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Claiming Sovereignty in the Oil Crisis "Project Independence" and Global Interdependence in the United States, 1973/74

Rüdiger Graf*

Abstract: »Souveränitätsbehauptungen in der Ölkrise. ‚Project Independence‘ und globale Interdependenz in den USA 1973/74«. Understanding sovereignty as a claim and not a property, the article scrutinizes how the US government under Nixon countered the challenge that emerged from the oil embargo and oil price increases in 1973/74. Using a distinction made by Stephen D. Krasner, it holds that the embargo challenged US international sovereignty by establishing the limits of its interdependence sovereignty, which was supposed to undermine its domestic sovereignty. The article examines how the Nixon administration tried to both maintain and demonstrate its sovereignty by institutional reorganization, the development of state energy expertise, direct communication with the public, and diplomatic negotiations with both producing and fellow consuming countries. Thus, it looks at the politics of sovereignty under the conditions of a highly interdependent globalized economy, modern mass communication, and the rising importance of expert knowledge in political decision-making.

Keywords: Oil crisis, sovereignty, Nixon, energy policy, United States, 1970s, international relations.

1. Introduction

When, in October 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) unilaterally raised the price of oil and the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) simultaneously reduced oil production and embargoed the United States and the Netherlands, the effects were felt throughout the world. The first oil crisis was part of a process in which a number of oil producing countries achieved “permanent sovereignty over natural resources,” making real a claim that had been put forward by the so-called Third World since the early 1960s. After attaining national independence in the process of decolonization, political elites in the developing world had realized that political sovereignty meant very little if they could not control their eco-

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conomic affairs.¹ Their gains in sovereignty had far-reaching repercussions: the multinational oil companies lost control over pricing and oil production in several countries, and the oil price increases and production cuts challenged sovereignty in Western industrialized countries.

Since Jean Bodin defined the term, “sovereignty” has traditionally signified a supreme form of power over a certain territory that is independent of external control or interference. At the beginning of the twentieth century, according to Lassa Francis Oppenheim, a state required a territory, a people, and a sovereign government:

Sovereignty is supreme authority, an authority which is independent of any other earthly authority. Sovereignty in the strict and narrowest sense of the term includes, therefore, independence all around, within and without the borders of the country.²

The concept of sovereignty, thus, connects the spheres of international and domestic politics; it is usually in reference to the state, but it can also be ascribed to governments that have the authority to exert sovereign rights. Over the course of the twentieth century, the principle of national sovereignty gained almost universal acceptance with the destruction of imperial systems, as well as with the rise of the League of Nations and the United Nations. Yet, at least since the 1960s, the viability of the concept has fallen into doubt. Increasing economic interdependence and the rise of multinational corporations seems to have weakened governments’ abilities to conduct autonomous economic policies.³ Moreover, the growth of international organizations and legal regimes were supposed to have circumscribed individual states’ sovereignty. Many political scientists, sociologists, legal scholars, and historians diagnosed either the loss of “sovereignty” or its transfer to supranational levels.⁴ Others saw the “rescue of the nation state” via supranational integration or even an increase in sovereignty due to new means of technological surveillance and control.⁵ Despite the differences, all of these narratives understand “sovereignty” as a property that states either possess or do not – sometimes allowing for different degrees of sovereignty. This conceptualization, however, neglects that, at its origin, sovereignty is a claim that legitimizes one form of authority while debunking others.⁶ Understanding sovereignty as a claim, and not property, means that it is a social concept and has an inherently communicative and

¹ Anghie 2005, 196–244; Garavini 2012. This article draws on material from my book Graf 2014. For comments and suggestions I thank Frank Bösch, Moritz Föllmer, Aimee Genell, and Christiane Reinecke.

² Oppenheim 1905, 101.

³ Maier 2000.

⁴ McCormick 1993, 1; Grimm 2009, 92; Sassen 1996, 29.

⁵ Milward 1992, 3; Rudolph 2005.

⁶ Hinsley 1966, 1, 25; Sheehan 2006; Grimm 2009.

symbolic dimension.⁷ Being sovereign, above all, means to be recognized as sovereign and, thus, sovereignty can be questioned, challenged, contested, and denied, as well as asserted or demonstrated. Due to its communicative dimension, claiming sovereignty can be the first step towards establishing it. But, in the end, it can be established only practically.

