation of interstate conflict and create military threats to national security. Article 44 specifies possible military actions against Azerbaijan's national security, which include

terrorist activities and sabotage by internal and external forces against energy and transport infrastructure, as well as against communication facilities passing through the territory of the country. In the same fashion, the Maritime Security Strategy emphasizes the need to address international terrorism and sabotage threats against maritime energy resources.

While laying out energy's importance for military and political security, these documents also present energy as the source of the country's economic security. Despite the acknowledgment of energy dependency as a central problem for the country and the need for economic diversification in article 4 of the National Security Strategy, the document nevertheless recommends further investment in securitization of oil and gas infrastructure to avoid economic disruptions.

All three documents construct the main threats to national security in relation to the energy industry and oil and gas resources. This narrative, however, is largely a construct, as Ganz points out. Armenian terrorism and sabotage against Azerbaijani energy infrastructure and, in this sense, national security is virtually non-existent (2021). Nevertheless, the state continually uses the Nagorno Karabakh conflict as an emotional pressure point to endorse the overuse of militaristic practices within and outside the energy sector. Such militaristic practices include the constant deployment of patrol forces in and around threat zones.

Despite the majority of the energy infrastructure lying far from the border with Armenia, the national security documents suggest that the military strategy should be centered around the resolution of territorial conflicts with Armenia to secure energy. This provision is even less coherent when taking into account that the interstate issues with Iran and Turkmenistan over the ownership of the Caspian Sea and, thus, the allocation of subsoil energy resources are not mentioned in these documents.

The juncture of energy and national security also plays upon Azerbaijani national identity, an appeal that can be traced back to the critical role energy played in the first years of Azerbaijan's post-Soviet independence. Energy securitization has become as symbolic as it is real because energy resources have been depicted as the backbone not only of the country's economy but also of the post-Soviet nation-building process. This is apparent in the memoirs of Hafiz Pashayev (2006), former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and ambassador to the US, in which he called the 1994 oil industry deal, the Contract of the Century, "an insurance policy for our new-found independence." By securitizing energy, the ruling regime has shaped a national discourse of both fear and pride which validates the use of military practices to secure energy, the source of stability and independence (Ganz 2021).

Finally, the national security discourse presented in the above documents and more widely ties the Aliyev regime to the economic success and geopolitical power of the country by emphasizing the role of Heydar Aliyev in "identifying and following a consistent approach to strategic development" and making Azerbaijan a "decisive country to cooperate within the Caspian-Caucasus region." The hyper-personalization of Azerbaijani politics affects energy securitization as the ruling regime's survivability has become a condition for national security as a whole, thus, legitimizing the concentration of energy resources in the hands of the ruling elite (Baghdasaryan 2013).

To secure energy, the Azerbaijani government has intensified efforts by increasing military spending over the years. With a discourse centered around a militaristic approach to security, most of the national agencies responsible for security-related issues have found a space to intervene in the energy industry with quasi-military models (Ganz 2021). The Armed Forces, State Border Service and Coast Guard, Special State Protection Service (SPSS), and State Security Service (SSS) created in 1991, 2002, 2003, and 2015, respectively, all participate in

securing energy and deploy their forces in and around energy infrastructure. For instance, the SPSS's main responsibility is to provide security to the president and high-ranking officials, as well as conduct counterintelligence. In 2003, its mandate was expanded to include the protection of energy infrastructure. Similarly, the SSS's primary responsibility is to conduct espionage and counterespionage operations. However, SSS agents have become increasingly engaged in the energy sector as energy workers are seen as a possible threat. The inevitable overlap and disorder have generated interinstitutional competition which, over time, has exacerbated the use of military and paramilitary forces in the country.

### **3. NATO, BP, and globalized (in)security**

As oil and gas is a heavily globalized industry, the interest of international actors such as NATO and BP in securing these resources and influencing the decision-making process within the country is very high. This section reviews the ways in which both of these foreign actors participate in energy securitization in Azerbaijan.

#### **3.1. NATO**

The first foreign actor, NATO, is an international organization that emphasizes the globalized threat that energy insecurity poses and the urgency of addressing new types of global threats to energy. NATO's main objective is to guarantee the 'freedom and security of its members through political and military means' (NATO 2022). Energy security is stated as an important part of the organization's goals because any disruption of supply could affect NATO members and partner countries (NATO 2021). The internationalization of these resources is what then legitimizes international interventions in energy-producing countries that are not members of the organization.

As stated in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué (NATO 2016), NATO's



main objective is to help national authorities to protect energy infrastructure and improve their ability to prevent supply disruptions. The organization started military collaboration in energy security matters with Azerbaijan in 1994 with the Partnership for Peace program which included joint training, planning, and military exercises with the final objective of putting the country's operating ability on par with that of the members of NATO (2020). This program was the beginning of NATO's transfer of know-how on doing energy security to the Azerbaijani military forces. Starting in 2005, Azerbaijan signed several Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs) which further diffused the conceptualization of energy security in its physical sense only.

