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PIPELINE POLITICS: HOW ENERGY DIPLOMACY BECAME THE ULTIMATE HYBRID WEAPON

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ABSTRACT

Even though energy diplomacy is seen as a new concept, it actually has deep historical roots planted in the evolution of modern international relations. In its earliest form, energy diplomacy was mostly about access and control.

Where Cold War powers used direct oil sanctions and pipeline diplomacy, modern powers use the market's manipulation and supply chain dominance. Russia deploys gas deals and pipeline routes as weapons, China dominates mineral processing, and the Western powers try to strike back using financial sanctions and trade mechanisms. This research reflects the big change in geopolitics: from controlling energy resources to mastering the systems that govern their flow. Nowadays energy conflicts are happening through contract terms, investments in infrastructure, and deeper strategies. What remains is a messy, interdependent battlefield where economic leverage replaces military might, and energy security depends as much on paper as on the barrel.

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BORU KƏMƏRİ SİYASƏTİ: ENERJİ DİPLOMATİYASI NECƏ ƏN ÜSTÜN HİBRİD SİLAHA ÇEVRİLDİ

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Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər

ANNOTASİYA

Enerji diplomatiyası yeni anlayış kimi qəbul olunsa da, əslində onun dərin tarixi kökləri müasir beynəlxalq münasibətlərin təkamülündə formalaşmışdır. İlkin mərhələdə enerji diplomatiyası əsasən çıxış və nəzarət məsələləri ilə bağlı olmuşdur.

Soyuq müharibə dövrünün gücləri birbaşa neft sanksiyalarından və boru kəməri diplomatiyasından istifadə etdikləri halda, müasir güclər bazarın manipulyasiyası və təchizat zəncirinə hakimiyyət vasitələrindən yararlanırlar. Rusiya qaz müqavilələri və boru kəməri marşrutlarını silah kimi tətbiq edir, Çin mineral emalına üstünlük edir, Qərb gücləri isə maliyyə sanksiyaları və ticarət mexanizmləri vasitəsilə cavab verməyə çalışırlar. Bu tədqiqat geosiyasətdə baş verən böyük dəyişimi əks etdirir: enerji resurslarına nəzarətdən onların axınını tənzimləyən sistemlərə hakim olmağa keçid. Müasir dövrdə enerji münaqişələri müqavilə şərtləri, infrastruktur yatırımları və daha dərin strategiyalar vasitəsilə baş verir. Nəticədə iqtisadi rıçaqların hərbi gücü əvəz etdiyi, enerji təhlükəsizliyinin isə bareldən olduğu qədər sənəddən də asılı olduğu mürəkkəb və qarşılıqlı asılı bir mübarizə meydanı formalaşır.

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ТРУБОПРОВОДНАЯ ПОЛИТИКА: КАК ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКАЯ ДИПЛОМАТИЯ СТАЛА ОКОНЧАТЕЛЬНЫМ ГИБРИДНЫМ ОРУЖИЕМ

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Гибридный

Область исследования:

Многодисциплинарные исследования

Научная область:

Международные Отношения

АННОТАЦИЯ

Несмотря на то что энергетическая дипломатия часто рассматривается как относительно новое явление, на самом деле она имеет глубокие исторические корни, уходящие в эволюцию современных международных отношений. На ранних этапах энергетическая дипломатия в основном была связана с доступом к ресурсам и контролем над ними.

В то время как державы периода холодной войны использовали прямые нефтяные санкции и трубопроводную дипломатию, современные государства прибегают к манипулированию рынками и доминированию в цепочках поставок. Россия использует газовые соглашения и маршруты трубопроводов как инструмент давления, Китай доминирует в переработке полезных ископаемых, а западные державы пытаются противостоять этому с помощью финансовых санкций и торговых механизмов. Данное исследование отражает крупный сдвиг в геополитике: от контроля над энергетическими ресурсами — к овладению системами, управляющими их потоками. В наши дни энергетические конфликты разворачиваются через условия контрактов, инвестиции в инфраструктуру и более глубокие стратегические подходы. В результате формируется сложное, взаимозависимое поле противостояния, где экономическое влияние заменяет военную силу, а энергетическая безопасность зависит не только от физического ресурса, но и от договоров и документов.

