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EHAB MOHAMED JABER ISMAEL

*Baku State University, Faculty of Journalism
Department of International Journalism and Information Policy
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-3089-5530
ehab.ismael.mohamed@bsu.edu.az*

DINULESCU ALEXANDRA-ŞTEFANIA

*Baku State University Faculty of International Relations and Economy
Department of Diplomacy and Modern Integration Processes
ORCID: 0009-0005-4226-3815
dinulescu.alexandra-shtefania@bsu.edu.az
alexandrastefaniaag7@gmail.com*

ENERGY IN HYBRID WARFARE (2022–2024): MEDIA AND DIPLOMACY

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The research investigates how hybrid warfare employed energy resources between 2022 and 2024 by examining how supply disruptions combined with media coverage and diplomatic efforts. The study demonstrates that energy weaponization achieved strategic value because media coverage turned economic ties into national security dangers, which resulted in military advantages. The article uses hybrid warfare theory together with energy geopolitics and strategic narrative analysis to show how media discourse advanced securitization processes while European countries changed their diplomatic strategies. The study results demonstrate that communication functions as a primary element that boosts hybrid threats during modern energy conflicts. Using the Energy Trade Intensity scale, calculated as the ratio of total energy trade to GDP, the study observes the evolution of energy engagement of Azerbaijan during the 2016-2024 period. The ETI is built on a theoretical ground of theories regarding complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye) and the capitalist peace (Gartzke), arguing that the more energy trades are occurring, the more the costs of conflict are growing, and lowering the chances of hostility. Using a data-based methodology, this research article also displays trade data for main energy resources, such as refined petroleum, electricity, and pipeline natural gas, together with GDP values, in order to calculate ETI scores. The study investigates how changes in ETI correspond to periods of geopolitical crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, and determines whether diversified energy involvement generates stronger security profiles.

Keywords: Hybrid warfare; Energy diplomacy; Media framing; National security; Energy weaponization.

Introduction. The energy crisis, which occurred between 2022 and 2024, showed how material disruption and media construction together created an operational joint effect. The economic instability that spread throughout Europe emerged as a direct result of decreased gas supplies that occurred during the Russia-Ukraine conflict [1]. The strategic effects of these actions depended mainly on their presentation through political channels and media coverage.

Western commentators adopted the term energy weapon as their first reaction to supply restrictions, which they interpreted as intentional coercive tactics [2]. The way electricity supply interruptions were described moved the issue from economic policy discussions into national security matters. The European Union responded to its diplomatic and regulatory activities through specific narrative construction methods [3].

The article investigates how media framing created a structural framework that determined hybrid energy conflict and its diplomatic communication process.

The central question driving this research is whether international energy partnerships can alter national security and economy, and if so, how can this effect be quantified? Traditional studies often rely on absolute values, but this focus usually overlooks one important aspect: how energy trades intro-

duce the states into bigger networks of interdependence. To capture this, the present article introduces the Energy Trade Intensity, or ETI, a foundational indicator of how strongly a state is involved in global energy markets, relative to the size of its national economy. By analyzing Azerbaijan during the 2016-2024 period, this research captures how changes in ETI correspond to geopolitical shocks and evaluates whether intensified international energy engagement strengthens national security.

1. Theoretical Framework

Hybrid warfare combines military operations with economic strategies and information about warfare and diplomatic efforts against its opponents. The method achieves success through two factors, which include physical pressure and strategic management of public perception. Energy geopolitics shows how countries depend on each other, yet their relationships create permanent security risks. The strategic value of vulnerability exists only when people perceive it as a danger. Strategic narrative theory explains how political discourse establishes the boundaries of accountability and lawful actions and potential threats in global diplomatic relations.

Energy weaponization in hybrid warfare therefore operates across three dimensions:

- Material leverage (supply manipulation, sanctions, infrastructure pressure)
- Narrative amplification (media framing and securitization)
- Diplomatic recalibration (policy adaptation and alliance restructuring)

The media dimension serves as the main element since it changes technological failures into governmental emergency situations.