In the most recent IPAP signed by the country in 2017, energy threats are designated as "emerging," "upcoming," and "non-traditional." This discourse conceptualizes threats as unexpected, constant, and permanent, thus, requiring more preventive and preemptive solutions than simply defensive ones (Ganz 2021). As a result, NATO participated in normalizing the use of military and paramilitary forces within the energy sector and the diffusion of its practices to adjacent matters where security is more the management of potential risks than of actual threats. Furthermore, the influence of NATO's vision on Azerbaijan's security practices is most apparent in the National Security Concept because the document was written with NATO involvement (Ganz 2021).

The alliance has held many conferences in Azerbaijan under different programs such as cybersecurity defense (Science and Peace Programme) and counter-terrorism cooperative actions (Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism) in energy security. Other military knowledge transfer between alliance members is also conducted under NATO mandate. For instance, in 2019, the Azerbaijani army personnel received training in tactical and computer-assisted exercises to improve interoperability in energy infrastructure security.

The organization's objective of achieving military interoperability in Azerbaijan also pushed the state to acquire more advanced technology (e.g., Maritime Domain Awareness, military IT systems, and surveillance) to comply with NATO standards (ibid.). While NATO did not show support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it has still played a role in the country's military-capacity building, especially when it comes to technology, knowledge transfer, and military training.

### **3.2. BP**

The second international organization influencing Azerbaijan's militarization of energy security is a private foreign actor that defines energy security and legitimizes its involvement in energy security in the country in a different way than the state and NATO. Securing energy, according to BP, is closely linked with neoliberal market rationales that securitize energy with the final goal of maximizing profits (Ganz 2021).

As the operator of the country's main energy-producing fields, Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli and Shah Deniz, and the manager of all the regional pipelines in transit countries, BP has a great interest in sustaining energy security. As such, the company signed the "BP-Azerbaijan Protocol on the implementation of security and human rights principle in the provision of security" with the Azerbaijani government to determine the legal boundaries of defense and enforcement in the energy sector (BP 2007).

Contrary to the discourse of the state actors and NATO, BP does not focus on identifying what is a threat to energy security. Instead, the focus is on the ways that threats should be addressed and which military and paramilitary security tools and measures BP can use to provide energy security. When it comes to the management and prioritization of threats, however, BP views energy security in terms of facilities and physical assets as it is the main owner of this

infrastructure. A threat to energy security is directly linked to the existence of the company (Ganz 2021).

The company provides energy security with multiple security services including an ad hoc security department with armed personnel, surveillance technology, and patrol boats, and hired military-trained private contractors (e.g., Titan D, Group 1 Security; AZCAN Defense Solutions) who are allowed to carry weapons. These same private contractors have been involved in acquiring equipment from Western countries. For instance, AZCAN signed a deal with Canadian INKAS Armored Vehicle Manufacturing for armored personnel carriers in 2017 and as stated by the then CEO, Shimonov, with the objective to “have more solutions in terms of defense” because Azerbaijan was “looking to protect their borders” (INKAS 2016). Simultaneously, BP cooperates with state actors through knowledge transfer exercises and joint training activities.

While BP’s focus and objective are to protect its corporate interests through the physical security of its assets, it has inadvertently participated in the standardization of military practices and the normalization of the use of force.

### **3.3. The use and abuse of insecurity**

Energy securitization is thus a complex process in which national government and international organizations’ interests combine and compete. All three actors discussed in this paper have different self-serving interests, yet concur on the military aspect of energy security within the country. As a result, security professionals from all three actors have benefited from a constant enlargement and expansion of their responsibilities and power (Ganz 2021). As Azerbaijan and others have made energy equivalent to survival, security objectives have quickly moved from the management of existing threats from terrorists, secessionists, and saboteurs to the prevention of any potential threats from farmers, energy workers, and local communities.

Because energy is so vital to Azerbaijan's national identity, its regional partners, and its economic success, repression and use of force have been justified against ordinary people. The insecurity created by these security practices within the local communities is disregarded. Many reports of intimidation and harassment by police and security officials around and within security infrastructure have been documented throughout the years (Crude Accountability 2012). Moreover, protests against energy projects or against energy blackouts due to poor energy management have also been heavily repressed with police brutality.

## **Conclusion**

With the homogeneity of energy security practices among state security actors, NATO and BP have participated in the legitimation process of the use of force and violence within the country. Simultaneously, the lack of coordination between the different security actors has led to the duplication of security practices and overlaps in many areas. All three actors in the Azerbaijani energy security field distort the concept of energy security to their benefit and exacerbate a military and preemptive way of doing security, thus aggravating the already existing insecurity and oppression within the country (Ganz 2021).

Both NATO and BP have exacerbated the militaristic nature of Azerbaijan by training military and paramilitary forces within the country and transferring technical knowledge and modern weaponry, thus enhancing the military and technological capabilities of the country. Energy securitization practices of these foreign actors have undoubtedly indirectly affected the capabilities of Azerbaijan in the 2nd Karabakh War in 2020.

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