



Natural Gas as an Instrument of Russian State Power

U.S. Army War College

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While in the 1980s oil was considered “the only commodity whose sudden cutoff would have a drastic effect on national welfare or on economic activity,” the 2030s come with the image of a world in which the sudden cutoff of Russian gas to Europe will have similar disastrous effects on the economies of many European and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states. This monograph argues that Russian control of the natural gas supplies and of the export infrastructure systems of natural gas to Europe gives tremendous leverage to Russia in imposing its national security policy. If in the traditional security environment the use of military force was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic’s (USSR) preferred method of political coercion, in the contemporary security environment Russia is struggling with a weaker military that no longer represents a threat to the North Atlantic Alliance. This book emphasizes that Russia overcame this major vulnerability by developing the capacity to use unilateral economic sanctions in the form of gas pricing and gas disruptions against many European NATO member states. It agrees with many scholars and politicians alike who fear that Russia will leverage its monopoly of natural gas to gain political concessions; and it supports the viewpoint that “Russia’s energy-centered foreign policy is not limited to the states of the former Soviet Union and is clearly designed to increase its leverage in key geostrategic theaters and over United States allies.” While Russian officials insist that these fears are overblown, skeptics believe that “if there were a serious enough dispute, the Russians might do just that [use its energy security leverage against NATO member states].” The concerns of these skeptics cannot be dismissed without an unbiased examination of the scarcity of natural gas in the contemporary security environment, of the salience of natural gas in Russia’s national security strategies, and of the natural gas pipeline politics in Eastern and Central Europe. To address these questions, the monograph has been separated into four chapters. Chapter 1 will demonstrate that like oil in the traditional security environment, under certain conditions, natural gas can serve as an effective unilateral instrument of state power in the contemporary security environment, and that its disruption by Russia will prove deadly to the economies of many NATO member states in Eastern and Central Europe (traditionally, Russia’s sphere of influence). Chapter 2 will explain why Russia perceives NATO as a hostile alliance, and how Russia uses natural gas as an instrument of coercion in its sphere of influence. In Chapter 3, a look at Russia’s use of natural gas as a national security instrument of coercion in negotiations with Ukraine will help energy security analysts determine the conditions under which Russia will leverage its energy superpower position in its relations with European Union (EU) and/or NATO member states. Additionally, a look at Russia’s failures in the use of such coercion in Ukraine will assist NATO member states in Eastern and Central Europe to identify ways to reduce the threat of disruption of Russian gas supplies. Finally, Chapter 4 will expose the processes Russia uses in the context of natural gas negotiations to bribe Western European nations—such as Germany, France, and Italy—to divide the NATO Alliance, and to rule over its traditional sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe.

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