Examining the oil crisis of 1973/74 as a challenge to sovereignty helps us understand its dynamics and the multiple reactions of Western European and US governments. Of course, one may hold the view that the “oil weapon” was not powerful enough to really threaten the sovereignty of Western industrialized countries, but this does not mean it was not perceived as threatening. Using a conceptual differentiation made by Steven D. Krasner, I will argue that even if the consuming countries’ “Westphalian sovereignty” was never an issue during the oil crisis, the embargo challenged their “international legal sovereignty” trying to pressure the governments to assume a certain position with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁸ It did so by establishing the limits of their “interdependence sovereignty,” as they were apparently not capable of ascertaining the sufficient influx of oil into the country. This, in turn, challenged “domestic sovereignty” in the Western world: the post-war economic boom of the 1950s and 60s had depended on the availability of cheap and abundant energy resources – above all, oil. Accordingly, prosperity seemed to be threatened when oil appeared to become scarce and prices rose. Moreover, the transfer of sovereignty towards the producing countries seemed to jeopardize the very foundations of Western democratic institutions, as, especially in the light of the Cold War, legitimatization of liberal democracies had depended on growing affluence among their citizens.⁹ Therefore, the oil crisis amounted to a crisis of sovereignty and political authority for Western governments and was ideally suited to formulate and challenge sovereignty claims.

While this was true for all industrialized countries affected by the price increases and production cuts, the predicament in the United States, on which I will concentrate, was special. Presidential authority to exert sovereign rights had increased since World War II at the expense of Congress.¹⁰ With the simultaneous rise of a “media democracy,” however, public scrutiny of the presidents also grew. Thus, the number of potential pitfalls that could result in an erosion of authority increased. This was even more the case as the president was seen as a source of moral leadership and guidance, and presidents were expected to live up to their self-proclaimed standards.¹¹ When the oil crisis

⁷ Biersteker and Weber 1996.

⁸ Krasner 1999, 3.

⁹ Campbell, Carmoy and Kondo 1974. Concerning oil and the Cold War see David S. Painter's contribution in this HSR Special Issue and Graf 2011.

¹⁰ Warsaw 2000.

¹¹ Pious 2000; Riccards 2000.

occurred, however, Nixon's presidential authority and moral integrity had already been called into question because of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. In the following, I will scrutinize the Nixon administration's response to the challenge to sovereignty – or, rather, I will show how and why certain aspects of the oil crisis in 1973/74 were perceived as matters of sovereignty. Using Krasner's differentiation, I will argue that the US government tried to demonstrate and augment its domestic sovereignty in the field of energy by (1) institutional reorganization and (2) the use of expert knowledge, specifically the development of state expertise. Furthermore, I examine (3) how the government's direct communication with the public shows its awareness of the symbolic challenge the oil crisis posed to national sovereignty. Finally, I will show that (4) diplomatic communication with both producing and fellow consuming countries was the most concrete means to secure and demonstrate US international and interdependence sovereignty. In examining US energy policy during the first oil crisis, which is often described as a critical juncture in the history of the Western world, this article scrutinizes the politics of sovereignty under the conditions of a highly interdependent globalized economy, modern mass communication, and the rising importance of expert knowledge in political decision-making.¹²

2. Domestic Sovereignty via Institutional Reorganization

Contrary to a widely held belief, energy supply problems in the United States did not begin with the oil crisis of 1973/74.¹³ In the preceding winter, the fuel situation had already become critical: kerosene became scarce in Maine and Virginia, people in Iowa suffered heating problems, and the city of Boston was unable to find a contractor willing to deliver gasoline for the city's vehicle fleet.¹⁴ In the following summer holiday season, thousands of independent gas stations ran out of fuel. The *Financial Times* was among the media outlets that declared the nation was facing an "energy crisis."¹⁵ In fact, in the years before the oil crisis, energy supply problems occurred frequently, and talk of an energy crisis had already become ubiquitous in the media.¹⁶ In June 1973, four months before the Arab oil embargo and OPEC price increases, 83 percent of

¹² Hobsbawm 1995, 248-86; Ferguson 2010; Jacobs 2010; Rodgers 2011.

¹³ Vietor 1984; Nye 1998, 217-27; Venn 2002; Merrill 2007.

