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Quiet power: How security interests shape offshore wind and marine spatial planning in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Offshore wind energy is increasingly framed by the European Union (EU) as critical infrastructure for achieving energy security, reducing fossil fuel dependence, and responding to geopolitical tensions, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This paper investigates how offshore wind development in Sweden is shaped by evolving security-related narratives, and whether it is becoming securitized across international, national, and local levels of governance. Addressing a gap in the literature on energy transitions and security, the study combines insights from securitization theory with a multi-level governance lens to examine how discourses, actors, and tools shape the governance of offshore wind. Empirically, it draws on qualitative analysis of 15 policy documents and 10 interviews with EU, Swedish national, and local stakeholders. The findings reveal a fragmented governance landscape: while EU institutions increasingly treat offshore wind as a security imperative, Swedish authorities approach it primarily through risk-based and technical planning frameworks. Yet national defence actors, especially in the Baltic Sea region, exert significant behind-the-scenes influence, shaping outcomes without transparent deliberation. This "soft securitization" constrains the democratic and integrative ambitions of Marine Spatial Planning, the key policy tool for managing marine use conflicts. The study underscores the uneven and contested nature of securitization processes and highlights the institutional challenges of balancing security, environmental, and democratic priorities in offshore energy governance.

1. Introduction

In response to growing concerns about environmental sustainability, geopolitical instability, and energy security, the European Union (EU) has intensified its efforts to accelerate the renewable energy transition. Offshore wind has emerged as a key technology within this agenda, particularly in the North and Baltic Seas, where EU institutions now frame it not only as a climate solution but also as a strategic asset for enhancing energy autonomy and geopolitical resilience [1,2]. Recent initiatives like REPowerEU, adopted in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, explicitly link the expansion of offshore wind to reducing fossil fuel dependency and strengthening critical infrastructure [3].

While offshore wind has become a strategic focus of the EU's energy and security agenda [2], its development is governed through a complex, multi-level system that includes international agreements, national planning frameworks, and local implementation processes [4]. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) has emerged as a key governance mechanism for managing this complexity, aiming to coordinate the diverse spatial and

sectoral interests at sea [5]. Yet, the extent to which EU-level prioritization of offshore energy influence national and local MSP processes remains unclear. This raises important questions about how energy, environmental, and security priorities are interpreted and reconciled across governance levels [4,6–9], and what role MSP plays in mediating these potentially conflicting agendas.

This paper investigates how offshore wind development in Sweden is governed through competing and overlapping logics of securitization, riskification, and normal politics. Rather than treating security as a fixed policy domain, we distinguish between three interconnected concepts – maritime security, energy security, and the securitization of energy – to examine how offshore wind is framed across multiple levels of governance: as an existential threat warranting exceptional measures, a long-term risk requiring anticipatory regulation, or a routine policy issue managed through democratic planning processes. Drawing on securitization theory [10,11] and a multi-level governance perspective [12,13], we examine how discourses, actors, and tools shape the governance of offshore wind in Sweden and its surrounding sea basins.

We address the following research question: *To what extent is offshore*

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wind development in Sweden being securitized, and how does this shape energy governance, environmental protection, and democratic processes within MSP? The goal, however, is not to determine whether offshore wind has been securitized in an absolute sense, but to understand how different narratives circulate, interact, and structure decision-making across international, national, and local arenas. To do this, we distinguish between different forms of security discourse and analyze how they are articulated and contested by various actors across international, national, and local levels.

Our analysis contributes to the growing literature on security and sustainability transitions by showing that securitization is not a binary process but a layered and negotiated one. Unlike much of the existing literature, which conflates energy security with securitization or assumes that geopolitical events automatically produce exceptional governance responses [14–16], we demonstrate how securitizing logics are refracted through national planning institutions, technical norms, and local procedural constraints.

Sweden serves as a relevant case due to its significant offshore wind potential, recent NATO accession, and long-standing commitment to environmental protection and participatory planning. Offshore wind development in Sweden is formally governed through a combination of MSP, coordinated by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), and a permit-based approval system under the Environmental Code. The MSP sets out broad zones for energy extraction, while the actual siting and construction of offshore wind farms are currently initiated through developer proposals under the open-door system (which may not follow the zones set out by the MSP), with discussions ongoing about introducing government-led area tenders as part of proposed regulatory reforms. This dual-track model, which is planning-led but permitting-dependent, requires coordination across sectors including energy, environment, defence, and fisheries, and has been a source of friction due to overlapping mandates and the absence of clear conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Methodologically, the study draws on a qualitative review of 15 policy documents and 10 interviews with EU, Swedish national, and local stakeholders. Through this material, we analyze the discourses, actors, and tools that shape offshore wind development, identifying how and where processes of securitization, riskification, or normal politics emerge – and what this means for the future of MSP and offshore energy governance in Europe.

The findings show that offshore wind governance in Sweden reflects a fragmented landscape of competing priorities. While EU and NATO actors increasingly frame offshore wind as a strategic security issue, Sweden's national and local institutions primarily treat it as a technical and environmental planning challenge. However, security concerns, particularly from the defence sector, exert strong influence on decision-making, often without clear procedures for balancing competing interests. These tensions play out through Sweden's MSP system, which both enables coordination and exposes institutional gaps across governance levels.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework, outlining how securitization theory and a multi-level governance perspective are combined to analyze the governance of offshore wind. This is followed by the analytical framework and methodological approach, which explain how the study operationalizes the concepts of discourses, actors, and tools. The results and discussion sections then apply this framework to the international, national, and local levels, highlighting how processes of securitization, riskification, and normal politics manifest across scales. The final section concludes by synthesizing the findings and discussing their implications for marine spatial planning and the broader governance of energy transitions.

2. Theory

Securitization theory, as formulated by the Copenhagen School, offers a framework for analyzing how political actors construct certain

issues as urgent security concerns that demand exceptional measures, overriding routine political processes [10]. It involves three key components: the identification of an existential threat, a referent object perceived as under threat, and the acceptance of this narrative by a relevant audience. Central to this process is the speech act, through which political actors portray an issue as a security concern, legitimizing the use of extraordinary policies and resources otherwise unacceptable in normal politics [10,11].

In classical securitization theory [10], the speech act is considered the theoretical core that explains how security problems emerge; i.e., the performative moment through which an issue is framed as an existential threat. However, later scholarship [11,17] emphasizes that securitization rarely occurs through a single, discrete utterance, but through broader *discursive processes* in which meanings are reproduced and institutionalized across texts, practices, and governance arenas.

Securitization theory thus enables the analysis of how issues like energy come to be prioritized over others, such as environmental protection, by being framed as existential threats. Its critical value lies in problematizing when and how security is invoked, challenging the tendency to view security as an objective condition or inherently positive policy goal [18]. However, securitization does not always lead to radical policy change, such as norm-breaking or executive overreach [19]. It can also take the form of “riskification,” a gradual shift where issues are framed in terms of potential harms requiring anticipatory governance, such as risk assessments and management protocols [13,20–23].

In the context of energy, it is important to distinguish between three interrelated, yet distinct, concepts: maritime security as it relates to offshore energy infrastructure, the normative goal of energy security, and the securitization of energy as a political process.