The idea of complex interdependence was first introduced by R. Keohane and J. Nye [4], providing a more specific framework that is applicable to modern-day energy relations. They argue that when a large number of global ties, like trade, are involved, the use of military force can be reduced and expensive signals can be created that increase state-level commitments: Military force is not used by governments against other governments in the region, or on the issues, when complex interdependence exists because using force on one issue against an independent state with multiple relationships is likely to damage mutually beneficial relations on other issues. In other words, the use of force often leads to costly outcomes for non-security goals. The Energy Trade Intensity (ETI) functions as a quantitative measurement that describes a particular concept, but its security effects exist beyond structural elements. The strategic value of interdependence materializes through communicative environments which energy partnerships are publicly presented as indicators of stability and reliability and mutual commitment. The ETI needs to be understood as an economic ratio which operates as a political measurement system that different media outlets and diplomatic dialogues use to define its importance.

One of the strongest confirmations of the system described above can be found in the work of E. Gartzke [5]. For example, two economically integrated states can more often avoid military violence, since market integration combines revelation and coercion. ETI measures the level of Azerbaijan's involvement in international energy flows, and in doing so, it becomes a living embodiment of the theories of the two scholars mentioned above, as energy markets, partnerships, and infrastructure are being transformed into motives for cooperation over conflict.

2. Material Disruption and Strategic Leverage

The Arab gas flow reductions in 2022 generated price volatility, which created industrial uncertainty and caused inflationary pressure. The rising strategic tensions between states require more than market instability as an explanation for their development. The transformation of supply reductions into perceived coercion occurred through narrative construction. Media outlets used "weaponization" term to create clear political urgency which removed any possibility of different interpretations. The process of material disruption transformed into hybrid leverage when it became part of the main communicative framework.

The infrastructure disputes established this viewpoint about the situation. The pipeline disruptions were seen as part of a larger geopolitical conflict rather than separate technical problems. The crisis reached beyond energy markets because of this interpretation, which established new boundaries.

The strategic situation became more complex because of sanctions and counter-sanctions between countries. Energy flows became tools for countries to show their political power instead of ser-

ving their economic needs. According to [6], interdependence now operates on a basis where countries view themselves as needing to protect their security instead of achieving mutual advantages.

Fig. 1. Energy in Hybrid Warfare (2022-2024): Media, Politics and Energy Effects



Methodology

The ETI is built using the formula:

$$\text{Energy Trade Intensity} = \frac{\text{Energy Imports} + \text{Energy Exports}}{\text{GDP}}$$

where:

1. **Energy Imports** = total annual amount (\$) of imported energy resources (HS271000 - processed petroleum oils, HS271600 - electricity energy and HS271121 - natural gas in gaseous state – pipeline gas trade)

2. **Energy Exports** = total annual amount (\$) of exported energy resources (same HS codes in order to ensure symmetry)

3. **GDP** = annual gross internal product (\$)

The indicator is calculated annually for Azerbaijan from 2016 to 2024.

3.1. Hypothesis

The growth of the ETI values indicates the enhancement of a state's national security through improved external ties, reduced vulnerability to attack, and enhanced geopolitical stature vis-à-vis significant core actors.

The hypothesis is constructed on the basis of directional value rather than absolute value. The primary objective is not to establish the high value of the ETI but to indicate that as the ETI of a state grows, its security environment improves. Similarly, as the ETI declines, it indicates that the vulnerabilities are rising. Thus, increased trade leads to a decrease in conflicts; energy interdependence acts as a shield, and states utilize energy trade to enhance their influence.

3.2. Interpretation

- ETI ↑ = more partners ⇒ reduced vulnerability through cooperation ⇒ higher geopolitical relevance and improved national security
- ETI ↓ = superficial ties ⇒ high vulnerability ⇒ diminished relevance and reduced national security.

The geopolitical effects of ETI which exists as a quantitative metric emerge through its use in communication. The public understands energy interdependence through media systems and diplomatic signals which create the actual deterrent effect of energy trade between countries.

4. Azerbaijan's Trade Intensity

Table 1. Azerbaijan – Annual Gross Imports (2016-2024)
(Values in Billions USD)

Year	Refined petroleum oils (HS 271000)	Electricity (HS 271600)	Pipeline natural gas (HS 271121)	Total Energy Imports
2016	0.189	0.004	0.049	0.242
2017	0.280	0.004	0.070	0.354
2018	0.318	0.005	0.340	0.663
2019	0.396	0.006	0.225	0.627
2020	0.204	0.005	0.005	0.214
2021	0.245	0.006	0.019	0.270
2022	0.693	0.005	0.131	0.829
2023	0.530	0.007	0.362	0.899
2024	0.722	0.006	0.087	0.815

Source: Author's compilation based on data from the World Bank.

