



Politicizing UK Energy: What Speaking Energy Security Can Do

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Abstract:

This paper explores one set of conditions under which a policy area, energy, became politicized. It also explores the relationship between concepts of 'speaking security', which claim that the language of security is politically potent, and notions of (de-)politicization. It argues that framing energy supply as a security issue influenced an opening up of UK energy, which had been subject to processes of depoliticization since the early 1980s, to political interest and deliberation. Speaking security about energy had a high degree of popular cognitive authority and to have been instrumental in revealing a lack of policymaking capacity in energy.

Keywords: politicization; securitization; energy and climate policy; change

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Introduction

A growing body of work has recently emerged that applies depoliticization as an analytical concept, often to explain developments in monetary and financial policy-making (Burnham 2001; Buller and Flinders 2005; Flinders and Buller 2006; Hay 2007; Jenkins 2011). It argues that responsibility for economic policy-making has been passed away, by various means, from Government to either quasi or wholly independent bodies resulting in lower degrees of political contestation and less active collective representation of publics by majoritarian institutions (Hay 2007; Jenkins 2011; Mügge 2011). This article moves beyond the empirical realms of economic policy by exploring UK energy governance through the lenses of (de-)politicization. UK energy policy-making is understood here as having been subject to very deliberate depoliticizing processes during the 1980s and 1990s. By some contrast, however, by the late 2000s energy had become re-politicized and subject to higher degrees of contestation and formal political deliberation. New Government institutions had been established in order to steer energy policy towards the achievement of new objectives, of energy security and climate change mitigation.

These changes are notable in that they mark energy policy out from other areas of economic policy-making in the UK, and elsewhere, where depoliticizing trends arguably continue. Through the application of insights from a second conceptual frame, that of speaking security, it is argued here that energy was politicized partly through the impact of narratives of national energy supply (in-)security. These politicizing processes took place at the time of growing political support for climate change mitigation, Russian energy policy restructurings, the emergence of China as a powerful energy actor, of rising oil and gas prices, and of the Russia-Ukraine gas transit disputes. In addition, the UK was on the brink of becoming an importer of oil and gas after decades as a net exporter. The specific argument here, however, is that renewed public and political interest in energy security, alongside the apparent failure of existing energy institutions to anticipate, explain or address energy security problems, highlighted a need for institutional change.

Combining conceptual insights from literatures on depoliticization and securitization may be novel, but it is also not entirely unproblematic. This is not least because, according to Copenhagen School scholars, a successful securitization process would result in a distinct *lack* of open or collective political deliberation as decision-making would disappear 'behind closed doors'. More recent critical security literature, however, has suggested that securitizing moves do not always have to result in secretized decision-making (McDonald 2008: 580; cf. Floyd 2007; Browning and McDonald 2011). Both Copenhagen School and critical security scholars are united, however, in suggesting that the language of security is evocative, that is raises public and political interest, and that it can cause governments to break with previous political

practice (Wæver 1995: 54-55; Buzan et al 1998: 23). The argument here moves somewhat beyond this debate in that it offers up an empirical example of what the language of security can do when applied in political situations – it can be described as offering actors political leverage albeit within quite specific contexts.

This paper as a whole focuses on one set of conditions under which politicization occurred marking it out from much of the literature on depoliticization that focuses on processes of delegation away from Government. It initially presents arguments about ways in which UK energy policy had been depoliticized by the start of the 2000s, before moving on to outline ways in which we can draw on the notion of securitization to explore conditions under which politicization can take place. The following two sections will apply this conceptual frame to UK energy policymaking - firstly through an analysis of emerging energy security narratives and then by tracing how specific articulations of the UK energy supply security crisis impacted upon existing processes and practices of energy governance.

1. Depoliticization, Politicization and Speaking Security

It is not without some caution that this paper proceeds **with** the explication and application of a conceptual framework that has borrowed from multiple schools of thought. This task is, however, undertaken because both concepts of depoliticization and securitization have something to tell us about the political nature of policymaking, and in particular about types of state involvement under certain conditions. Both concepts also utilize, in some instances more explicitly than others, the notion that narratives and the ways in which subjects are both conceived and framed are important in understanding political processes and specific forms of political agency and change.