We use *maritime security* here not as a catch-all label for diverse threats, but as a situated and relational concept shaped by practices, actors, and discourses in specific geopolitical contexts [24,25]. In the case of offshore energy infrastructure, it refers to the governance of vulnerabilities and threats – ranging from navigational hazards, accidents, and illegal activities to cyberattacks and geopolitical interference – that emerge as marine environments are transformed into built seascape [26]. The expansion of offshore wind farms, submarine cables, and energy islands creates new entanglements between civil and military uses, ecological risks, and technological dependencies tensions [27,28].

In contrast, *energy security* is generally defined as the stable, reliable, and affordable supply of energy to support a country's or region's economic and social needs [29]. While this goal is often framed in objective or technical terms, it too is deeply political, with multiple and sometimes competing interpretations across contexts [15]. Crucially, threats framed under the domain of maritime security, such as sabotage of an undersea cable, can directly undermine energy security by disrupting supply, increasing volatility, or exposing systemic vulnerabilities [30].

Finally, the securitization of energy refers to the discursive and political process by which issues like energy infrastructure, supply, or maritime vulnerabilities are framed as existential threats to national security. This discourse enables exceptional measures beyond routine politics, including emergency laws, military involvement, or fast-tracked permitting. As such, securitization is not the recognition of a threat per se, but a performative act that transforms policy domains into sites of urgency and exceptionalism [19].

If securitization is understood as a continuum [22], one end represents threatification, where issues are discursively constructed as existential threats that justify exceptional security measures. The opposite end reflects normal politics, where issues are handled through routine democratic procedures [13]. Within this latter domain, MSP serves as a central governance framework for managing competing demands on ocean space, including those related to offshore renewable energy. MSP is a systematic, multi-stakeholder process that balances environmental protection, economic development, and social interests by allocating

marine areas for uses such as fishing, shipping, conservation, and energy production [31]. In the offshore wind context, MSP plays a key role in addressing spatial conflicts, coordinating between sectors, and ensuring alignment with sustainable and inclusive marine governance goals [32].

In this paper, we explore how offshore wind development in Sweden is positioned between processes of securitization, riskification, and practices of normal politics in MSP. Specifically, we are interested in understanding whether offshore wind development is framed and managed as an urgent response to acute threats, as a matter of managing long-term systemic risks, or merely as normal politics.

3. Analytical framework

We adopt a broad understanding of securitization that encompasses both threatification, focused on direct and immediate harms, and riskification, which emphasizes the management of long-term risks [33]. This approach is motivated by recent scholarship that extends securitization theory beyond its original focus on acute threats, to capture the more diffuse, anticipatory forms of security politics found in domains such as climate change adaptation, energy transitions, public health, and critical infrastructure protection [9,13,15,19,22,23,33–35].

Beyond uncovering the speech act itself, we are interested in understanding who advances securitizing moves, what measures are proposed to enforce such discourses, and what tools and processes are mobilized to promote the securitization of offshore wind energy. Here it is important to differentiate between the *speech act* and *discourses*. We refer to the speech act in a theoretical sense, to acknowledge that securitization begins as a performative articulation of threat. Discourses, by contrast, are the empirical manifestations of this process. In other words, the speech act points to the original performative logic of securitization, whereas discourses capture how that logic circulates, becomes embedded in *narratives* – storylines situated within broader discursive practices [36] – and shapes governance over time [36].

To structure this empirical analysis, we use Rhinard et al.'s [13] analytical categories, summarized in Table 1: discourses, actors and tools. These are examined through a multilevel governance approach, focusing on the EU (international), Sweden (national), and local levels, anticipating that securitization at one level may not necessarily guarantee the same outcomes in the other [34].

The proposed framework seeks to address the methodological weaknesses of securitization theory, which often lacks detailed guidance for empirical research [17,19,37], by moving beyond a pure linguistic analysis and providing a structured approach for identifying how security narratives are articulated, by whom, and through which institutional and material mechanisms. This approach aligns with Balzacq [11] who urges to investigate the 'how,' 'who,' and 'what' of securitization processes, and responds to calls for moving beyond the temporal determinism found in earlier interpretations of the theory, where securitization is understood as a singular, speech act, event [38].

A multi-level governance perspective conceptualizes the dynamic interconnections between domestic and international levels of

authority, recognizing that policies and decisions are not confined to the national level but are shaped by interactions among actors operating across multiple scales [12]. This perspective provides a conceptual foundation for examining how securitization processes are produced and propagated across governance levels, allowing for the identification of where securitizing narratives emerge – whether from EU institutions, national agencies, or local actors – and how these narratives are communicated, adapted, or resisted as they circulate across and between levels [34].

3.1. Discourses

Discourses involve the use of words, concepts, and narratives that frame offshore wind development as an urgent priority. They establish the key challenges that offshore wind can address, highlighting why it is considered crucial and what broader purposes it serves. Discourses often outline what is at stake [11], in this case, emphasizing the potential contributions of offshore wind to, for instance, energy security, climate mitigation, or geopolitical stability. Discourses may also illustrate the relationship between offshore wind development and the ocean, and how these connections are framed: whether as security issues (such as threatened regional cooperation), risks (like significant impacts on marine ecosystems), or typical governance concerns (including regulatory processes, public acceptance, or procedural matters).

The language used in these discourses can vary in its orientation toward risk or threat [33]. Risk-oriented narratives often portray a wide range of complex problems that are challenging to address unless offshore wind is deployed. This kind of language includes terms like “uncertainty,” “precautionary principle,” “risk reduction,” “preparedness,” and “resilience” [34]. The imagery associated with risk highlights potential vulnerabilities or challenges, suggesting a cautious and measured approach to mitigate various threats. This reflects the broader trends observed in securitization theory applied to energy policy [15,39], where discourse often frames energy issues as requiring proactive measures to manage potential risks [10].

On the other hand, threat-oriented discourse may frame offshore wind development in terms of specific, immediate dangers that require rapid and decisive action [13]. Such discourses may employ more urgent or militarized language, invoking terms like “threat,” “security,” “urgent,” “existential,” “emergency,” “survival,” or “defence” [40,41]. This type of imagery suggests that the challenges posed are inevitable, severe, and require extraordinary measures for resolution.

By analyzing discourses, it is possible to identify the degree to which offshore wind is presented as an indispensable solution and the nature of the language that frames its necessity – whether it is cast as a measured response to risks or an urgent reaction to immediate threats [9].

3.2. Actors and actions

Securitization theory emphasizes that security is not an inherent condition but a political accomplishment performed through

Table 1
Three analytical categories to analyze securitization of offshore wind energy.