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1.Introduction

If during the Cold War hard power tools, like the embargoes, military involvement and pipeline cutoffs, were the primary tactics, then in the post-Cold War era, the need for a new hybrid model of energy diplomacy unfolded. This new pattern combines economic importance, institutionalized structures, and enhanced interdependence, making the energy pressure more sophisticated, but not less effective.

To capture this change, the concept of hybrid energy diplomacy is introduced and developed in this article. The main idea is that modern energy diplomacy now uses a combination of institutional mechanisms, economic power, and control over energy systems rather than direct pressure. Hybrid energy diplomacy operates through contracts, investment choices, regulatory standards, and supply chain positioning, in contrast to conventional methods that concentrate on resource ownership or actual supply disruption. Although these instruments are less obvious, they are frequently more reliable and politically acceptable.

This idea is relevant because the structure of global energy relations is evolving. States are increasingly getting attached to long-term agreements that restrict their flexibility, and energy markets are now so complex and interrelated. In these circumstances, power is exercised by influencing the regulations that govern energy flows rather than by completely stopping them. Key areas of geopolitical competition are now price mechanisms, transit conditions, financing regulations, and legal frameworks. These dynamics are difficult to fully explain by current theories of energy diplomacy, which are primarily based on experiences from the Cold War.

This article shows how the development of energy diplomacy follows a new, different pattern, from direct control and intimidation to indirect, system-based influence, by contrasting various historical eras and key players. The study demonstrates how changing political, economic, and legal constraints led the US, the USSR, China, and the EU to modify their strategies. The article implements the idea of hybrid energy diplomacy and demonstrates its practical application through this comparison.

In the end, this study offers two contributions. In the first place, it gives a conceptual instrument for understanding how energy power is used in the modern world. Second, it shows how the ability to explore and shape complex economic and regulatory environments is just as important to energy security today as physical resources. This article wants to advance the scholarly discussion on energy geopolitics and provide a more accurate point of view for examining current energy conflicts by introducing the hybrid energy diplomacy framework.

1.1.Methodology notes

This article brings a qualitative comparative methodology that involves and unites historical and geopolitical analysis with case studies. It is built on secondary sources such as official reports, academic literature and policy documents in order to follow up the evolution of energy diplomacy from the Cold War version to the new, hybrid model, that it is also presented in this article for the first time.

The methodological design consists of four main analytical components:

1. Historical analysis was used to identify the origins of energy diplomacy and find the relation between the control of resources and international influence.

2. Comparative case studies that examinate the U.S., the Soviet Union, China and the E.U. to prove how their strategies progressed.

3. Documents and discourses analysis of policy frameworks, legal tools and international treaties to reveal how energy influence works.

4. Theoretical blend which was used to conceptualize the hybrid transformation of energy diplomacy from the hard power pressure ways to market-oriented and regulating approaches.