1.2 UK Depoliticizations and Energy Governance

In his 2001 article on the governing strategies of New Labour, Peter Burnham suggested that depoliticization can be understood as placing the political character of decision-making at one remove from Government (Burnham 2001: 127). The emphasis in his article is on depoliticization as a governing strategy whereby the discretionary nature of decision-making is reduced and replaced with a more 'rules-based' system over which state managers, and politicians, have less active control (ibid: 136). This at once both reduces Government responsibility for policy whilst also leaving it less subject to political discretions, deliberations and interventions (cf. Mügge 2011: 189).

There are different ‘tactics’ which politicians can pursue in order to move a policy field to this more indirect governing relationship (Flinders and Buller 2006: 296). For the purposes of this analysis one particular form of depoliticization is emphasised: the passing of policymaking responsibility to quasi-public, or independent, authorities (cf. Hay 2007: 82-3). What is notable about this form of depoliticization is the degree to which it can serve, over time, to reduce political capacity. Thus we can compare two different types of policymaking system that can be placed at two ends of a spectrum. Depoliticized here refers to a system where rules have been decided, embedded into political practice, where there is little or no contestation of policy, and where there is little room for open deliberation, self-reflexivity or discretionary politics. The other, politicized, end of the spectrum is articulated here as one where politics as deliberation and contestation are embedded within the structures of governance such that capacity exists for more informed collective choices to be made (Hay 2007; Gamble 2000).

UK energy institutions had undergone significant changes over the course of the 20th century reflecting shifting relationships between states and markets. Energy in the post World War II era was considered a merit good, energy companies were state owned and operated and a considerable state programme of establishing national access to electricity was undertaken (Helm 2003). This was followed by a, not unproblematic, period of energy deregulation and privatisation as part of wider UK neoliberal reform processes. One aspect of this process that is often overlooked was the establishment over time of a more indirect, technocratic governing system for energy – in line with neoliberal economic and rational choice ideas. Both Conservative, and later New Labour, politicians had actively sought to remove energy from politics, making it subject to neutral, ‘economic’ forces:

From the early 1980s, British energy policy, and its associated regulatory regime, was designed to transform a state-owned and directed sector into a normal commodity market. Competition and liberalization would, its architects hoped, take energy out of the political arena (Helm 2003: 386)

By the early 2000s the Energy Ministry had been disbanded, there was little or no opportunity for or interest in Parliamentary debate, energy was not represented directly at Cabinet level, responsibility for the supply of energy had been passed to private operators and electricity and gas markets were regulated by an independent body, Ofgem. The Energy Directorate within the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), to which overall responsibility for energy policy had passed, had no specific energy mandates but instead mandates aimed at encouraging the ‘right’ conditions for business, with an emphasis on competition and freely trading markets. The job of Government, with regard to energy, had been defined as setting a framework within which the scope of market forces, and competition, could be maximised and the establishment of freely trading, competitive markets became the principal objective of policy (Lawson 1989: 23).

The Energy Directorate of the DTI was tasked only with maintaining the prevailing framework and, as such, the expectation was that their policy discretionary function would be low and that energy should be managed within the confines of set rules, regulations and norms, with little active political interference.

These processes of depoliticization resulted over time in a lack of political deliberation about energy, about its specific and complex infrastructures and about how it should be governed, outside of technocratic circles. Within technocratic circles energy systems were modelled, language was specific and often unintelligible to others, including generalist politicians and wider publics, and this can in part explain the high degree of public and collective disengagement with the subject (cf. Stern 1987). Technical language and hiring practices that privileged neoliberal economic knowledge served to further isolate policy practices from contestation and from other political interpretations and choices. Arguably, the placing of elected representatives at a remove from active deliberation also resulted in lack of political capacity to engage with and understand energy and its relationship to wider societal goals, such as security. It is worth reiterating here the paradoxical nature of depoliticization - whilst decisions to depoliticize are deeply political, political capacities to deliberate, contest and act in a policy area are reduced through these same processes.