Category	Definition	Normal Politics Examples	Riskified Examples	Securitized Examples
Discourses	Words, concepts, and narratives framing offshore wind's urgency, purpose, and stakes.	Public acceptance, regulatory process, stakeholder dialogue, procedural matters; emphasis on whole-of-government, bottom-up collaboration.	Uncertainty, precautionary principle, risk reduction, preparedness, resilience, contingency planning, robustness, prevention.	Threat, security, urgent, existential, emergency, survival, defence, eradicate.
Actors	Legitimacy to act at a specific governance level, through particular roles or mandates.	Municipalities, regional authorities, communities.	Civilian agencies, national regulatory agencies; special task forces.	Military, civil defence, national governments, NATO, rapid response agencies.
Tools	Policies, technologies, and resources mobilized to advance or protect offshore wind development.	MSP, local plans, public participation frameworks, stakeholder engagement mechanisms	Risk modelling, probability assessments, precautionary governance, resilience planning	Surveillance systems, infrastructure protection, emergency powers, military support, security drills

interactions between actors, audiences, and institutions [10]. Actors are central to this process: they are the individuals, organizations, or coalitions that possess the authority or legitimacy to define an issue as a matter of security. Their ability to do so depends on their institutional position, expertise, and access to political or communicative power [14,42]. This includes state institutions, such as governments or military agencies, but also non-state actors (e.g., industry associations, civil-society groups, or epistemic communities) that may either amplify or contest securitizing narratives [43]. Examining who these actors are, the arenas in which they operate, and how they interact with audiences helps reveal whose interests are prioritized and how power circulates across governance levels.

Building on this literature, our analysis treats *actors* as the agents who initiate or respond to securitizing moves, and *actions* as the practices or measures through which these moves are materialized and legitimized. This dual focus allows us to examine both the discursive dimension (who speaks security and with what authority) and the practical dimension (what is done once an issue is securitized). Accordingly, we analyze how actors are positioned and legitimized within offshore wind governance: whether as initiators (e.g., EU institutions advancing emergency regulations), implementers (e.g., national agencies translating directives), or challengers (e.g., environmental organizations or municipalities).

Empirically, we identify actors and actions through explicit references in policy documents and interviews to mandates, responsibilities, and calls for intervention. We pay attention to which actors are invoked as responsible for safeguarding energy or maritime security, at what governance level (international, regional, national, or local), and through which institutional or material practices these expectations are expressed. For example, securitizing moves may call for the mobilization of defence agencies or the coordination of civil authorities; riskification processes may instead highlight the role of planners or environmental agencies; and normal politics may emphasize participatory or administrative routines. This structured approach ensures that both actors and actions are systematically captured within our coding framework, as summarized in Table 2.

Building on this foundation, previous research on the securitization of energy provides useful illustrations of how actors participate in these processes. For example, Judge and Maltby [14] investigated how national discourses of gas supply insecurity in the UK and Poland – shaped through securitization and riskification narratives – constrain EU energy policy integration. Bocse [44] analyzed how US governmental actors influenced EU energy policy through the securitization of gas dependence, while Khrushcheva [45] traced how state and corporate agents constructed and contested threat narratives around Russian energy. These studies demonstrate that actors play differentiated roles – as initiators, brokers, or opponents of securitization – depending on context, institutional authority, and political leverage.

In our operationalization, we therefore assess not only what securitizing actions are proposed (e.g., expanding infrastructure, mobilizing defence, or enhancing preparedness), but also which actors are empowered or constrained through these calls. We distinguish between actions invoking urgency or threat (e.g., “combat,” “attack,” “defend”) and those reflecting risk management or normal politics (e.g., “plan,” “coordinate,” “prepare”). This dual attention to actors and actions

allows us to trace both the performative and material dimensions of securitization across governance levels.

3.3. Tools

In the context of securitization, tools can encompass a variety of policies, technologies, and resources [13]. For example, Wilson [46] compared how the Russian and Australian governments responded to energy securitization pressures through nationalistic or liberal policies, shaping patterns of international conflict or cooperation in energy relations.

Policy tools relevant to advancing offshore wind development might include regulations, incentives, and strategic frameworks that align with broader energy security objectives. Key policy areas often involve environmental legislation, energy transition strategies, and marine governance frameworks, which collectively aim to facilitate the integration of offshore wind into national and regional energy systems [47].

Technologies mentioned in this context could range from digital tools and advanced modelling techniques to enhance efficiency and safety, to more security-oriented technologies such as surveillance systems, tracking mechanisms, and rapid response capabilities that may be framed as necessary to protect critical infrastructure against potential threats [34]. There could also be a focus on risk management tools, including risk modelling, probability assessments, and the application of the precautionary principle, which are designed to address uncertainties related to offshore wind development. Alternatively, tools may involve more conventional governance mechanisms, such as MSP, municipal or regional plans, and frameworks for public participation and stakeholder engagement [48].

In terms of resources, the discussion may centre on what resources need to be mobilized to advance offshore wind development, the scale of these resources, and their sources. This could involve public and private investment, funding from EU programs, or collaboration with regional partners [40]. The allocation of resources might be guided by the perceived urgency of the offshore wind agenda and the broader strategic goals of energy security and sustainability [16,49].

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design combining document analysis and semi-structured interviews, guided by the analytical framework presented earlier. The analysis used a deductive coding approach structured around the categories of securitization, riskification, and normal politics, with coding dimensions including discourses, actors, and tools. Table 2 presents the specific aspects analyzed within each analytical category to guide the document review.

We reviewed 15 key strategic and regulatory documents launched between 2022 and 2025: nine at the international level and six at the national level in Sweden. Table 3 provides an overview of all documents reviewed. The materials, produced between 2022 and 2025, were selected through targeted searches and expert input, focusing on the post-Ukraine war period of intensified energy security debates. Documents were selected based on their strategic and legal importance for marine governance and offshore wind; explicit treatment of offshore wind in relation to energy security, resilience, or multi-use planning (e.g., REPowerEU, EU Council Regulation 2022/2577, national permitting inquiries); and their role in operationalizing or translating EU commitments into national-level implementation (e.g., Swedish Energy Agency reports, MSP proposals). The review involved extracting direct quotes or summarizing relevant content into an Excel matrix, coded by discourses, actors, and tools. For documents in Swedish, quotes were translated into English.

To triangulate the document analysis and incorporate practice-based perspectives, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with key informants from EU, national, and local levels (Table 4). We used a purposeful sampling strategy guided by the principle of information power

Table 2
Questions explored in the documents for each analytical category.

Discourses	What terms are used to describe offshore wind? Problem formulation; Referent Object; What should be done? Level of Urgency; Security problem; Reference to the marine space/environment
Actors	Who should take action? Where should action originate from? What is the form of action?
Tools	What policies are called for? What technologies are called for? What resources are mobilized?

Table 3
Documents included in the review.

Governance Level	Document
International (EU, NATO, regional agreements)	REPowerEU Plan, 2022
	EU Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 laying down a framework to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy, 2022
	Regulation (EU) 2022/869 on guidelines for trans-European energy networks, 2022
	The Marienberg Declaration, 2022
	OSPAR ICG-ORED Terms of Reference for Offshore Renewable Energy Development, 2022–2024, 2022
	HELCOM–VASAB MSP Working Group Work Plan, 2022–2024, 2022
	EU Proposal to revise the Renewable Energy Directive, 2023
	EU–NATO Task Force on Resilience of Critical Infrastructure – Final Assessment Report, 2023
	Ostend Declaration on the North Sea as Europe’s Green Power Plant, 2023
	MSP for the Gulf of Bothnia, the Baltic Sea and the Skagerrak/Kattegat (SwAM), 2022
National	Final report from project Marin MedVind – Vindval report 7055, 2022
	Description of process for update of MSP for energy extraction - (SwAM), 2023
	Proposal on Suitable Areas for Energy Extraction for the MSP (STEM), 2023
	Proposals for amended MSPs for the Gulf of Bothnia, the Baltic Sea and the Skagerrak/Kattegat (SwAM), 2025
	Committee terms of reference Inquiry Commission on Offshore Wind Power, 2023

Table 4
Key informants at EU, national and local levels.