Note: All values are rounded to three decimal places. The original data was collected in thousands of USD (K) from the World Bank International Trade Database. Component values and totals are displayed after rounding.

The energy import statistics of Azerbaijan confirm its identity as a hydrocarbon-exporting engine. The most striking aspect is the absolute import value, which remains below \$1 billion every year. This indicates that Azerbaijan does not rely on foreign sources for its own primary energy requirements. Thus, the state is secured against any pressure exerted by foreign parties who might disrupt crucial energy streams. Azerbaijan's domestic production levels, particularly in natural gas, give it the liberty to make independent policy decisions without any fear of energy disruptions.

Azerbaijan is a gas-exporting superpower (it exports billions of cubic meters to Europe, which will be demonstrated in the following export statistics). Thus, it does not require any gas imports to sustain itself. When Azerbaijan's gas imports rose in 2018 (\$0.340 billion) and in 2023 (\$0.362 billion), which is 5-7 times higher than the normal level, it was not because the state was running out of gas. This is a market strategy of a smart player: Azerbaijan imports cheap regional gas during the peak European demand seasons and thereby provides more domestic gas for export at competitive prices.

Table 2. Azerbaijan – Annual Gross Exports (2016-2024)
(Values in Billions USD)

Year	Refined petroleum oils (HS 271000)	Electricity (HS 271600)	Pipeline natural gas (HS 271121)	Total Energy Exports
2016	0.410	0.028	1.097	1.535
2017	0.339	0.051	1.238	1.628
2018	0.521	0.066	1.512	2.099
2019	0.463	0.077	2.367	2.097
2020	0.295	0.060	2.191	2.546
2021	0.650	0.072	5.534	6.256
2022	0.527	0.122	14.990	15.639
2023	0.572	0.402	13.678	14.652
2024	0.335	0.094	8.407	8.836

Source: Author's compilation based on data from World Bank.

Note: All values are rounded to three decimal places. The original data was collected in thousands of USD (K) from the World Bank International Trade Database. Component values and totals are displayed after rounding.

During the Pre-Corridor era (2016-2020), the total exports were moderately increasing from \$1.5 billion to \$2.9 billion. During this period, the exports included a combination of refined petroleum products, very limited electricity sales, and natural gas. Natural gas was already the primary source of income, but it was limited to the regional market only. The drastic change from 2021 to 2024 shows how the connectivity of pipelines to Europe helped Azerbaijan take advantage of the new market conditions formed by the Russia-Ukraine war. The operational Southern Gas Corridor to Europe resulted in Azerbaijan gas export revenues reaching \$14.99 billion which brought total energy export revenues to \$15.64 billion. The national security assessment of this expansion shows two results: gas export increases enhanced Azerbaijan diplomatic strength toward both Western nations and regional powers. At the same time international media coverage and policy discourse increasingly framed Azerbaijan as a reliable strategic supplier during a period of European vulnerability. The export growth increase gained geopolitical significance through its development as a communicative element. The country maintained high export levels during geopolitical crisis which improved its material power while building its image as a reliable energy partner for both diplomats and the general public.

Table 3. Azerbaijan – Data for ETI Calculation (2016-2024)
(Values in Billions USD)

Year	Total Energy Imports	Total Energy Exports	Total Energy Trade	GDP
2016	0.242	1.535	1.777	37.867
2017	0.354	1.628	1.982	40.867
2018	0.663	2.099	2.762	47.112
2019	0.627	2.097	2.724	48.174
2020	0.214	2.546	2.760	42.693
2021	0.270	6.256	6.526	54.825
2022	0.829	15.639	16.468	78.807
2023	0.899	14.652	15.551	72.428
2024	0.815	8.836	9.651	74.316

Source: Author's compilation based on data from World Bank.

Note: All values are rounded to three decimal places. The original data was collected in thousands of USD (K) from the World Bank International Trade Database. Component values and totals are displayed after rounding.

The international integration of Azerbaijan is primarily based on energy exports (crude oil and gas). Although they are profitable, they do not generate the same level of economic prosperity as other sectors. The economy of the state can be vulnerable because of the change in international energy prices and the absence of a larger engagement in the international production network. Azerbaijan joined the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, which may indicate that it has plans to increase its economic engagement

Table 4. Azerbaijan ETI Scores
(Values in Billions USD)

Year	Azerbaijan Score
2016	0.047
2017	0.049
2018	0.059
2019	0.057

2020	0.065
2021	0.119
2022	0.209
2023	0.215
2024	0.130

Source: Author's compilation based on data from World Bank.