It has been observed that depoliticization, particularly of this technocratic nature, has been an ongoing form of governing throughout the 20th century (Burnham 2001: 464). Depoliticization is understood here, however, as being particularly powerful and more difficult to reverse when underpinned by a dominant and embedded policy paradigm. In looking for the domestic sources of UK depoliticizations in the 1980s and 1990s one book suggests that these processes were underpinned by neoliberal and public choice ideas about the role of the state and about the ability of political actors to make sound decisions relating to the economy (Hay 2007: 95-99). Such ideas had also dominated approaches to governing for sustainable energy. As of 2003 climate change mitigation had become an, albeit vaguely worded, objective for energy policy but this had implied little serious change to energy governance structures and reliance on markets and market instruments to deliver (Mitchell 2008; Scrase and Ockwell 2009). Given the degree to which neoliberal economic ideas were held by a range of political elites to be legitimate over this time period depoliticization was genuinely understood by some as a process that would result in 'better' governance (Hay 2007: 94). This makes decisions to depoliticize appear both less instrumental but also harder to reverse given the degree to which such ideas had become yet further entrenched via processes of depoliticization (Wood 2011: 7).

1.2 Speaking Security and Political Priority

As already suggested, the bulk of scholarship that applies concepts of (de-)politicization does so in order to explore and explain processes of delegation in economic governance, but little is said on the subject of politicization and how it occurs. Flinders and Buller observe that politicians can be pressured to repoliticize a subject and to become more actively engaged with it once more (2006: 296) and Hay suggests that issues can be promoted from the public sphere to direct governmental deliberation and collective agency (2007: 82). Politicization as a process is conceptualised as placing a subject into the realm of contingency and deliberation (Hay 2007: 79), and as an instance within which an arms length governing position can be subject to change via contestation and the identification and dispute of underlying assumptions (Jenkins 2011: 159). Less is said in these analyses, also, about *how* politicization can take place. This is an important question given the degree to which the most recent phase of depoliticization in the UK is understood here as having become entrenched within governance practices and institutions. Hay comes closest to describing how politicization happens in his suggestion that it can be through the successful lobbying of government, the replacement of one administration by another, or the attempt by an incumbent administration to expand its political reach. In such instances issues, which may already have considerable salience within broader public discourses, can be taken up and incorporated within formal legislative processes (Hay 2007: 82). The inference here that it is issues that have a prior and considerable degree of resonance with public opinion and discourse is one to which we will return below.

The Copenhagen School draws links between political interest, state agency, and security discourses that can be usefully considered here when asking questions about how politicizations can take place. Speaking security is understood as

...the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization (Buzan et al 1998: 23)

This implies that once a subject has been understood as a security issue then Government, as security is the language of political priority and of the state, is enabled to break with 'normal' political practices to address the problem (Wæver 1995: 54-55; cf. Buzan et al 1998). This statement is problematic in that it implies both that there is such a thing as 'normal' politics, as well as a somewhat fixed notion of what normal politics might be (McDonald 2008). However, normal politics could be taken to refer to ongoing governance practices at a point in time, in a given policy area. What is important for the argument here, however, is that the evocative language of threat and urgency are understood to lend the concept of security mobilizing powers - not least in that an issue can be framed as 'a special kind of politics' subject to state intervention. This conceptualisation of the effects of speaking security has elements of

'Schmittian exceptionalism' to it in that the state is understood to be the appropriate actor to decide upon 'the exception' in times of crisis (Schmitt 1985: 5).

This is where we need to proceed carefully, however, in that according to original Copenhagen School analyses once a subject has been fully securitized it may well become subject to a particular form of depoliticization. This is because decision-making, if the issue is taken to be 'above politics', can justifiably take place behind closed doors without input from other political institutions. A subject, once securitized, tends to move into the logic of national security where the state becomes more preoccupied with identifying and countering enemies, with the focus often being on the wrong-doing of others but not on internal reflection (Wæver 1995: 55). Furthermore because particular institutions, such as the Armed Forces and Navy, are understood to be legitimate security providers responsibility is often immediately passed on to these more expert institutions without the need for further political deliberation.