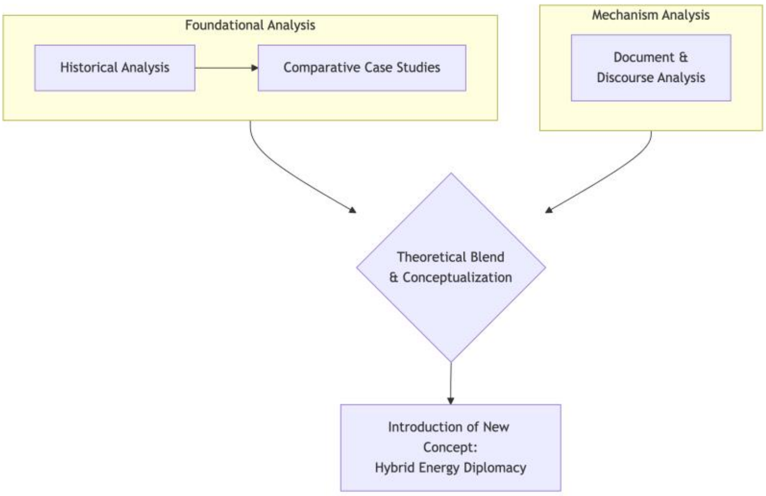

Figure 1. *Methodological design for analyzing The Hybrid Energy Diplomacy Concept*
Source: *Author's compilation.*
Note: *This diagram visually confirms the qualitative comparative methodology. It breaks down on the four analytical components and shows that the new concept of Hybrid Energy Diplomacy is not just an ambiguous term, but a product of a multi-step analytical work.*

Moreover, this study introduces a new concept: hybrid energy diplomacy. This way it captures and explains the evolution from the traditional pressure instruments such as embargoes, military control to complex, new, geoeconomic methods like the supply chain dominance, price settings, and regulatory power. Proposing this new concept, the presented article serves to advance the academic understanding of how economic, legal and infrastructural instruments are replacing the old military pressuring methods, nowadays in global energy politics.

2.Comparative Analytical Framework

As mentioned above, this study also applies a temporal-comparative approach to outline how the instruments of energy diplomacy changed from direct, brute force intimidation into regulatory mechanisms. Through this comparison, the article introduces and operationalizes the concept of Hybrid Energy Diplomacy that describes the shift from the old, traditional power tactics to the nowadays complex and legal tools of influence. Therefore, understanding the subchapters above, an attempt to define the Hybrid Energy Diplomacy concept can be made.

Therefore, this comparative analysis is based on three stages of evolution: The Cold War, Post-Cold War, and Present Era, according to the dominant players, tools of energy diplomacy, and methods of influence.

Period	Dominant Actors	Tools of Energy Diplomacy	Method of Influence	Example Case
Cold War (1945–1991)	USA, USSR	Embargoes, pipeline control	*Hard Power*	1973 Oil Embargo, Soviet Gas Policy

Post–Cold War (1991–2014)	Russia, OPEC	Market pricing, supply contracts	*Hybrid Power*	2006 & 2009 Ukraine Gas Crises
Present Era (2014–2025)	EU, China, USA	Regulation, sanctions, investment control	*Geo-economic Power*	CBAM, Belt and Road, LNG Shifts

Table 1. *Comparative Framework of Energy Diplomacy*

Source: *Author's compilation based on information retrieved from D. Yergin (1991), Thane Gustafson (2020), Maciej Z. (2019), simon Van Dorpe for Politico (2022), Reuters (2024), Eva Pander Maat (2022), CNBC (2022), Ely Sander et al. (2025), Faris Al-FadHat et. Al. (2024), The China Global South Project (2025), Reuters (2025) and Global Business Council (2022).*

Hybrid Energy Diplomacy can be understood as the intersection between hard power, soft power and economic governance, where states can achieve their geopolitical goals through market manipulation, infrastructure control, sanctions and contractual influence, rather than through open military confrontation. This concept offers methodological appliances for comparing states' behavior during different time periods.

2.1.Energy Diplomacy during the Cold War

From the 20th century oil diplomacy of the US and Great Britain in the Middle East, to the Soviet Union's use of gas pipelines as instruments of authority, energy has drawn the contours of the global power. No event presents energy diplomacy's historical significance better than the 1973 oil embargo led by OAPEC, during the Yom Kippur war. "At the end of the twentieth century, oil was still central to security, prosperity, and the very nature of civilization" [Yergin, 1991, p.13], so when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Saudi Arabia, imposed an oil blockage on states perceived as supporting Israel, it "nearly quadrupled the price of oil from $2.90 a barrel before the embargo to $11.65 a barrel" [Corbett, 2013].