Level	Organization	Date	Ref. Code
International	Directorate General - For Energy (DG ENER)	2024/02/14	I1
	Directorate General - for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)	2023/11/07	I2
National	Government Offices of Sweden	2024/02/12	I3
	Swedish Energy Agency (STEM)	2023/11/27	I4
	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM)	2023/11/20	I5
	Researcher on infrastructure and defence	2023/12/11	I6
	Swedish Defence Research Agency	2023/12/08	I7
	Swedish Wind Energy Association ¹	2023/11/28	I8
Local	Municipality of Lysekil	2024/01/23	I9
	Network on commercial fishing for municipalities on the west coast	2024/02/12	I10

¹ Since May 2025 the Swedish Wind Association changed its name to Green Power Sweden, which is now the industry association for large-scale wind power, solar power, and energy storage in Sweden.

[50], prioritizing informants able to provide rich, relevant insights rather than aiming for data saturation. Participants included: EU-level actors, from directorates and working groups involved in offshore wind and MSP. National-level stakeholders, including government agencies and sectoral organizations. Local actors, such as a municipal official from a region with approved wind projects, and a fisheries representative concerned with marine space use.

Interviews were conducted in Swedish or English via Microsoft Teams, recorded with consent, transcribed, and coded in a separate Excel file. An interview guide was provided in advance, and interview summaries were shared post-interview for validation. The interviews explored five themes: The informant’s role in offshore wind or MSP governance; perceptions of offshore wind expansion (urgency, support, barriers); security and geopolitical concerns, including impacts of NATO membership; governance processes around MSP, coordination, and prioritization; and multi-use potentials of offshore wind (e.g.,

coexistence with military or ecological uses).

The combined use of document analysis and interviews allowed for triangulation between formal policy positions and dynamic institutional practices [51,52]. While the sample is not exhaustive, the selected documents and interviews offer an information-rich dataset capable of addressing the research aims. We acknowledge that theoretical saturation was not achieved [53], but the depth and specificity of the sources provided strong insight into the contested nature of offshore wind governance in the Baltic and North Seas. The approach prioritized conceptual insight over empirical completeness, aligning with the analytical goals of the study [54,55].

5. Results and discussion

This section presents the integrated results and discussion from both the document review and interviews, organized into international, national, and local levels. Using the lens of securitization theory, we analyze how offshore wind governance is shaped by discourses, actors, and tools, and how these reflect dynamics of securitization (issues framed as existential threats requiring exceptional measures), riskification (issues framed as potential harms needing anticipatory governance), or normal politics (managed through routine democratic processes).

Table 5 provides an overview of the documents in relation to the three analytical categories used in the study – discourse, actors, and tools. Supplementary material provides more details about each document.

5.1. International level

While the structures established by the EU Green Deal and the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E)¹ have been important pillars for European climate and energy targets, recent policy instruments – including the REPowerEU Plan [2], Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 [56], and the Proposal for the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive [57] – demonstrate a shift toward securitizing offshore wind within a dual crisis frame: reducing dependency on Russian fossil fuels and accelerating the green transition (I2).

REPowerEU Plan [2] states: “Wind energy, in particular offshore wind, represents a significant future opportunity: resources are stable, abundant, and public acceptance is higher.” According to an informant, REPowerEU was expected to help unblock several (on and offshore) projects stuck in permitting processes in different EU countries. The plan mobilizes political urgency and emergency measures, such as fast-track permitting and reduced environmental scrutiny, indicating a securitized logic (I1).

The link to security in this case is more often framed in terms of national energy security, given the significant role offshore wind is expected to play in future energy mixes (I1). Similarly, the Ostend Declaration [58] and Marienberg Declaration [59] reinforce this narrative by linking offshore wind explicitly to Europe’s energy security, emphasizing the commitment to “accelerate our efforts to reduce fossil fuel consumption as well as dependence on fossil fuel imports, and promote the rapid upscaling and deployment of renewable energy for an energy-resilient Europe” [58].

Informants indicate that, generally, policy discussions tend to focus primarily on meeting climate targets and phasing out fossil fuels, with energy security presented more as an implicit benefit than a central rationale. However, REPowerEU and Council Regulation 2022/2577 represent formal institutional moves that deviate from normal politics by temporarily suspending usual procedural checks, such as parliamentary approval or full environmental review – hallmarks of

¹ A long-standing EU instrument for connecting EU countries’ energy networks.

Table 5
Policy Comparison across analytical categories.

Policy	Discourse	Actors	Tools
REPowerEU Plan, 2022	Urgent and strategic vocabulary; offshore wind key to energy security and independence.	European Commission, EU institutions, Member States, developers.	Binding targets, permitting streamlining, funding, supply chain scaling.
EU Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577, 2022	Highly securitized; emergency-driven need for exceptional permitting measures.	European Council, Member States, project developers.	Temporary regulation, overriding public interest, fast-track permitting.
Regulation (EU) 2022/869, 2022	Technical and strategic; emphasizes integrated planning and long-term infrastructure.	MS, ENTSO-E, EC, TSOs, national permitting authorities.	Grid corridors, basin agreements, ONDPs, permitting reforms, PCIs.
The Marienberg Declaration, 2022	Strongly securitized; urgent Baltic energy transition tied to geopolitical risks.	Baltic Sea governments, EC, TSOs, developers.	19.6 GW target, grid hubs, LNG ports, TEN-E-aligned pacts.
OSPAR ICG-ORED ToR (2022–2024), 2022	Precautionary risk-based approach; balanced discourse on renewables and biodiversity.	OSPAR Parties, ICG-ORED, biodiversity experts, ICES, NGOs.	Best-practice guidance, impact reviews, renewables database.
HELCOM–VASAB MSP Work Plan (2022–2024), 2022	Normal politics; MSP as routine governance; offshore wind one of many uses.	Baltic MSP authorities, HELCOM, VASAB, EC, NGOs.	MSP evaluations, BASEMAPS GIS, planners' forums, data sharing.
EU proposal to revise the Renewable Energy Directive, 2023	Emphasizes risk reduction and long-term robustness.	European Commission, Parliament, Council, MS, planners, TSOs.	Legislation, national targets, measures to increase resilience of energy system
EU–NATO Task Force, 2023	Highly securitized; offshore infrastructure seen as vulnerable to hybrid threats.	EU & NATO bodies, MS, militaries, infrastructure operators.	Threat assessments, exercises, security-by-design, NATO-EU dialogues.
Ostend Declaration, 2023	Dual narrative: securitized and growth-oriented; urgency plus long-term goals.	North Sea governments, EC, TSOs, industry forums.	120/300 GW targets, meshed grid plans, supply chain tools.
MSP for the Gulf of Bothnia, the Baltic Sea and the Skagerrak/ Kattegat (SwAM), 2022	Normal politics and risk governance; balancing multiple marine uses.	SwAM, CABs, ministries, NGOs, public, sector stakeholders.	SEAs, Espoo consultations, public dialogue, legal clarification.
Final report from project Marin MedVind - Vindval Report 7055, 2022	Evidence-based and anticipatory; ecological sustainability must guide expansion.	STEM, EPA, planners, policymakers.	GIS maps, buffers, risk assessments, cumulative impact models.
Description of process for update of MSP for energy extraction (SwAM), 2023	Routine and participatory; risk-aware but framed as	SwAM, CABs, sector actors, defence, ministries.	Multi-round consultations, SEAs, conflict mapping, Espoo review.