By contrast there are more recent suggestions, emanating in particular from critical security studies, that speaking security does not always have to lead to sets of conflictual and exclusionary reactions (cf. McDonald 2008: 580; Browning and McDonald 2011: 8). Browning and McDonald suggest that the language of security pervades political debates but only rarely does it have the effect of shifting issues beyond the democratic realm. They point out, using the example of the political resources given over to tackling HIV/AIDS, that the language of security has often proved useful in placing previously non-politicized issues onto the political agenda (2011: 7). As such although security does often involve militaristic solutions and 'panic politics' it can also focus attention, political and public, onto certain subjects. McDonald further suggests, in language similar to that used in conceptualizing politicization above, that security can be understood as a site of contestation and therefore for change (McDonald 2008: 580). As such speaking security can do different things at different times and in different places (Browning and MacDonal 2011: 8), and as such context is important. It can be understood, therefore, as capable of enabling a degree of politicization certainly of a momentary nature although whether momentary politicization leads to a new system that embodies more ongoing deliberation and contestation is another question entirely.

We can return at this point to the suggestion that subjects that become politicized may be ones that already have broader public salience (Hay 2007: 82). Within notions of speaking security there are links implicit between elite politicians and wider society, particularly in democracies. For example the concept of securitization infers that wider publics matter in processes of political change when it is suggested that Governments can use public fear about an issue to justify a break with 'normal', or ongoing, political practice (Wæver 1995; Buzan et al 1998).

Sociological institutionalists have argued both for a more inter-subjective relationship between publics and political possibility (Widmaier et al 2007: 755) and that structural change in ongoing political practices "...are generally associated... with highly politicized and public debates..." (Hay 2001: 200). It has also been argued that for a particular narrative to prevail it does not necessarily need to be complex or sophisticated, but that it should be cognitively convincing and normatively appealing (Hay 1999: 100). Simple explanations can, as such, be effective in garnering public and political interest in that they can be communicated more easily and widely than complex explanations that perhaps require a more in depth knowledge of the subject. Success in terms of raising the political profile of a subject can also depend on whether a narrative can appeal to existing, or emerging, norms, values and understandings (Schmidt 2006: 252). In this vein, it has been suggested that not all subjects can be as successfully spoken about in terms of security as others (Wæver 1995; Buzan et al 1998; Browning and MacDonald 2011). This paper argues that the association of energy with security does appear to have a reasonably high degree of cognitive authority. As will be discussed below, this may have to do with historical precedent given the nature of international oil relations in the 20th century, but it may also have to do with energy security being understood in near-term, *national*, as opposed to global in the case of climate change, terms.

As such securitizing moves are taken here as offering a set of specific conditions under which politicization can happen in that fears about the security of a particular subject can equate to a sense that something is wrong and that something needs to be done (Widmaier et al 2007: 749). It also implies, possibly because security is still understood largely in national terms akin to a social good, that Government has direct responsibility to respond (Wæver 1995: 55) - in direct contrast to the notion of an arm's length Government relationship to a policy area.

2. Speaking Security, Popular Response and National Agendas

The period from 2005 to 2009 UK was a busy one for energy politics and policy. This is not least because of the Stern Report on the economics of climate change, the decision taken to sign up to the EU 20-20-20 agreement, and the adoption of specific climate change objectives. A less well analysed part of the UK energy policy story of this time is the way in which energy security impacted upon political agendas. UK policymakers started to become more aware of changes in the international environment for energy which was understood as more important given the shifting UK oil and gas import-export position. By contrast, just a few years earlier, both the 2002 Energy Review and the 2003 Energy White Paper had observed that, despite sharply growing demand for fossil fuels from China and India, the international environment for energy was both developing in a more marketised direction and 'benign' (PIU 2002: 6; DTI 2003: 79-

80). The development of energy markets in a pro-market direction during the 1990s was considered fundamentally important given the embedded understanding that energy security would be an outcome of freely trading, competitive markets (DTI 2003: 14 and 79). Academic and think tank reports in the early 2000s observed that almost all consuming markets had adopted pro-market energy policies and that this had, in part, allowed for an end to energy security issues (Hayes and Victor 2006; Mitchell et al 2001).