Note: All values are rounded to three decimal places. The original data was collected in thousands of USD (K) from the World Bank International Trade Database. Component values and totals are displayed after rounding.

**Important note: Because $ETI \approx 0.01 - 0.20$ in most economies, its analytical value is observed from its fluctuations in time, not from its absolute value. Although the absolute numerical values of ETI are very small in general (because energy trade is only a fraction of a nation's GDP), the direction of change is what matters. ETI is a directional indicator, where increases and decreases reveal changes in the depth of a state's international energy partnerships.*

5. Azerbaijan's scores interpretation

The Azerbaijani case shows an impressive and constant growth, with much higher ETI scores (0.047-0.215). This is because its economy is much more energy-export-oriented, and this energy trade is what dominates the international partnerships.

During the period of 2016-2020, the ETI appears to be stable, indicating that energy trade was already contributing a significant part of the country's economy. The Southern Gas Corridor was not yet in full operation, but gas exports still influenced the foreign politics of the state. The sudden rise from 0.065 in 2020 to 0.119 in 2021 indicates the first successful year of the Southern Gas Corridor, marking Azerbaijan's entry into Europe as an energy partner. The highest ETI scores in 2022 (0.209) and 2023 (0.215) indicate the emergency needs of Europe, during which the export volumes and profits of Azerbaijan increased. The rising ETI scores indicate Azerbaijan's enhanced geopolitical significance and its leverage in the European energy security frameworks. The drop in 2024 (0.130) also occurred due to the market stabilization, but it remained above the pre-2021 levels. This is a constant enhancement in Azerbaijan's engagement in international energy partnerships, which is associated with the enhancement of its national security.

6. Media Framing and Securitization

Material leverage created pressure, but its strategic impact depended on communicative amplification

The media generated news coverage, which continued to depict the crisis throughout its entire duration. The repeated characterization of supply reductions as "weaponization" established a dominant interpretive frame [7]. The framework that emerged from this study identified energy dependence as a danger that threatened national security.

Through continuous coverage of shortages, price spikes, and winter preparedness, media narratives sustained urgency. Energy issues moved rapidly from economic management to a high-level security agenda. The process demonstrates how securitization develops according to the strategic narrative framework that security experts established [8].

Two different storytelling approaches developed in response to the situation. Alternative interpretations framed supply measures as contractual disputes or retaliatory sanctions. The hybrid confrontation operated through both pipeline and market activities and the ongoing battle over storytelling power [9].

Media influence operated at three levels:

- I. Threat perception definition
- II. Legitimacy debate framework creation
- III. Policy response acceleration

The absence of narrative consolidation would have restricted material disruption to minor economic disturbances.

7. Diplomacy in a Mediatized Environment

Energy diplomacy during 2022–2024 was highly visible in the media. Governments emphasized strategies such as diversifying energy sources, signing LNG deals, and introducing regulatory changes to show they were resilient [10].

Diplomatic actions were used as part of managing the crisis.

Publicly announcing new supply agreements aimed to rebuild trust in energy markets and maintain political stability. At the same time, communication and negotiation efforts were carried out in parallel.

The period from 2022 to 2024 showed that energy diplomacy activities existed within a framework of media ecosystems. The three elements of policy announcements and diversification agreements and LNG contracts operated as both negotiation results and strategic communication methods. Diplomatic credibility required two elements which included proving supply access and demonstrating resilience and independence to both local and global audiences.