This led the West into a major energy crisis because of fuel shortages, inflation, and economic panic. It is important to notice how the embargo pushed the Western powers to review their energy vulnerabilities and foreign policy agreements because they realized the strategic advantage that the resource-rich states can use in the international arena. So, as soon as the blockage "turned the oil weapon from a vague threat into a stark reality" [Yergin, 1991, p.604], a new wave of institutional and policy responses emerged, like the "creation of the International Energy Agency in 1974" [USA Dep. of State, n.y.] or the institutionalization of the strategic petroleum reserves. But, more importantly, all of this brought the concept of energy into the heart of western national security thinking.

2.1.1.Case studies

There are other examples during the Cold War that show the transformation of energy diplomacy into a main tool for geopolitical competition. For example, when Prime Minister Mossadegh nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, Western powers fought back immediately: "Churchill, taking direct charge of the Foreign Office, approved a plan to overthrow Mossadegh. So did the Americans. In Allen Dulles's words, the operation went 'active' [...] The two Western countries believed they were not supporting a coup — that was what Mossadegh was carrying out — but rather a countercoup by the Shah and Za-hedi" [Yergin, 1991, p.468]. So, the 1953 coup gave the Western control over the Iranian oil through a new agreement where the U.S. oil companies received a combined 40% stake, consolidating the American political and economic influence in Iran: "Shell had 14 percent, each of the five American majors had 8 percent initially, and CFP had 6 percent" [Yergin, 1991, p.477]. This showed that energy security can be so powerful that it can justify regime change: "by the end of August 1953 the Shah was back on his throne, his new Prime Minister was in power, and Mossadegh was under arrest" [Yergin, 1991, p.470].

Hybrid Energy Diplomacy can be understood as the intersection between hard power, soft power and economic governance, where states can achieve their geopolitical goals through market manipulation, infrastructure control, sanctions and contractual influence, rather than through open military confrontation. This concept offers methodological appliances for comparing states' behavior during different time periods.

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2.3.The shift in Energy Diplomacy: from hard power to hybrid strategy

The Soviet Union collapse represented a critical moment in the energy geopolitics because the states reshaped the way energy was used as an instrument of influence.

2.3.1.Pillar 1: The Hybrid Mechanism of Russia's Gas Strategy

The first pillar of this hybrid model of energy diplomacy is the use of economic efficiency as a pretext for a state to gain more power over other states. One case study to support this can be Russia, who inherited the Soviet Union's huge energy infrastructure. So, the state found it very difficult at first to manage its control of Eastern Europe. But, by the early 2000s, Russia has improved its strategies, moving from obvious constraint to subtle market manipulation. Its gas wars went from cutoffs to contractual intimidation, by using the market advantage camouflaged as usual commercial disputes, as a main tactic. This way, the state was allowed to pursue its geopolitical goals, while maintaining plausible deniability. There are some key events to support this first case study, like the 2006 and 2009 Ukraine gas crises when, after the Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, Russia raised the gas price, justifying it as a market adjustment: "The state-controlled Russian gas monopoly, Gazprom, [...] threatened to cut off flows on January 1 if Ukraine does not agree to pay quadrupled prices […] Ukraine currently buys Russian gas […] at a heavily subsidized \$50 per 1 000 m^3 […] but [...] raise the cost to \$230" [Parfitt, 2005]. When Kyiv refused, "Russia has begun cutting gas supplies to Ukraine" [BBC News, 2006], creating EU wide shortages. As an outcome, the EU accused Russia of using energy as a manipulation weapon, but it was divided on actions, which exposed its dependence on Russian gas. So, eventually, Ukraine had to sign up the unfavorable long-term contracts: "Ukraine signed a deal on Sunday allowing EU, Ukrainian and Russian observers to monitor gas flows across Ukrainian territory" [Reuters, 2009]. Another event is when Russia built direct pipelines to Germany through the Nord Streams 1 and 2, to eliminate the reliance on the transit states like Ukraine or Poland. Even though it was labeled only as a business project by the Russian president: "I have said more than once that this project is purely commercial, and that there are no politics, nor any political tinge, here" [Soldatkin et al., 2022], it was later revealed that the Nord Stream pipelines were not just purely commercial infrastructures, but also geopolitical tools: "In April 2018, however, Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged concerns by the Ukrainian government and said the pipeline "is not just an economic project, but that, of course, political factors must also be taken into account" [Wettengel, 2025]. The result? U.S. sanctioned Nord Stream 2 in 2021, delaying its launch. After the 2022 invasion, Germany froze the project, but the plan was already successful – Ukraine lost around \$2B/year in transit fees: "Gazprom had to make payments to Ukraine as the price of transit, roughly one to two billion dollars per year. The Kremlin, and Putin personally, objected to having to make these payments, both because it was costing Russia and because this money, in effect, helped fund the Ukrainian budget and thus supported the existence of a politically independent Ukraine" [Zaslaviskiy, 2017].