The events that unfolded from 2005 onwards were perceived as worrying not least in that they signalled a return of 'resource nationalism' in emerging powers such as China and Russia. Chinese economic growth, and links between growth and energy usage, had prompted a surge in demand for fossil fuels and upward pressure on prices. Equally worryingly, from a pro-market perspective, China had started to pursue what was considered to be an aggressive energy diplomacy, striking bi-lateral deals with producer countries thereby by-passing both international oil markets and multilateral governance rules and norms. Starting in 2004 a number of changes were made to Russian energy governance whereby the state assumed a greater degree of control over energy assets and these events made headlines in the UK, and Europe. In 2003 Mikhail Khodorkhovsky, the CEO of the oil and gas company Yukos, was imprisoned and Yukos assets were purchased at auction in 2004 by the Russian state-owned company Rosneft (Brill Olcott 2004: 11). At the same time restrictions on foreign investments in the Russian energy sector were applied, appropriation of Exxon-Mobil and Shell assets and the Russia-Ukraine gas transit disputes of 2006 and 2009 further disturbed UK observers (Locatelli 2006). Russian energy policy changes were arguably of particular significance for UK observers. They marked a reversal from the politically and ideologically significant processes of privatisation and liberalisation that Russia had initiated post Cold War. In energy governance terms they represented the polar opposite of the free markets that UK policymakers, and other institutions such as the International Energy Agency (IEA), had been so actively seeking to establish.

Clearly there were many changes ongoing in energy in the mid-2000s but the storm underpinned by Russia's reversal, despite the 'victory' of Western ideas, prompted a public debate about energy the like of which had not been witnessed for decades. During the 1970s oil shocks crisis debates had highlighted deficiencies in UK energy policy, politicized energy and led to a variety of changes. Not least amongst these were the reinstatement of the Ministry for Energy, which had only just been disbanded in 1969, and the establishment of the International Energy Agency (IEA) by OECD consumers to co-ordinate responses to energy shocks. Likewise in the mid 2000s notions of energy as a security issue started to ignite media and academic energy debates in the UK and Europe. The return of such a framing of energy arguably also allowed space for the re-emergence of 'peak oil' arguments which served to throw further fuel on the fire of fears about access to sufficient, vital energy supplies in future (Klare 2008;

ITPOES 2008). Peak oil arguments had been in and out of favour since the 1970s but the notion of running out of energy appears to have had wide popular appeal over time – perhaps of particular saliency in the 2000s given the UK’s changing import-export position.¹

Broadsheet newspapers, such as the Times and Financial Times, and journals such as the Economist, started to paint a picture of energy supply insecurity underpinned by overt threats to UK supplies from producer countries, especially Russia (Wagstyl 2006: 3; Rodgers 2007: 5). Broadsheet newspapers ran stories on Russia ‘bullying’ UK and other Western energy companies (Times 2006), and described Russia as a ‘threat’ to energy security in Europe (Ostrovsky 2006). Articles were replete with Cold War terminology and reference to Russia’s emerging position as an energy ‘superpower’ based on assumptions that the possession of large quantities of oil and gas qualified a nation to be internationally powerful (Ostrovsky 2006; Rodgers 2007: 5). This position was contrasted evocatively with the euphoria that had been felt in many Western quarters at the end of the Cold War (Economist 2004: 11). Around this time cartoons depicting Russia, or President Putin, as not only in control of important energy arsenals but as willing and able to threaten the West appeared widely (Economist 2006; Scherr 2009). One BBC television programme, ‘Have I Got News for You’, still includes in the opening titles a depiction of lights going out all over Europe as a Russian soldier turns the gas pipe to Europe off.² Certainly Russia remains one of the world’s largest fossil fuel exporters of particular significance for Europe but what is interesting here is the degree of success of this popular re-interpretation of Russia – from developing country to a threat to free-market energy.

Negative assumptions about resource nationalism, as conducted specifically by Russia, seem to have provided a rationale for energy supply to become an issue of national security. By contrast rising Chinese and Indian energy demand, the earlier return of Venezuela to OPEC and growing state control over Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PdVSA) had not evoked such widespread interest and responses in the UK. This may be because the notion that Russia could pose a threat arguably contains a high degree of cognitive authority - it speaks directly to already embedded ideas about Russia related to the Cold War and underpinned by the great number of depictions historically of Russia as the enemy. It was observed above that if narratives are to find purchase they need to be simple, to have a degree of popular appeal, as well as an equal measure of credibility (Hay 2007: 82). This observation highlights the important effects that narratives can have on audiences if they appeal to pre-existing sets of ideas, norms and understanding (Schmidt 2006: 252). Narratives about resource nationalism and energy security

¹ For examples see the movies ‘Mad Max II’, books such as Alex Scarrow’s ‘Last Light’ and the video game ‘Frontlines: Fuel of War’.