¹⁴ Oil and Gas Journal, 25 December 1972; Joseph Lerner to William Simon: Motor Gasoline Inventories, 22 Mar. 1973; Fuel Shortage Incidents (Distribution Pattern) [1973]; George A. Lincoln: Memo for the President: Fuel Situation in the Upper Midwest, 7 Jan. 1973, Nixon Library, Yorba Linda, California [hereafter Nixon Library], White House Central Files, SMOF, EPO, Box 24.

¹⁵ Jonquieres 1973; Oil: Sharing the Shortage 1973.

¹⁶ U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs 1972.

Americans declared they had already heard of the “energy crisis.”¹⁷ This energy crisis shaped public perception and politics during the oil crisis, as it had initiated a restructuring of US energy policy.

By the late 1960s, most Western energy experts, such as those in the OECD’s Oil Policy Committee, shared the view that the global energy economy was undergoing significant changes. They attributed these transformations, above all, to the unexpectedly fast-rising oil consumption in industrialized countries and to the increasing demands of the producing countries to control their resources.¹⁸ Despite its ample oil reserves and status as the world’s largest oil producer, even the United States’ situation was considered worrisome in the early 1970s. Oil imports exceeded domestic spare production capacity, and the Texas Railroad Commission abolished the production restrictions on US oil fields, which had been introduced in order to stabilize prices.¹⁹ In the second half of the 1950s, oil import quotas had been introduced for national security reasons, as well as to protect the domestic oil industry from cheaper competition. In 1970, Richard Nixon’s Task Force on Oil Import Control suggested that the system should be substituted by tariffs in order to secure America’s growing energy needs.²⁰ Despite of or due to various government interventions in the oil and energy markets – most prominently the price controls on petroleum products in 1971, which were later abolished under President Carter – local energy supply problems increased. Together with the expectation of a coming energy crunch, they created a sense of crisis that seemed to necessitate further government action. Something had to be done to prove that the government was in control and able to solve the problem.²¹ Many energy experts, as well as both Republicans and Democrats, argued that energy competences were too dispersed, with various governmental agencies responsible for single energy sources, and called for centralization.²²

In his address to Congress in June of 1971, Nixon had demanded the Federal government’s energy authority be strengthened with an energy program and a Department of Natural Resources, as “a single agency that can execute and

¹⁷ Gallup 1978, 172.

¹⁸ Concerning these debates see Graf 2014, 51-66.

¹⁹ See Vietor 1984, 3-5 and 193-99 and Robert Lifset’s contribution to this HSR Special Issue.

²⁰ U.S. Cabinet Task Force on Oil Import Control 1970.

²¹ The Quality of Government 1973; see also Grossman 2013, 20f.

²² Henry M. Jackson: Letter to the President: Concern about Oil Situation, 13 June 1972, Nixon Library, NSC Institutional Files (‘H-Files’), NSSM 174, National Security and U.S. Energy Policy, Box H-197; Hastings Keith to John C. Whitaker: Over a Barrel? A Report of a Trip Concerning Energy, 22 June 1972, NA-RA, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, John Whitaker, Box 56; National Science Foundation, 1971; McLean 1973, 34; see also Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981, 119-23.

modify policies in a comprehensive and unified manner.”²³ In 1973, months before the oil embargo, the restructuring of energy authorities gained momentum. In June the short-lived and inefficient National Energy Office was replaced with the Energy Policy Office under the guidance of Nixon’s first “energy czar,” the Republican Governor of Colorado, John A. Love.²⁴ In naming him “czar,” Nixon used a notion that, in American politics, had signified the endowment of somebody with unlimited authority over a certain policy field in order to strengthen the government, usually in times of war. Justifying his decision, Nixon pointed to a deficiency of the federal government: while “the acquisition, distribution, and consumption of energy resources [...were] critical to the functioning of our economy and our society,” the government could not “effectively meet its obligations in these areas under the present organizational structures.”²⁵ Therefore, the competences of various departments and government agencies should be centralized within the new office. The energy czar’s powers, however, were not as supreme and absolute as his name suggested; rather, the often hectic restructuring of energy authorities over the course of 1973 led to parallel structures and power conflicts.²⁶ Love’s office soon came into conflict with the Oil Policy Committee, which was headed by William E. Simon, a former banker at Salomon Brothers, who had joined the Treasury only in January 1973. Over the course of 1973 and, especially after the beginning of the embargo in October, Simon rose to become the central figure for the conduct of US energy policy. When he replaced Love as the new energy czar, Nixon emphasized again the need for further government control of the energy sector, giving Simon significant authority, while claiming to participate personally in the conduct of energy policy.²⁷