Table 5 (continued)

Policy	Discourse	Actors	Tools
Proposal on Suitable Areas for Energy Extraction for the MSP (STEM), 2023	standard planning. Urgent but balanced; expansion essential, must align with other uses.	STEM +8 agencies (Table 6), planners.	GIS overlays, 53 areas, impact reports, inter-agency methods.
Proposals for amended MSP (SwAM), 2025	Mixed narrative; acknowledges benefits and risks, e.g., defence constraints.	SwAM, Armed Forces, sector agencies, developers, public.	23 proposed areas, consequence analysis, redundancy planning.
Committee terms of reference Inquiry Commission on Offshore Wind Power, 2023	Risk-regulated reform agenda; system inefficiencies and security integrated.	Government, commission team, agencies, developers, Parliament.	Auction design, legal reform, seabed fees, Offshore Wind Act.

The table is color-coded to reflect the degree of securitization in the discourse: teal color indicates documents that adopt a strongly securitized narrative, positioning offshore wind as a response to existential threats and justifying exceptional measures. Medium-dark blue signals a risk-based narrative, where offshore wind is governed through anticipatory planning or precautionary principles without invoking emergency logics. Light blue represents a normal politics narrative, where offshore wind is treated as part of routine spatial planning and long-term policy development.

securitization in practice. As one informant explained, REPowerEU is “one of the examples in policy making, where if many things come together, you have this kind of window of opportunity, which then also made it possible to have this emergency regulation, where the Parliament has a very minor role, if at all. But that was still accepted in view of these urgencies and emergencies, and it has been prolonged because there was clear evidence that it did help in some Member States to accelerate the roll out of wind power” (I1). Another informant explained that “while energy security has long been part of the discussion, the war in Ukraine has intensified debates on critical infrastructure, particularly in the context of renewable energy production at sea” (I2). This political momentum has thus shaped how EU institutions frame offshore wind beyond a climate solution and as a key component of secure and sovereign energy systems.

However, this securitized narrative does not go uncontested. Within the broader international governance system, competing discourses emerge, particularly those aligning with international commitments like the global initiative for governments to designate 30 % of Earth's land and ocean area as protected areas by 2030. In this context, policy tools such as, Regulation (EU) 2022/869 on TEN-E [60], and the OSPAR and HELCOM-VASAB planning frameworks embed risk-governance discourses. These emphasize long-term, ecosystem-based planning and regional coordination, pushing back against narrow, fast-track, or crisis-based development models. For instance, OSPAR's ICG-ORED Terms of Reference for 2022–2024 [61] and the HELCOM-VASAB Work Plan for the same period [62] both emphasize the need for cross-border environmental coordination and cumulative impact assessments, tools consistent with riskification and normal politics. Regional environmental actors therefore act as important counterweights to securitizing trends.

From a multi-level governance perspective, this interplay illustrates how securitizing moves initiated at the EU level interact with, and at times conflict with, risk-oriented and precautionary approaches advanced at the international and regional levels. For instance, the EU-NATO Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure focuses on safeguarding offshore systems from sabotage, cyberattacks, and hybrid threats; concerns more closely aligned with conventional understandings of maritime security. In contrast, regional environmental actors promote more deliberative, risk-based, and ecologically grounded

governance approaches, emphasizing cumulative impacts, cross-border coordination, and long-term sustainability [63].

Key actors at this level include the European Commission, European Parliament, EU Member States, NATO, and regional environmental organizations such as OSPAR and HELCOM. NATO's influence has grown, particularly in the Baltic Sea, where Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic states face increasing surveillance responsibilities. As an informant noted, *"sensors and monitoring capabilities in the Baltic Sea, especially further from the Swedish coast, have become even more crucial because the countries are now monitoring not only for themselves but also on behalf of NATO"* (16). At the same time, OSPAR and HELCOM act as risk-managing actors, focusing on cross-border environmental safeguards, cumulative impact assessments, and the integration of MSP.

While EU-level informants emphasized growing momentum for regional coordination in offshore wind, particularly in the North and Baltic Seas, national-level actors expressed skepticism about its practical impact. One EU informant noted that *"some Member States are organizing together, especially in the North Sea and the Baltic; they are now all increasing their own ambitions for offshore renewable energy beyond EU goals nationally and at sea basins, with our support obviously"* (12). This perspective reflects an EU institutional view that sees sea basin cooperation as increasingly influential. However, this optimism is not fully shared at the national level, where MSP remains a predominantly national competence. As one national-level informant explained, *"it may be that you send comments to each other, and then perhaps those comments aren't taken very seriously. That's one way to put it. Each actor is still sovereign in these decisions. There is a risk then – I'm just speculating – but a risk that whoever comes first gets the environmental space, and whoever comes last can't build because the environment can't handle any more"* (15). This reveals a gap between the EU's ambitions for basin-wide coordination and the realities of nationally led MSP processes, where regional dialogues often lack the authority or mechanisms to shape concrete spatial outcomes.

The tools mobilized at the international level reflect this duality. On the one hand, emergency legal instruments such as the "overriding public interest" clause in Council Regulation (EU) 2022/2577 [56] and the creation of "renewables acceleration areas" in the revised Renewable Energy Directive [57] aim to fast-track permitting, streamline environmental assessments, and bypass normal regulatory hurdles – manifestations of securitized governance. On the other hand, environmental planning instruments such as ICG-ORED [61], HELCOM-VASAB MSP work plans [62], and TEN-E guidelines [60] promote ecosystem-based governance, cumulative impact review, and stakeholder engagement – tools more aligned with riskification and normal politics.

Technological tools such as dual-use surveillance systems, grid resilience measures, and marine sensors, identified in EU-NATO assessments [64], illustrate the merging of energy and defence logics in offshore infrastructure [27]. These developments blur the boundary between civil and military priorities and suggest a hybridization of governance frameworks.

From a multi-level governance perspective, the international level reveals how securitization operates not simply through the presence of a security discourse, but through the deployment of exceptional tools, like emergency regulations and legal derogations, that suspend normal democratic procedures in favor of urgent energy goals. These moves are not universally adopted but compete with risk-based and participatory governance arrangements, especially those promoted by regional environmental actors and MSP frameworks. This dynamic interplay illustrates how the governance of offshore wind is shaped by competing rationalities – geopolitical resilience, long-term risk management, and participatory planning – that circulate across scales. Rather than a linear diffusion of EU discourse, the international level is characterized by selective uptake, resistance, and adaptation, resulting in a hybrid governance landscape where securitization and sustainability coexist, sometimes in tension.