² See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00wbw6y/Have_I_Got_News_for_You_Series_40_Episode_7/

fit these criteria also given the popularity of energy supplies running out in popular fiction and film and the reasonably recent experience of the 1970s oil shocks. These narratives importantly overshadowed other factors. For example, actual UK fossil fuel imports from Russia were below five percent and Russia had reliably supplied Europe with fossil fuels throughout the Cold War period. What is important is that they were believed, believable and that they shone the spotlight on energy security issues and, ultimately, energy policy.

One further, but very important, example of the popular saliency of energy security narratives was the emergence of an energy security-climate nexus at this time. Some climate change groups seized upon this new sense of urgency and popular interest surrounding energy to argue for change to energy policy. Some started to utilise security language about energy dependency on unstable suppliers as a device to underpin arguments about the need for more state funding and support for UK domestic renewable energy production and energy efficiency measures (Greenpeace 2006; IPTOES 2008; Ochs 2008). Although many climate groups had long sought to bring political attention to climate change through evocative depictions of future insecurities the method of doing so now changed in order to harness the perceived political power of speaking *energy* security. There was a clear sense here that energy security was considered more tangible - UK audiences were understood to engage with energy as a near-term, national security issue as opposed to notions of long-term, global climate threats. Evidence of this is born out in a number of opinion polls: one suggested that energy security was understood as a more important issue than climate change (Niblett 2011) and another that British consumers would be more willing to pay a higher price for their energy for security of supply than for climate change reasons (House of Commons 2002). The degree to which energy security was understood as a more credible narrative to underpin climate demands could arguably be explained by the observation that some subjects, as suggested above, are more suitable to speaking security in a national sense than others (Browning and MacDonald 2011).

Put together this evocative narrative tended to create a picture not only of energy insecurity, of a need for greater domestic energy production but also of UK energy in contrast to Russian energy. This is an archetypal 'us' and 'them' picture often applied in processes of speaking security about a subject wherein collective identity is created around a nationally conceived 'us' in contrast to a foreign other (Browning and McDonald 2011). It made energy a subject for national concern thereby making it politically more relevant and arguably demanding some sort of state response (Scrase and Ockwell 2009: 40). Energy security was placed on agendas for think tanks and a new journal, the *Journal of Energy Security*, was launched in 2008 in order to

better analyse and debate energy security issues.³ References to energy's socio-economic role started to take on an alternative tone moving away from the notion of energy as replaceable commodity towards claims of energy as "...the lifeblood of a modern economy" (CBI 2006: 1). If energy is important and supplies are potentially threatened then this evokes a sense of state responsibility which is taken here as particularly significant for the UK given the preceding decades of withdrawal of state capacity from energy.

3. Processes of Politicization: Deliberation and Political Capacity

The return of energy as a security issue also led to the placement of energy onto national and international political agendas and a widening and deepening of political debate. This in turn opened energy up to whole host of questions about prices, about a lack of investment in UK energy infrastructures but also about a lack of political *capacity* to govern (Leake 2005; CBI 2006). Some media outlets started to single out energy institutions, particularly Ofgem, arguing that they had been so blinded by free-market ideology that they had neglected security of energy supply and the national interest (Warner 2009). A plethora of new papers and policy documents on energy emerged over this time in response to both energy security and climate concerns (DTI 2006a, 2006b and 2006c; House of Commons 2007a). In marked contrast to preceding policy documents the energy sector became increasingly referenced in terms of supply insecurity. Echoing media, academic and think-tank narratives, direct links are made between energy security fears and Russia, for example the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) report entitled 'Global Security: Russia' (FAC 2008; see also House of Commons 2007a). This is where we can understand how pro-market assumptions about resource nationalism as wrong affected interpretations of the global energy environment. The FAC report claimed that political frameworks in certain non-OECD producer countries, particularly Russia, were economically inefficient and unlikely to allow new fossil fuel reserves to be developed properly (ibid 2008). It was argued that resource nationalism and national oil companies would undermine Russia's ability to be a stable supplier and bad investment decisions would be made because of state interference. This in turn was understood to have negative implications for politically important energy prices as articulated by the then Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw (Straw in Plesch et al 2005; DTI 2007: 19).