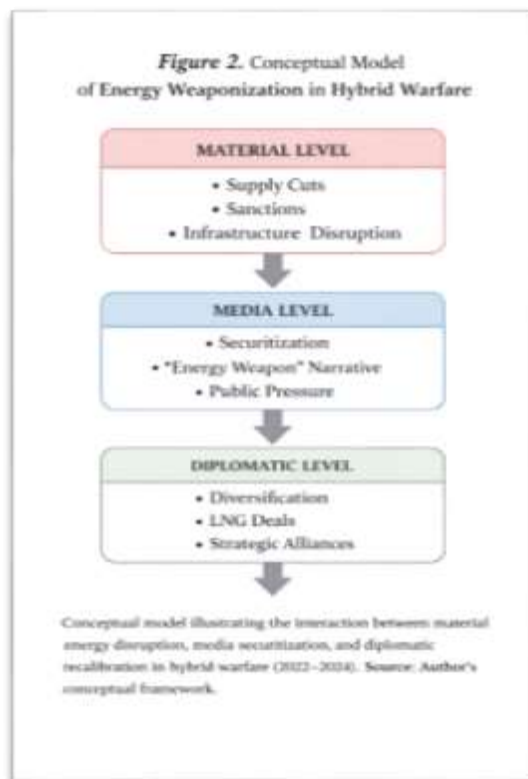
This pattern is evident in the European Union, where policies were pushed forward quickly due to the pressure of public narratives.

Emergency steps and diversification initiatives were taken in response to this. Diplomacy addressed not just actual shortages but also the perception of energy security as a critical issue.

As a result, energy diplomacy was influenced by the need to communicate effectively.

The media environment played a key role in shaping the sense of urgency, the legitimacy of actions, and the limits of acceptable policy responses.

Conclusion.



The period between 2022 and 2024 saw energy function as hybrid warfare. The strategic outcome of supply manipulation extended beyond its direct effects. The results of the situation depended on how people created narratives and spread their messages.

Media discourse securitized energy dependence, structured legitimacy debates, and accelerated diplomatic recalibration. Contemporary conflicts use energy weaponization through infrastructure systems and their related interpretive frameworks.

The system of hybrid energy conflicts needs to recognize media systems as essential elements, which drive the development of strategic pressures. The existing infrastructure system creates security weaknesses, while the way people view these weaknesses creates immediate demands. The absence of unified storytelling results in material power, which would only operate as an economic tool, instead of becoming an instrument for geopolitical control.

The Energy Trade Intensity results prove that it functions less as a measure of economic volume and more as an indicator of geopolitical interdependence: the extent to which a state's security is strengthened through

its integration in the international energy partnerships. Analyzing the scores through this point of view, a new pattern can be noticed: states are becoming more secure not by just trading more energy, but by taking part in partnerships that grow the political and economic costs of any hostile activity. For Azerbaijan, the direction of ETI is analytically important because the upward movements in the indicator align with the periods of international energy cooperation, which works as a compensatory security mechanism during crises. A high ETI reflects that the more the state gets involved in supply chains valued by other external actors, the more its geopolitical influence grows and opens new doors for its economy and security. As the universe of international relations is becoming more and more

competitive, a state's role in the energy dimension, captured in this study through ETI, can function either as a source of vulnerability or as a powerful advantage.

Scientific Novelty. The article advances a media-centered analytical model of energy weaponization, which the researchers demonstrate through their study of dual material power and discursive power that their research from 2022 to 2024 establishes as their main finding.

Practical Value. The research establishes a framework that enables policymakers and scholars to evaluate the process through which energy crises develop into security crises by analyzing media framing and diplomatic signaling. It also contributes to the sectors of energy geopolitics and international political economy by proposing ETI as a measurement analytical tool. It goes beyond the absolute trade volume analysis in order to capture the evolution of energy partnerships and their security side effects.

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EHAB MOHAMED JABER ISMAEL

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DİNULESCU ALEXANDRA-ŞTEFANIA

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Diplomatiya və Müasir İntegrasiya Prosesləri kafedrası

HİBRİD MÜHARİBƏDƏ ENERJİ (2022–2024): MEDİA VƏ DIPLOMATİYA

Tədqiqat 2022-2024-cü illər arasında enerji resurslarından istifadə etməklə aparılan hibrid müharibəni araşdırır və təchizatın pozulmasının media işıqlandırılması və diplomatik səylərlə necə birləşdiyini təhlil edir. Araşdırma göstərir ki, enerjinin silahlaşdırılması strateji əhəmiyyət qazanmışdır, çünki media işıqlandırması iqtisadi əlaqələri milli təhlükəsizlik təhdidlərinə çevirmiş və bu da hərbi üstünlüklərlə nəticələnmişdir. Məqalə hibrid müharibə nəzəriyyəsini enerji geopolitikası və strateji narrativ təhlili ilə birlikdə tətbiq edərək göstərir ki, media diskursu sekuritizasiya proseslərini irəli aparmış, eyni zamanda Avropa ölkələri diplomatik strategiyalarını dəyişmişdir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri göstərir ki, müasir enerji münaqişələri zamanı kommunikasiya hibrid təhdidləri gücləndirən əsas amil kimi çıxış edir. Enerji Ticarəti İntensivliyi ETI göstəricisindən istifadə etməklə, hansı ki ümumi enerji ticarətinin ÜDM-ə nisbəti kimi hesablanır, araşdırma 2016–2024-cü illər ərzində Azərbaycanın enerji əlaqələrinin inkişafını müşahidə edir. ETI mürəkkəb qarşılıqlı asılılıq nəzəriyyəsi Keohane və Nye və kapitalist sülh nəzəriyyəsi Gartzke kimi nəzəri yanaşmalara əsaslanır və iddia edir ki, enerji ticarətinin artması münaqişənin xərclərini yüksəldir və düşmənçilik ehtimalını azaldır. Məlumatlara əsaslanan