Both events show how Russia used the advantage it has in the market area to create the so-called commercial disputes. This tactic generated the desired outcome: as a hybrid twist, Russia avoided the old Cold-War style restrictions and instead focused on the price raises and pipeline rerouting to destabilize the adversaries by maintaining a plausible deniability. Despite even the European Union efforts, the dependence on Russian gas lasted until the Ukraine invasion in 2022.

However, the Ukraine war stands as a clear illustration of the risks created by the overreliance on the hybrid tactics: first, Russia's blackmail backfired when EU adopted fast to its supplies cuts by growing the liquified natural gas imports. Moreover, the USA's rise as a top liquified natural gas exporter replaced the Russian gas supply in Europe, so it proved the fact that the market is used as a weapon. Secondly, China took all of this as an opportunity and bought discounted Russian oil quietly, even though this subverted the Western sanctions. So, in order to play its card right, China's official stance was a strategic non-alignment, which showed that it prioritizes its strategic interest over any moral value, ideology or alliance.

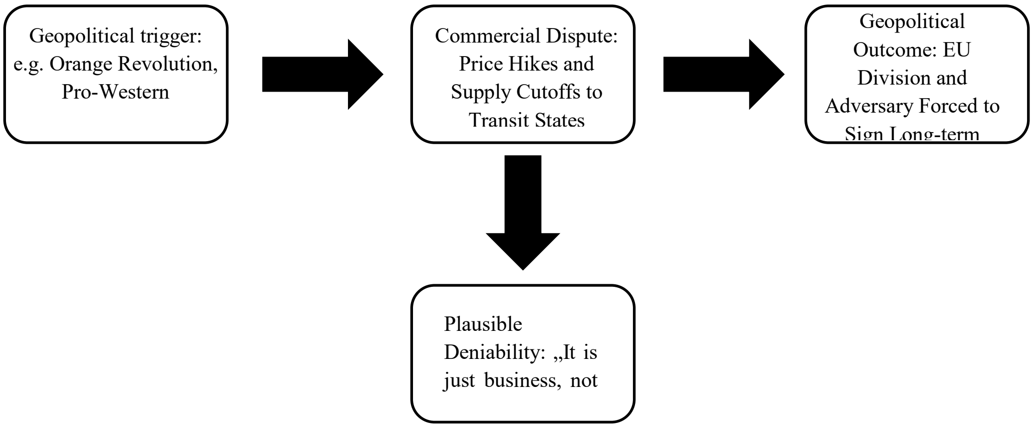

Figure 2. *Russia's Economic and Market Decisions (cause and effect)*

Source: *Author's compilation based on information retrieved from The Guardian (2005), BBC News (2006), Reuters (2022), J. Wettengel (2025) and Ilya Z. for the Atlantic Council (2017).*

Note: *This figure captures the "hybrid" nature of Russia's strategy. It visually demonstrates how a geopolitical trigger is laundered through a "commercial dispute" to achieve a geopolitical outcome, all while maintaining a facade of market normality.*

2.3.2. Pillar 2: China's Infrastructure and Supply Chain Influence

The second pillar is represented by infrastructure-driven energy diplomacy by using supply chains as weapons. The case study to exemplify this is China, who became a master at this through the Belt and Road Initiative. Unlike the Soviet-type manipulation, China relied on the resources-for-loans deals and the control of minerals.