What was also evident around this time was the broadening out of the energy debate as evident in the number of reports now being produced by political institutions outside of those directly responsible for policy maintenance, the DTI's Energy Directorate and Ofgem. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the newly formed House of Commons Committee on Energy

³ See: <http://ensec.org/>

Security and parliamentary offices, such as that of Science and Technology, are examples of institutions that started to produce reports on energy security (FCO et al 2004; POST 2004; House of Commons 2007a). Energy security was added to formal forums for international negotiation such as the 2006 G8 Summit and the 2005 EU Summit at Hampton Court. In a paper prepared for the EU Summit energy was characterised as a sector that was fast becoming an issue of national security (Helm 2005: 2). Increasing dependence on Russia for supplies, particularly of gas, was interpreted as a source of threat to the security of EU, and by extension UK, energy supply. In 2006 Prime Minister Tony Blair used his annual Lord Mayor's speech to highlight energy security concerns (DTI 2006c: 4). The scale of political response to fears about energy security, after decades of relative silence on the subject, can be seen as evidence not only of the mobilising powers of speaking security but also arguably reflects the degree of cognitive authority around notions of energy as security issue.

Growing interest in energy, outside of technocratic circles, indicates the extent to which energy had become subject again to political interest, debate and deliberation. There had been a suggestion by the then Shadow Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, in his report on energy security that what was required in response, among other things, was increased military spending (Fox 2006). This kind of response would be more akin to responses to securitizing moves envisaged within the Copenhagen School. By contrast what happened in response to the increased political deliberation of energy was the establishment of new processes through which energy policymakers would be mandated to report to Parliament on energy security. This started in July 2004, in the immediate aftermath of the Yukos affair, when the new Energy Act conferred on the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry a fixed duty to report annually on energy security matters to Parliament (DTI 2005). Thus a political process was formalised whereby Britain's primary majoritarian institution was to revisit energy security at least annually – thereby in theory exposing elected representatives to questions surrounding energy on a more regular basis.

Changes related to the need to deliberate more formally had also started to take place within the DTI and FCO in that new resources were allocated to energy (xxx). The 2007 White Paper acknowledged that energy had not previously existed as a discrete area of foreign policy and for this reason it had had less dedicated Government capacity assigned to it. The paper announced that, for the first time, the UK would have

...an integrated international energy strategy which describes the action we are taking to help deliver secure energy supplies and tackle climate change (DTI 2007: 8)

Strategy documents from this period start to openly associate questions of security as being "... the first responsibility of government" implying a need for some sort of state response (House of Commons 2007b: 32).

Concurrent with the degree to which energy security was re-entering elite political debates at both the national and international levels, which in itself indicates a degree of deliberative politicization, there were a number of policy alterations made relating to changing interpretations of energy. It could be argued that energy security had, in 2003, been assumed to exist, especially given the degree to which energy governance was still understood to be heading in a pro-market direction (DTI 2003: 79-80). For example the energy supply objective had been worded such that the UK should continue to “*maintain* the reliability of... supplies” (DTI 2003: 11).⁴ Energy security, although still an objective, had been an assumed outcome of marketization and this explains why competitive markets had been the principal objective of energy policy at that time. By 2007, however, energy security was understood to be something that needed to be established, as one of the ‘immense’ challenges facing the UK, and furthermore, as requiring further political action to achieve (DTI 2006c: Introduction and 4). The rise of energy security up the hierarchy of objectives added to the political pressures being brought to bear on energy policymakers given the degree to which supplies continued to be considered ‘insecure’. This re-emphasis on energy security was rued by some climate change academics who feared a distraction from climate change mitigation (Scrase and Ockwell 2009: 40).