5.2. National level

In Sweden, offshore wind development is primarily framed through a risk governance discourse, emphasizing the need to balance electrification, decarbonization, and environmental sustainability. The Swedish Energy Agency (STEM) projects that electricity demand will double by 2045, positioning offshore wind as "essential" to ensuring a "safe, competitive, and sustainable electricity supply" [65]. Despite the importance of offshore wind, an informant highlights how its realization is constrained by high costs, lack of financial support mechanisms, infrastructure limitations, and spatial conflicts. *"Unlike other countries, Sweden does not offer feed-in tariffs or grid connection subsidies, making offshore wind economically less viable compared to land-based alternatives"* (14). The cost curve for offshore wind remains steep, especially in the absence of state support.

Beyond the regulatory constraints, the informant (14) emphasizes that offshore wind development in Sweden faces major spatial and systemic challenges. Most areas proposed for wind farms are subject to competing interests (nature protection, fisheries, and shipping) making trade-offs unavoidable. Constraints vary regionally: the West Coast is highly congested with existing uses, the Baltic Sea raises unresolved defence concerns, and the Bothnian Bay, though less contested, presents uncertainties related to winter navigation and icebreaking. Moreover, there is a spatial mismatch between where electricity is most needed (southern Sweden) and where most offshore wind potential lies (in the north), raising additional questions about grid capacity and long-term infrastructure planning.

STEM's 2023 proposal identified 53 potential offshore wind areas totalling ~90 TWh/year, while SwAM's updated planning proposal earmarked 23 formal "energy extraction" areas, totalling ~120 TWh/year. Both documents emphasize coexistence with other marine uses and the need to identify spatial synergies but also acknowledge that few areas are free of conflict.

Alongside these conflicts of interests, broader security concerns emerge through the involvement of the Swedish Armed Forces. Defence actors highlight offshore wind as a potential risk to military operations, particularly with respect to radar functionality, surveillance capacities, and maritime freedom of operation – concerns that are especially salient in the Baltic Sea region: *"There are potential threats in our region... the risk of sabotage and attacks, including hybrid attacks, exists. This issue has gained significant attention over the past two years, both nationally and in neighboring countries"* (15).

Importantly, these defence concerns reflect the dual-use nature of offshore infrastructure but do not amount to securitization in the strict theoretical sense, as they do not construct offshore wind as an existential threat requiring exceptional political measures or broad audience acceptance. Rather, they express maritime security risks that constrain planning outcomes. This dynamic is exemplified by the Swedish government's rejection of multiple offshore wind applications in 2024 based on defence concerns, highlighting how the Armed Forces exert disproportionate influence in MSP and permitting decisions, despite being one actor among many.

A core governance tension relates to the open-door permitting system, which allows developers to independently propose project locations, rather than the state designating areas through centralized planning or auctions. This system exacerbates uncertainties for defence actors and amplifies cross-sectoral tensions. As one informant explained: *"multiple applications for the same geographic area force regulatory bodies to review several proposals, even though only one project can realistically be implemented"* (13). According to informants, instead, authorities, including the Swedish Armed Forces, would need to review an overarching planning for the whole marine area in order to approve the establishment of an individual offshore wind park, because currently *"they don't know if they say yes to a park if there will be another one in that area as well. They might be able to adjust their operations to one park in the area, but not three parks, and since they don't know which ones will be*

constructed and when they will be constructed, they will have to say no to all of them" (I3).

In response, the 2023–2024 Inquiry Commission on Offshore Wind recommended phasing out the open-door model and replacing it with a centralized, auction-based system where the state defines offshore zones and tenders them competitively. This approach is expected to clarify rights, reduce regulatory fragmentation, and better align wind development with defence and environmental planning. Proposed reforms include a dedicated offshore wind law, seabed leasing mechanisms, and more systematic integration of national security in the permitting process, reflecting a governance shift toward greater state coordination and risk management.

National actors involved in this governance landscape include government agencies (STEM, SwAM), sectoral organizations (e.g., Swedish Wind Energy Association), the fisheries sector, and the Swedish Armed Forces. While MSP operates as a normal politics framework – a deliberative, multi-agency process involving nine public authorities (Table 6) – the Armed Forces exert outsized influence, often bypassing participatory processes: *"It's just easier to say no, because you haven't been through this before... there is only a rule that the Armed Forces should say yes or no, but there is no guidance on the basis for such decisions or how stakeholders should adapt their installations accordingly"* (I6).

Apart from MSP and the Inquiry Commission, other key tools include the Swedish Environmental Code (Miljöbalken), which governs environmental permits and impact assessments, aiming to safeguard sustainable development. Additional planning tools include GIS-based conflict mapping (used by STEM and SwAM), site-specific impact assessments, and stakeholder consultation processes. These tools help visualize overlaps among marine interests and are central to Sweden's evolving approach to identifying wind-compatible zones.

Despite these mechanisms, informants across sectors consistently pointed to missing structures for cross-sectoral dialogue and coordination. As one informant emphasized, there is a need for: *"an overall analysis of the energy needs and energy supply going forward in the long term and really weigh the pros and cons of different types of energy in relation to how they affect other interests, in which Swedish total defence is one interest"* (I7).

Informants pointed at the opportunities to learn from mechanisms developed in other EU and Baltic Sea countries: *"offshore wind installations affect land-based radar facilities...but I think it is entirely possible to manage this within the existing frameworks, as seen in other countries that have advanced further"* (I6). Countries such as Denmark and the UK have developed more consensual governance models, enabling defence, energy, environmental, and local actors to build a shared understanding of

risks and develop frameworks to facilitate coexistence [66]. Poland's MSP model exemplifies a governance approach where security, environmental, and energy objectives are negotiated through pre-established institutional platforms (e.g., inter-agency committees, cross-sectoral working groups, or statutory planning forums set up in advance), illustrating how dual-use technologies can be effectively embedded across governance scales.²

Sweden's case underscores how the boundaries between risk governance and securitization can blur without fully collapsing into emergency politics. While offshore wind is largely treated as a matter of long-term planning, institutional asymmetries, particularly the Armed Forces' de facto veto power, reveal how security logics can subtly displace participatory and cross-sectoral coordination within formally democratic processes. This reflects a form of soft securitization, where operational concerns, connected to maritime security, carry outsized weight not through exceptional discourse, but through structural authority and institutional gaps. The Swedish example thus illustrates how multi-level governance challenges are not limited to vertical misalignment with EU ambitions but also emerge horizontally through unmediated sectoral conflicts. Rather than full securitization or routine politics, what emerges is a fragmented governance landscape in which risk, security, and planning priorities compete without clear rules for reconciliation.

5.3. Local level

At the local level, discourses around offshore wind are predominantly grounded in normal politics and local risk governance, where municipalities and local stakeholders engage through formal planning, consultation, and permitting processes. Municipalities such as Lysekil, in the west coast of the country, frame offshore wind as essential for local energy independence and industrial competitiveness, highlighting both economic opportunity and local development needs: *"Västra Götaland imports 70-80% of its energy consumption, primarily for industry. This is happening at a time when the industry is transitioning to renewable energy, with no viable alternatives. Large-scale electricity generation is essential, and offshore wind is the most immediate solution"* (I9).