China invested in energy infrastructure in Africa, Central Asia and Latin America in exchange for long-term supply contracts, making debt traps that generate political submissiveness. For example, Farid Al-Fadhat and his colleague [Al-Fadhat et al., 2024] explain in their research that China has often managed financing in such a way to tie the infrastructure loans to the resource access through the repayment in natural resource exports. They mention that China's deals became "debt traps [...] caused by the structural disparity between China as an investor and African countries as investment recipients" [Al-Fadhat et al., 2024] in places like Zimbawe and Bolivia. The contracts command Chinese processing, securing the battery production control, so clearly this justifies the fact that "China also controls over 90% of refining capacity for both graphite and rare earth elements, and processes around 60% of global lithium and cobalt" [Bore, 2025]. As evidence, it is well known that China has channeled over $1 billion into Zimbabwe's lithium sector since 2021, through companies like "Sinomine and Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt" [Reuters, 2025] and gained dominance over most of Zimbabwe's lithium mines. But now, Zimbabwe plans to "ban the export of lithium concentrates from 2027 as it extends its push for more local processing" [Reuters, 2025]. This stands as a clear response of the state to the foreign, mostly Chinese, extract and export control, as the Minister of Mines and Mine Development, Winston Chitando, explains: "If we continue exporting raw lithium we will go nowhere. We want to see lithium batteries being developed in the country" [Global Business Council, 2022]. What would this ban exactly mean for Zimbabwe? It would create more jobs for locals, give the economy a boost, and attract higher tech investments.

This would portray Zimbabwe as a serious player in the global supply chains and allow it to directly involve into all of it, not just the mining stage. Even though right now, the Chinese companies are trying to comply with this decision and build the processing plants in Zimbabwe, this change is not done out of goodwill. It is a tactical move due to the pressure of the government.

In reality, China won't give up willingly its worldwide refining leadership status or prioritize Zimbabwe's development unless it is directly beneficial to its own supply chain goals. The future of Zimbabwe is depending on how well it will use policies and regulations to transform the foreign investments into a long-term local gain, and not just a short-term extraction. This brings us to the last pillar of the hybrid model of energy diplomacy: the use of sanctions and laws to counterstrike.

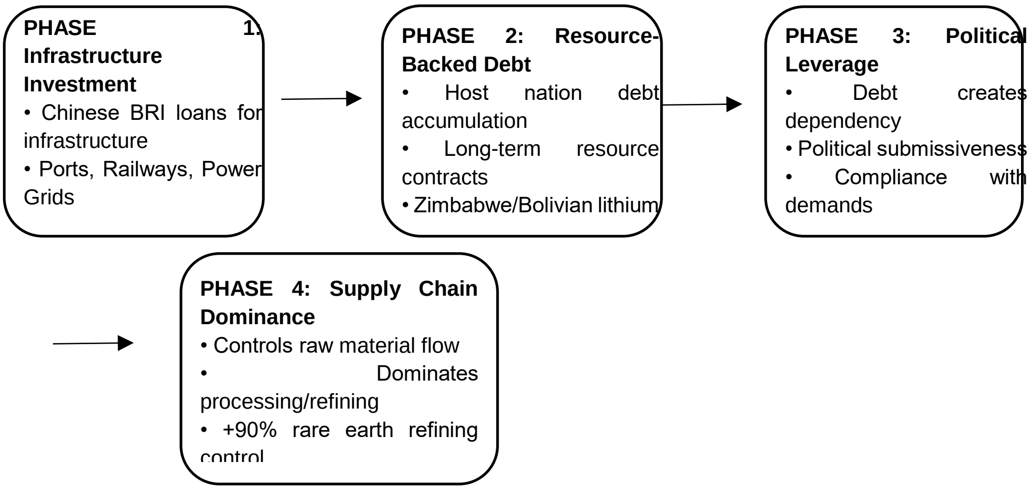

Figure 3. *China's 'Debt Trap' Resource Diplomacy Model*

Source: *Author's compilation based on information retrieved from Faris Al-FadHat et. Al. (2024), The China Global South Project (2025), Reuters (2025) and Global Business Council (2022).*