The already existing government interventions in the energy sector, particularly the price control and the mandatory allocation program of November 1973, necessitated further intervention and the construction of a bureaucracy.²⁸ Despite portraying himself as an anti-bureaucratic businessman, Simon quickly built up the Federal Energy Office (FEO), which soon had more than one thou-

²³ Office of the White House Press Secretary: The President’s Energy Message. Fact Sheet, 4 June 1971, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, Edward David, Box 101; concerning the transformation of US energy policy in the 1970s see also Sabin 2012.

²⁴ Bruce Kehrli to H. R. Haldeman: White House Staff Man on Energy, 5 Feb. 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Staff Secretary, Box 96; Executive Order 11712: Special Committee on Energy and National Energy Office, 18 April 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, Subject Files, FG 6-23.

²⁵ Office of the White House Press Secretary: Statement by the President, 29 June 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24, 2f.

²⁶ For a detailed account see de Marchi 1981.

²⁷ Suggested Energy Statement, 10 AM, 13 Dec. 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Pres. Pers. Files, Box 89; Noel Koch: Final Draft for Nixon’s Announcement of the creation of a Federal Energy Office, 3 Dec. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, Subject Files, FG 6-26.

²⁸ Grossman 2013, 26f.

sand employees.²⁹ Lack of clarity over authorities remained a problem, even when the FEO was turned into the Federal Energy Agency in June 1974. An Energy Policy Committee had to be formed in order to coordinate the work of the relevant agencies.³⁰ The reorganization was so chaotic that parts of Love's Energy Policy Office continued to exist long after it had lost all its functions.³¹ Yet, despite these frequent changes, improvisations, and shortcomings, the institutional rearrangements formed the basis for the later institutionalization of the Department of Energy under Jimmy Carter and contributed to the formation of energy as unified field of policy. However imperfect the centralization of energy competences under one institutional roof was, it was driven by two closely interrelated goals. First, it was supposed to expand the government's authority in the realm of energy in a fast-changing international environment to secure domestic sovereignty. Secondly, the measures were to demonstrate the US government's ability to solve the mounting energy crisis to the broader public and to the governments of oil producing and consuming countries. This symbolic dimension was crucial, as the perceived capacity to change domestic policies influenced the international bargaining position and the capacity to maintain international sovereignty.

3. The Paradoxes of Energy Expertise and "Project Independence"

The most important factor that seemed to restrict the government's sovereignty and its capacity to implement energy policies, which undermined the public's trust in its political leadership, was the apparent lack of government expertise in the field of energy. Indeed, on the eve of the oil crisis, even central protagonists of US energy policy were not well informed about the energy situation. A little more than a week before the declaration of the oil embargo and production cuts in October 1973, John A. Love, still head of the Energy Policy Office, held a press conference with the director of the Atomic Energy Commission,

²⁹ Federal Energy Office: Supergrade Summary und Staffing Ceiling, Lafayette College Libraries, William Simon Papers [LCL, WSP], Series IIIA, Drawer 14, Folder 4; Fiscal Year 1974 Supplemental Budget Request for Executive Office of the President. Federal Energy Office. Salaries and Expenses, LCL, WSP, Series IIIA, Drawer 13, Folder 16; Nixon Library, WSHF, Staff Secretary, Box 99, Folder: Energy Reorganization; LCL, WSP, Series IIIA, Drawer 14, Folder 4.

³⁰ Executive Order 11790: Providing for the Administration of the Federal Energy Administration Act of 1974, 25 June 1974, Nixon Library, WHCF, Subject Files, Box 2, FG 377; Frank G. Zarb: Memo for Alexander Haig: Coordinating Energy Policy and Programs, 8 May 1974; Office of the White House Press Secretary: Establishment of a Committee on Energy, 14 June 1974, Nixon Library, WSHF, Staff Secretary, Box 98.

³¹ Robert D. Linder: Memorandum for Dave Hoopes, 23 Feb. 1974, Nixon Library, WHCF, Subject Files, FG 6-25, Box 2.