However, local fishing communities and environmental groups introduce competing risk discourses and, at times, broader maritime security concerns, particularly around marine food supply and ecosystem health. For example, a representative from a fisheries association framed marine areas as linked to national resilience: *"We see the national food supply as a political security issue, in crisis and war you need to be able to use the seas as they are a good source for food in Sweden. In shorter periods, you can really scale up without jeopardizing anything in the long term"* (I10).

This points to an important nuance: while local actors generally operate within normal politics, alternative security logics emerge, not as existential threats in the Copenhagen School sense, but as dispersed logics of societal resilience (e.g., food security, biodiversity protection) and maritime security. As one informant warned, *"conflicts will arise with other interests, such as fishing, shipping, and biodiversity conservation. The scale of the planned expansion will inevitably have consequences, despite the benefits of increased renewable energy production"* (I5).

From a multi-level governance perspective, Swedish MSP is coordinated nationally by SwAM but relies heavily on county administrative boards (CABs) and municipalities in practice. CABs act as state representatives at the regional level, conducting environmental assessments, reviewing permit applications, and mediating between national policy goals and local concerns. Their influence has been visible in several high-profile cases, notably in Gotland (east coast), where the CAB has

Table 6

Authorities collaborating in the formulation of the MSP.

Actor	Area of responsibility
Svenska Kraftnät ³	Operates and develops Sweden's national electricity transmission grid and ensures reliability.
Swedish Armed Forces	National defence, including military readiness, surveillance, and protecting strategic infrastructure.
SwAM	Manages marine and freshwater environments, including MSP and fisheries.
Swedish Environmental Protection Agency	Oversees environmental policy implementation, nature conservation, and climate adaptation.
The Swedish National Heritage Board	Protects and manages cultural heritage and historical environments, including underwater archaeology.
Swedish Maritime Administration	Ensures safe and efficient maritime navigation, including fairway maintenance and pilotage.
STEM	Develops and implements national energy policy, promotes renewable energy and energy efficiency.
The Swedish Board of Agriculture	Oversees agricultural policy, food production, and rural development, including fisheries.
Geological Survey of Sweden	Responsible for geological mapping, mineral resources, and seabed data relevant to MSP.

³ Responsible for the transmission system for electricity.

² Tafon et al. [67] provide a critical analysis of MSP in Poland, highlighting how both defence interests and offshore wind developers have emerged as key beneficiaries of the process.

repeatedly raised environmental and defence concerns over large offshore wind projects. For example, the OX2 “Aurora” project, a major offshore wind farm east of the island, was put on hold in May 2025 after the CAB revoked the permit, citing military radar interference, bird migration risks, and cumulative ecological impacts in the Baltic Sea [68].

This influential role also places considerable pressure on the CABs themselves. As one informant noted, *“It requires an incredible amount of expertise for a CAB to be able to make good decisions – they need to know a lot about everything”* (I10). Despite their wide mandate, CABs often work under tight deadlines and with limited resources. Permit applications are typically reviewed in isolation, with little consideration for how projects interact spatially or cumulatively. *“They don’t take into account other applications; instead, each application is assessed individually, regardless of what’s around it,”* the informant continued, highlighting cases where proposals even overlap geographically. The lack of transparency in how decisions are made further complicates the process, especially since CAB recommendations carry significant weight in national-level decisions.

Both CABs and municipalities have raised concerns over the unclear division of responsibilities in MSP implementation, particularly when defence interests override their assessments without clear procedural guidance. While risk management is central to their role, informants argued that the current fragmented and opaque process risks undermining the legitimacy of planning outcomes. Instead, *“it would be more neutral to first establish a MSP and then, based on that, apply for these energy extraction areas... I believe the general public would be more on board if the marine plans were decided on first”* (I10).

At the municipal level, Sweden’s municipal veto right grants local governments formal authority to block offshore wind projects within territorial waters (12 nautical miles from shore). This power is far from symbolic: since 2019, municipalities have used their veto to reject roughly 40 % of near-shore offshore wind projects [69]. While the municipal veto does not extend to Sweden’s Exclusive Economic Zone, informants noted that municipal political pressure can still shape public opinion, influence consultations, and indirectly affect national-level decision-making.

Recent planning processes [e.g., 65,70] have attempted to engage local stakeholders through regional hearings and public consultations, but municipalities report limited capacity to analyze complex spatial trade-offs and few opportunities to meaningfully shape final decisions in national MSP revisions. Their formal influence is limited outside territorial waters, and many perceive that decisions are ultimately shaped by national, especially security, interests.

However, within the 12-nautical-mile zone, municipalities retain veto rights over offshore wind permits, and this formal authority allows them to block near-shore projects, thereby exerting significant influence over the geographic viability of wind development. This duality means that while municipalities often feel sidelined in strategic planning, they can nonetheless constrain offshore wind trajectories through localized decisions – often in tension with national or EU-level ambitions.

Local governance tools include participation in MSP consultations, municipal planning procedures, and the use of the municipal veto. Despite this, informants consistently stressed that local actors often feel marginalized when facing overriding national defence or energy priorities, especially given the absence of clear mechanisms to balance military objections and local concerns. One informant explained that: *“there is only a rule that the Armed Forces should say yes or no, but no guidance on the basis for such decisions or how stakeholders should adapt their installations accordingly”* (I6).

The local level illustrates how multi-level governance in Sweden operates not as a neatly integrated hierarchy, but as a fragmented field of negotiation where competing rationalities – economic development, environmental protection, food security, and national defence – collide. While formal securitization is absent, localized security logics emerge through alternative narratives, particularly around food sovereignty and

ecological resilience, expanding the understanding of what constitutes “security” beyond military terms. This aligns with more systemic approaches of maritime security [24,25]. However, the lack of procedural clarity and limited transparency, especially between municipalities, CABs, and national authorities, undermines the legitimacy and coherence of MSP. Rather than enabling participatory governance, the current configuration risks reinforcing top-down decision-making masked as consultative, leaving local actors with formal authority but limited influence.

6. Conclusions

This paper has explored how offshore wind development in Sweden is positioned between processes of securitization, riskification, and normal politics, using a multi-level governance lens to unpack discourses, actors, and tools at international, national, and local levels. Drawing on securitization theory, we analyzed whether and how offshore wind is framed as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures, a manageable risk needing anticipatory governance, or a policy challenge addressed through routine democratic procedures. Rather than a uniform logic, we find a fragmented and contested governance landscape where different narratives intersect, reinforce, or undermine one another across levels.

At the international level, institutions such as the European Commission and NATO frame offshore wind within a securitization logic, linking it to Europe’s geopolitical resilience, energy independence, and defence against Russia’s aggression. Emergency measures like the “overriding public interest” principle and the establishment of “renewables acceleration areas” reflect how offshore wind is discursively elevated from a technical climate measure to a security imperative. At the same time, the coexistence of environmental safeguards and multi-use planning promoted by OSPAR and HELCOM, particularly through MSP platforms like HELCOM-VASAB, reflects more precautionary and deliberative approaches. This duality shows how international governance spaces are not uniform but marked by competing logics, with securitizing moves from the EU interacting with riskified and environmental discourse at the regional level. This supports earlier findings suggesting that the more internationalized an energy issue becomes, the more likely it is to be framed through a securitization lens – moving away from technical expertise toward politicized arenas where security discourses gain traction [19]. Recent evidence from EU-level policy also shows how securitizing tools (e.g., emergency regulations) are activated under geopolitical stress, yet they remain time-bound and contested, indicating an incomplete shift toward permanent exceptionalism.