Note: *The diagram makes the "hybrid" quality of this strategy unmistakable. It is not military; it is economic and structural. Phase 1 appears as benign, even generous, economic development. The coercive elements (Phases 2 and 3) emerge organically from the initial deal, demonstrating the sophisticated and indirect nature of the power. The final phase, "Supply Chain Dominance," is the visual payoff that directly validates it. It shows that the goal is not only the resource extraction but "mastering the systems that govern their flow". The flow of the diagram makes it clear that control over processing and refining is the logical, intended outcome of the entire process.*

2.3.3.Pillar 3: The West's Regulations and Market Intervention

The third pillar is defined by market interventions and the use of laws or regulations to re-establish balance, as a case study. These interventions prove that even in the energy area, market and regulatory power can become useful geopolitical tools.

The EU's tactical use of financial instruments, legal constraints and regulations helped reducing the Russian influence and then it reshaped the power dynamics in the global energy markets. According to Enterdata in 2022, the EU Energy Ministers officially agreed on a €180/MWh gas price cap to be triggered in case the benchmark Transit Facility hub prices stayed above the level for three days consecutively, and also if the Transit Facility hub exceeded the €35/MWh global liquified natural gas price references for the same period of days. This market correction mechanism would suppress the price spikes without discouraging the global suppliers, only using the triggers and suspension clauses in order to guarantee energy security and market stability. It went officially in force from 2023, and it was meant to stay in effect for at least 20 trading days, if triggered. Moreover, as reported by Reuters in 2018, the EU almost fined Gazprom because of the abuses of market dominance in Central and Eastern Europe. This threat forced the company to reshape the pricing structures, contract conditions and transit rights in such a way to fit the EU competition law. However, after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, things changed, and the European Commission increased legal examination of Gazprom, who reduced the gas supplies to Europe without any commercial justification, which represented a violation of the 2018 commitments. The EU Competition Commission, Margrethe Vestager, declared that it was "thought-provoking" [Van Dorpe, 2022] for a market leader to do such a thing during a record demand, raising the problem of antitrust. So, some European companies, like Germany's Uniper, launched legal proceedings against Gazprom for breaking the long-term contracts. As Reuters [Reuters, 2018] shows, Uniper won and received $14 billion in damages. These actions portray a change in EU's policy, from regulations and constraints to legal enforcement, because of the energy intimidations.

Moreover, another EU's tactic can be the use of the climate policies as geostrategy, through the Carbon Border Adjustment mechanism, which reduces Europe's reliance on the countries that might weaponize the natural resources. EU will use this policy, starting with 2026, to make the dirty imports costly, lower the pollution and eliminate the politically risky exporters: "The CBAM is a quintessential example of EU climate unilateralism, understood here to entail unilateral measures with external effects which set standards on emissions reductions" [Pander et al., 2022].

Similarly, as a hybrid twist, the West accompanied EU's steps in order to counter resource nationalism through economic sanctions, like the SWIFT bans on Russian oil traders: "The U.S., European allies and Canada agreed Saturday to remove key Russian banks from the interbank messaging system, SWIFT, an extraordinary step that will sever the country from much of the global financial system" [Macias, 2022]. The U.S. is even considering following the EU's CBAM and it is taking legislative proposals, like the Foreign Pollution Fee Act. This would generate "up to $198.1 billion for the U.S." [Sandler et al., 2025] over a five-year period and help it counter China by aligning itself with the transatlantic climate strategies.