Dixy Lee Ray, and the director of the National Science Foundation, H. Guyford Stever, to present a ten billion dollar investment program in energy research. During the press conference, a journalist asked “what share, first of oil, and secondly of energy use as a whole, [came] from Middle Eastern oil.” To his surprise nobody could give an answer, and Stever admitted that they did not know.³² As science- and expert-based approaches to policy making had gained wide currency at the time, the government’s lack of knowledge in oil and energy greatly contributed to its loss of credibility and the sense of insecurity during the oil crisis. Ignorance seemed to make the government dependent on external information and, in the end, cast doubt on its ability to conduct politics in a sovereign manner.³³

At the root of insecurity during the oil crisis were the declarations by OPEC and OAPEC that destroyed well-established communicative routines, increased contingencies, and made it difficult to anticipate future actions and reactions.³⁴ Moreover, the data provided by the oil companies were regarded with growing suspicion as conspiracy theories flourished, suggesting that the multinationals orchestrated the crisis to increase prices and drive the independents out of the market.³⁵ Therefore, demands grew stronger that the United States needed an independent agency to produce policy-relevant knowledge on energy.³⁶ Simon’s Federal Energy Office was supposed to reduce insecurity with weekly *Petroleum Situation Reports*, copying the industry information system.³⁷ However, these reports had contradictory effects and contributed to the mounting sense of crisis. In December 1973, for example, Simon’s deputy, John Sawhill, appeared in front of the Senate Committee on Government Operations testifying on the expected decrease in oil supplies. When he said that he expected a shortfall of 3.27 million barrels per day in the first quarter of 1974, Democratic Senator Henry A. Jackson quoted seven different official assessments, ranging from 1.6 to 3.5 million barrels per day, asking ironically, “Do you feel now that you have any more accurate means of making these estimates than we had earlier?”³⁸

Due to the lack of state expertise, external oil and energy experts provided data and knowledge to the administration. In general, the government presented its reliance on experts as an attempt to act on the best-available evidence. With

³² Office of the White House Press Secretary: Press Conference, 11 Oct. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, Garmant, Box 83.

³³ Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981, 109.

³⁴ See Graf 2012.

³⁵ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Government Operations 1974, 113.

³⁶ National Archives, College Park, Film Archive [hereafter: Film Archive], 6694, Tape 2: Weekly News Summary of Week 3- 9 Dec. 73; Issues and Answers: An Interview with William E. Simon, ABC Network, January 6, 1974, LCL, WSP, series IIIA, Drawer 13, Folder 39.

³⁷ Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981, 125-7.

³⁸ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Government Operations 1973, 7; see also U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs 1973.

the rising importance of science and expertise in policy-making over the course of the twentieth century, the legitimacy of political power increasingly depended on its capacity to justify decisions scientifically. Yet, the scientification of politics posed problems, because expert opinions differed widely, even about the most basic issues concerning oil and energy, and the resulting conflicts called into question the legitimizing function of science for politics.³⁹ Above all, experts disagreed whether the oil crisis reflected or at least foreshadowed a real shortage of oil or whether it was just the product of artificial interventions in an otherwise functioning market by both the producing countries' and the United States' governments.⁴⁰

Accordingly, there were two basic, yet fundamentally different strategies to overcome the energy crisis: increasing domestic oil/energy production or curtailing demand. The National Petroleum Council, an advisory body to the Department of the Interior that consisted of representatives of the oil industry, opted for the first solution. In 1972, its *U.S. Energy Outlook* predicted virtually no limits to domestic energy production from various sources.⁴¹ Even though its experts acknowledged the need for energy conservation in the private sector during the oil crisis, they still argued that only increased domestic production offered a long-term solution.⁴² By contrast, the Ford Foundation's Energy Policy Project, which was led by David S. Freeman, reached the opposite conclusion. Its widely circulating report developed an "historical growth," a "technical fix," and a "zero energy growth" scenario for future energy use, arguing that the last scenario was mandatory to overcome the energy crisis.⁴³ Generally speaking, the National Petroleum Council and Energy Policy Project were symptomatic for the state of energy expertise in the United States before and during the oil crisis. On one hand, experts working in the oil industry formulated recommendations that were clearly derived from their companies' business interests. On the other hand, independent experts – often inspired by the environmentalist movement – developed radically alternative energy futures.