These changes in policy objectives, political institutions, and the addition of political capacity to deliberate energy were put in place partly in response to political pressures to change emanating from outside energy policy circles. Ofgem officials report a higher degree of ‘outside’ political interference in their practices (Kuzemko 2013: 155), and it has been claimed that both the 2006 Energy Review and 2007 White Paper were compiled in part because the DTI and Ofgem understood the political need to respond to perceptions of energy security crisis (CEPMLP 2006; House of Commons 2007). As these processes of deliberation intensified it started also to become clear that the State had lost considerable capacity to understand the complexities of energy. Government was, given the narrative of national energy security, considered to be more responsible for ensuring energy security but lacking in information and knowledge both about what was happening and what to do about it. Ultimately this underpinned arguments for establishing a new government institution, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), with specific mandates to deliver on energy security and climate change mitigation. The House of Commons set up an Energy and Climate Change Committee to oversee progress of DECC’s policies and the FCO likewise added a dedicated team to researching and dealing with energy security as part of the Energy and Environment team. These new institutions increasingly picked up on the energy security-climate narrative, outlined

⁴ Emphasis author’s own.

above, which was utilising fears of reliance on unstable foreign supplies to argue for clean, 'home grown' energy production (Wicks 2009).

It might be plausible to argue that it was precisely the degree of depoliticization, particularly in terms of a lack of dedicated capacity at the Government level, that triggered politicization in this context of energy security concerns. The lack of existing political capacity dedicated to energy can be directly related to pro-market ideas about Government intervention in economic subject areas. But these ideas were also, and ironically, partly responsible for the strong reaction by British audiences to the rise of 'resource nationalism' in Russia and elsewhere and for creating a sense of crisis. The crisis then opened up a realization that security issues require response, that existing technocrats had few answers and that Government has a responsibility in instances of potential national security to act. As a result a more direct relationship between UK majoritarian institutions and policymaking departments had been established in energy placing it back on political agendas on a more formalised and ongoing basis – a stark contrast to previous decisions to depoliticize energy and place it at 'arms length' from Government.

4. Conclusions

This article has suggested one set of conditions under which an issue area can move along the spectrum, outlined in section one, away from depoliticized to more politicized. Speaking energy security appears to have galvanised interest, to have allowed for a degree of political leverage whilst also driving interpretations in a nationalistic, 'us versus them' direction. Such interpretations tended to highlight differences between Western neoliberal energy governance and Russian, and Chinese, energy nationalism that suggested not only a shift in the direction of energy market governance but also that these shifts were driven by increasingly influential, non-OECD energy players. This marks energy out as a policy area within which contestations of neoliberal economic governance are not only more developed internationally but are also resulting in a higher degree of state involvement in policymaking.

There are three main conceptual insights that emerge from this analysis. One is that 'speaking security', using the evocative language of imminent threat to a nationally defined space, has been an integral part of why British publics and politicians became interested in energy once more. This not only provides a useful link between suggestions that policy areas can become subject to politicization and the language of security as being politically potent but it is also an example of what security can do within certain contexts. A further conceptual insight is that renewed public and political interest can be understood as leading, within depoliticized policy areas, to the realization that there is a lack of capacity to understand energy events and to

respond. Such a realization can be causal of change through the establishment of new institutions. The final conceptual point is that combining insights from different schools of thought, as advocated in recent work on 'analytic eclecticism' (cf. Sil and Katzenstein 2010), has opened energy politics up to sociological, institutional and security explanations. Arguably neither concepts of politicization, underdeveloped as they currently are, nor concepts of securitization could on their own have allowed for such detailed explanations of both how and why change took place.

What this article also tells us, however, is that context is clearly important to understanding these process of politicization. The degree of cognitive authority around notions of energy supplies as nationally relevant and around Russia as both willing and able to pose a threat arguably made energy a more credible subject for security. The alacrity with which media and political commentators returned to Cold War narratives is evocative both of the perceived divisions that remain in place between East and West twenty years post Cold War and of how long such memories last. Context is also important in understanding why speaking energy security resulted in politicization of a longer lasting nature. If energy institutions had been more capable of a response, or even if a Department of Energy had existed, then it would arguably have been far less likely that the energy security crisis debate would have led to longer lasting political changes.

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