THE WEST'S HYBRID COUNTER-STRATEGY TOOLKIT		
PRICE CAPS (e.g., EU's €180/MWh)	**COMPETITION LAW** (e.g., EU vs. Gazprom antitrust case)	**FINANCIAL SANCTIONS** (e.g., SWIFT bans on Russian oil traders)
CLIMATE POLICY (e.g., Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism)	**LEGAL PROCEEDINGS** (e.g., Uniper wins $14B from Gazprom)	**LEGISLATIVE FEES** (e.g., U.S. Foreign Pollution Fee Act)

Table 2. *The West's Multitool Graphic*

Source: *Author's compilation based on information retrieved from Enterdata (2022), Reuters (2018), Simon Van Dorpe for Politico (2022), Reuters (2024), Eva Pander Maat (2022), CNBC (2022), and Ely Sander et al. (2025).*

Note: *This table communicates that the West's response is not a single policy, but a suite of financial, legal, and regulatory instruments. It categorizes tools like price caps, competition law, and climate policy, showing how they work in concerts.*

3.Conclusion

The post-Cold War evolution of energy diplomacy reflects a complex shift, from direct hard power to sophisticated hybrid strategies that exchange economic influence, infrastructure control, and legal conflict. Russia's price manipulations of gas, China's debt-trap resource diplomacy, and the West's regulatory measures indicate that energy remains a big geopolitical instrument, even though its mechanisms grow more subtle.

The goal of this article was to analyze how energy diplomacy has changed from being a direct pressure instrument to a hybrid tool of influence shaped by infrastructure, markets, and regulations. The study demonstrates that energy has maintained its geopolitical significance in the post-Cold War era through historical analysis and comparative case studies. Moreover, it has evolved into an even more adaptable and strategic weapon that functions more through structural control than through direct conflict.

Feature	Cold War Battleground	Modern Hybrid Battleground
Primary Arena	Territory and Resources	Interdependence and Systems
Key Instruments	Tanks, Embargoes, Coups	Contracts, Regulations, Courtrooms
Weapon of Choice	Oil Barrel/ Pipeline Shut off	Price Setting, Debt, Legal fines
Visibility	Overt, Military	Covert, Economic with Plausible Denials
Example	1973 Oil Embargo	2022 EU vs. Gazprom Legal Battle

Table 3. *The Changing Battleground of Energy Conflicts*

Source: *Author's compilation based on information retrieved from M. Corbett for Federal Reserve History (2013), D. Yergin (1991), Reuters (2018), Simon Van Dorpe for Politico (2022), Reuters (2024), Eva Pander Maat (2022), CNBC (2022), and Ely Sander et al. (2025).*

These examples point to a new reality: interdependence is the new battleground. Where the Cold War relied on raw supply disconnections, the struggles of the present are played through contract terms, pipeline routes and courtroom fines. However, the goal remains unchanged: using the energy to manipulate, punish or reward.

The comparative analysis reveals the different but interconnected forms of hybrid energy diplomacy. With reference to the Russian natural gas diplomacy, the Western states have observed the use of economic instruments to threaten other countries even when there is no official announcement of conflict. With reference to the China natural gas diplomacy, the Western states have observed the dominance of China in natural gas financing, leading to long-term dependence on China, as can be noticed in the above paragraphs. Taking a look at Western natural gas diplomacy, the states have observed the economic instruments of the EU to counter the natural gas conflict. Therefore, the different forms of economic instruments have confirmed the position of energy diplomacy as the juncture of economics, law, geopolitics, and more.

Upon the above findings, the article introduces and justifies the notion of Hybrid Energy Diplomacy as necessary for the applicable analytical tool within the topic. This concept basically examines the transformation towards resource power to system power, with the power deriving its energy through the organization, regulation, and financing of the flow of energy. The study concludes that interdependence is the main battleground for energy conflicts in modern times. Since nowadays energy security covers a physical dimension that can deal with energy regimes, this article also fills a gap in the academic debate by providing a better understanding of the whole concept of energy power in the contemporary world. It is estimated that though the means have changed, the objective stays the same. In conclusion, energy is seen to become a way to impact political action, to encourage compliance, and to penalize non-compliance.

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