metodologiyadan istifadə edən bu elmi məqalə ETİ göstəricilərini hesablamaq məqsədilə emal olunmuş neft məhsulları, elektrik enerjisi və boru kəməri ilə nəql olunan təbii qaz kimi əsas enerji resursları üzrə ticarət məlumatlarını ÜDM göstəriciləri ilə birlikdə təqdim edir. Tədqiqat ETİ-də baş verən dəyişikliklərin COVID-19 pandemiyası və Rusiya-Ukrayna müharibəsi kimi geosiyasi böhran dövrləri ilə necə uyğunlaşdığını araşdırır və enerji sahəsində şaxələndirilmiş iştirakın daha güclü təhlükəsizlik profilləri yaradıb-yaratmadığını müəyyən edir.

Açar sözlər: Hibrid müharibə; Enerji diplomatiyası; Media çərçivələndirməsi; Milli təhlükəsizlik; Enerjinin silahlaşdırılması.

ЭХАБ МОХАМЕД ДЖАБЕР ИСМАЭЛ

*Докторант кафедры международной журналистики и
информационной политики Бакинского государственного университета*

DINULESCU ALEXANDRA-ŞTEFANIA

*Бакинский государственный университет
Факультет международных отношений и экономики
Кафедра дипломатии и современных интеграционных процессов*

ЭНЕРГИЯ В ГИБРИДНОЙ ВОЙНЕ (2022–2024): МЕДИА И ДИПЛОМАТИЯ

Исследование рассматривает, как в период 2022–2024 годов в рамках гибридной войны использовались энергетические ресурсы, анализируя, каким образом перебои в поставках сочетались с медийным освещением и дипломатическими усилиями. Работа показывает, что милитаризация энергетики приобрела стратегическое значение, поскольку медийное освещение трансформировало экономические связи в угрозы национальной безопасности, что привело к военным преимуществам. В статье теория гибридной войны применяется в сочетании с энергетической геополитикой и анализом стратегических нарративов, демонстрируя, как медийный дискурс способствовал процессам секьюритизации, в то время как европейские государства изменяли свои дипломатические стратегии. Результаты исследования подтверждают, что коммуникация выступает ключевым элементом, усиливающим гибридные угрозы в современных энергетических конфликтах. Используя показатель интенсивности энергетической торговли ETI, рассчитываемый как отношение общего объема энергетической торговли к ВВП, исследование прослеживает эволюцию энергетической вовлеченности Азербайджана в период 2016–2024 годов. Показатель ETI основан на теоретических подходах сложной взаимозависимости Кеохейна и Найя и капиталистического мира Гартцке, утверждающих, что увеличение объемов энергетической торговли повышает издержки конфликта и снижает вероятность враждебности. Применяя методологию, основанную на данных, данная научная статья также представляет торговые показатели по основным энергетическим ресурсам, таким как нефтепродукты, электроэнергия и трубопроводный природный газ, вместе с данными ВВП для расчёта значений ETI. Исследование анализирует, как изменения ETI соотносятся с периодами геополитических кризисов, таких как пандемия COVID-19 и война между Россией и Украиной, и определяет, приводит ли диверсифицированная энергетическая вовлеченность к формированию более устойчивых профилей безопасности.

Ключевые слова: Гибридная война; Энергетическая дипломатия; Медиа-фрейминг; Национальная безопасность; Энергетическое оружие.

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Rəyçilər: f.e.d. Sabir Məmmədli, t.ü.f.d. Məmmədağa Baxışov.