At the national level, Sweden presents a governance system anchored in risk-based planning, with offshore wind framed by agencies like STEM as critical to climate mitigation and energy supply. Yet this logic is challenged by the Swedish Armed Forces, whose operational concerns, particularly around surveillance and defence infrastructure, exert significant influence, even in the absence of public declarations of existential threat. These dynamics point to a form of “soft securitization,” where security interests shape policy not through over emergency discourse, but through institutional asymmetries, limited transparency, and decisive veto power. Recent permit rejections tied to military objections, coupled with weak coordination mechanisms, illustrate how national security actors can shape marine energy trajectories without transparent procedures or clear criteria. The national permitting process, especially the open-door model, exacerbates these tensions by allowing uncoordinated applications, fueling uncertainty, and intensifying cross-sectoral friction. While a shift toward more centralized, auction-based planning is proposed, current arrangements reveal structural weaknesses in Sweden’s capacity to mediate between energy, environmental, and defence priorities within its MSP system.

At the local level, governance remains anchored in normal politics and local risk discourse, with municipalities and CABs managing consultations, permit reviews, and environmental assessments. Coastal

municipalities such as Lysekil highlight the importance of offshore wind for local industrial competitiveness, while fisheries organizations frame marine space as part of national food security and ecological resilience. Although these do not constitute full securitization, they challenge dominant narratives of national energy and defence imperatives and reflect a more systemic view of maritime security. Local actors retain some influence (e.g., through the municipal veto) but face procedural and political constraints that limit their ability to co-shape MSP. Municipalities possess veto power within territorial waters, giving them formal authority to block nearshore offshore wind projects. Yet outside this zone, their influence is more limited, and local actors often report marginalization in national marine planning processes. The fragmented, opaque, and resource-constrained nature of local engagement risks undermining the legitimacy of MSP processes and eroding public trust in long-term energy transitions.

While our analytical framework distinguished between initiators, implementers, and challengers of securitizing moves, the findings reveal that these categories are not always clear-cut in practice. At the national level, Swedish agencies occupy an intermediate position: rather than directly implementing international securitizing agendas, they reinterpret and normalize them within established risk-governance and planning frameworks. This mediation effectively tones down the exceptionalism present in EU and NATO narratives, embedding energy security concerns within administrative procedures and environmental assessments. These dynamics suggest that multi-level securitization operates less as a linear diffusion of threat narratives and more as a process of translation, where discourses are recontextualized through institutional norms, planning traditions, and sectoral routines.

Taken together, the Swedish case underscores the multidimensional, uneven, and negotiated nature of securitization processes [11]. Our findings support recent scholarship emphasizing that securitization is not a binary outcome but a layered, iterative phenomenon shaped by institutional context, actor power, and audience reception [9,38]. Securitizing logics are most visibly articulated at the EU level, but their material and procedural consequences are negotiated at national and local levels, where they encounter risk-based governance frameworks and democratic constraints. Importantly, we find that security narratives often privilege certain actors, particularly those aligned with geopolitical or defence priorities, while marginalizing others, including coastal communities and environmental advocates. This dynamic resonates with critiques of how securitization tends to entrench dominant power relations, reproducing exclusions even in the name of public interest [71].

This study also sheds light on the conceptual and practical entanglements between maritime security, energy security, and the securitization of energy. While maritime security is operationalized through concerns about sabotage, surveillance, and freedom of naval movement, particularly visible in the Baltic Sea context, these concerns rarely escalate to full securitization in the sense of public discourse as existential threats requiring exceptional political measures. Rather, they operate as background conditions that subtly shape infrastructure governance through defence vetoes and institutional asymmetries. Meanwhile, energy security, typically understood as the stable and affordable supply of energy, is rhetorically invoked to justify offshore wind expansion, but in Sweden, this goal remains embedded in risk governance and long-term planning. The securitization of energy, in contrast, is most visible at the EU level, where geopolitical narratives of offshore wind as critical infrastructure enable emergency measures and fast-track permitting. However, these narratives do not uniformly travel across levels. Our data reveal a complex layering: maritime security constrains where offshore wind can be located, energy security legitimizes why it must expand, and securitization provides the legal and discursive tools to override normal procedures – though often in contested and temporary ways. Recognizing these distinctions is crucial for understanding how power circulates in marine governance and whose interests are prioritized under the banner of “security.”

Moreover, local counter-narratives, rooted in environmental protection, food sovereignty, and spatial justice, can function as forms of *counter-securitization* or *de-securitization* [18,19], pushing back against energy-security imperatives and highlighting the social costs of rapid, top-down energy transitions. These localized responses underscore recent conceptualizations of maritime security not as a fixed or top-down agenda, but as an “everyday practice” shaped by dispersed, situated actors navigating overlapping risks, responsibilities, and contestations at sea [24,25].

Finally, this study highlights the central, yet currently limited, role of MSP in mediating between competing governance logics. While MSP is formally tasked with balancing multiple uses and priorities at sea, in practice it is constrained by institutional fragmentation, lack of transparency, and sectoral power asymmetries, most notably the strong influence of defence and energy actors. This imbalance reflects a subtle but significant form of institutionalized securitization, whereby security actors shape outcomes not through public declarations of existential threats, but through opaque administrative authority. In Sweden, the Armed Forces’ ability to deny offshore wind permits without transparent justification or deliberative engagement illustrates how security logics can override democratic procedures even in the absence of formal securitizing speech acts. This challenges the assumption that securitization must be discursively enacted, revealing instead how structural power and institutional asymmetry can reconfigure policy hierarchies beneath the surface of normal politics. These dynamics are compounded by underdeveloped planning tools and regulatory frameworks, particularly in relation to cumulative impact assessment, cross-sectoral conflict resolution, and clear, accountable criteria for permit approvals. Strengthening the institutional capacity, procedural safeguards, and inclusivity of MSP processes will be essential to manage the growing complexity of marine governance under conditions of climate urgency and geopolitical instability [72].

Future research could expand on these insights by addressing several areas not explored in this study. First, there is a need to investigate the material and spatial consequences of securitization for marine environments and coastal communities, including the distributional impacts of offshore wind development on marginalized groups. Second, longitudinal studies could shed light on how securitization dynamics evolve over time, particularly in response to shifting geopolitical, environmental, or societal pressures. Third, comparative research across national and regional contexts would help clarify under what institutional or governance conditions securitized energy transitions succeed or face resistance, and how local counter-mobilizations shape outcomes. Finally, future work could more systematically integrate the perspectives of actors often excluded or sidelined in securitized debates – such as small-scale fishers and coastal residents – to illuminate how these communities experience, contest, or reshape security and risk discourse. By addressing these gaps, future scholarship can contribute to designing governance frameworks that not only manage the technical and institutional challenges of energy transitions, but also navigate their deeply political, contested, and socially uneven dimensions.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Karina Barquet: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Frans Sjölander:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

All authors have seen and approved the final version of the manuscript being submitted.

There is no financial/personal interest or belief that could affect the

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There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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