In this constellation, the events of 1973/74 created "urgency for data" and an incentive to augment governmental energy expertise.⁴⁴ The first product of these efforts was the *Project Independence Report*, which was derived from Nixon's pledge to make the United States energy independent by 1980. In 1974, more than four hundred people from various government agencies and

³⁹ Weingart 2005; Plowden 1987; Jasanoff 1990.

⁴⁰ Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981, 20; Vietor 1984, 7.

⁴¹ National Petroleum Council, National Petroleum Council. Committee on U.S. Energy Outlook 1972, 3f.

⁴² National Petroleum Council. Committee on Emergency Preparedness 1973a, iii, 2; National Petroleum Council. Committee on Emergency Preparedness. Coordinating Subcommittee 1973b.

⁴³ Ford Foundation. Energy Policy Project 1974, 10, 39-41.

⁴⁴ Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981, 112.

institutions contributed to the report trying to project different energy futures and evaluate political strategies.⁴⁵ Invented to reduce uncertainty and make the United States energy independent, *Project Independence* failed miserably, since the overall development of the energy sector depended heavily on the price of oil, and there was very little knowledge concerning the price elasticity of oil demand, which was consistently overestimated.⁴⁶ Moreover, almost all contemporary energy experts – including those working on Project Independence – agreed that energy independence in the sense of autarchy was as illusory as it was undesirable.⁴⁷ Yet, the sheer amount of intellectual and financial resources spent on energy prognoses to define and legitimize policies is significant in other respects. To begin with, it contributed to the emergence of “energy” as a coherent field of knowledge, political action, and debate. Moreover, the rhetoric of Project Independence emphasized a traditional notion of national sovereignty under new challenges and has been renewed by every US president since. Finally, the government undertook huge efforts to publicize its undertakings and involve the people.

Between August and October 1974, the government discussed Project Independence at ten public hearings in different parts of the country, inviting scientists, businesses, lobbyists, and non-profit associations, along with local politicians and individual citizens. Television spots demanded, “Today we need a new Project Independence: Energy Independence [...] Be there and share in America’s Future.”⁴⁸ More than a thousand individuals and organizations offered their advice, and the transcripts of their statements and the ensuing debates fill ten large volumes, totaling more than 6,700 pages.⁴⁹ The hearings were supposed to invoke the impression that the government acted responsibly with the best available evidence and, yet, everybody could contribute to the formulation of America’s energy policy and the reassertion of its independence. At least the latter is highly questionable. The last hearing took place on October 12 and, only two months later, the *Project Independence Report* was published, whose complicated analytic scheme bore little resemblance to the heterogeneous and idiosyncratic statements that were made during the hearings. Yet, the enormous effort and the participation of high government officials suggest that the administration viewed the hearings at least as an important means of political communication. In terms of government strategies, Project Independence offered a seemingly paradoxical blend of technocracy and grassroots democracy as a means to bolster the government’s legitimacy. As a result of the growing interconnection between science and politics in the twentieth

⁴⁵ Greenberger 1983, 118; Federal Energy Administration 1974b, 199.

⁴⁶ Federal Energy Administration 1974b, 23; Federal Energy Administration 1976, 14.

⁴⁷ Federal Energy Administration 1974a, 38-40.

⁴⁸ ‘Project Independence’ TV Spots 09/1974, NARA, Film Archive, ARC 88483.

⁴⁹ Federal Energy Administration 1974/75.

century, the government had to demonstrate that it based its energy policies on scientific expertise. Yet, it also followed the expectations of a media democracy and pretended that everyone could participate in the formulation of policy strategies. Both strategies had the common goal to bolster the government's domestic position in the field of energy.

4. Communicating Sovereignty: "Nixon Doesn't Practice What He Preaches" and "Simon Says..."

As sovereignty is a social concept, its acceptance depends on the way it is communicated. From April 1973 to January 1974 Nixon gave five major speeches in order to claim and demonstrate sovereignty in the field of energy. Apart from the announcement of new government measures, Nixon's energy addresses served a dual purpose. They were to induce energy conservation in order to improve the country's fuel situation, which would in turn advance its international bargaining position. Moreover, they were designed to prove to the public at home and abroad that the president was still in charge and, despite Watergate, able to tackle the mounting energy problems. In April 1973, Nixon still refused to talk of an energy "crisis," arguing that the nation was only facing "a vitally important energy challenge."⁵⁰ On November 7, 1973, however, Nixon declared in his "energy emergency address" that, because of the embargo, the challenge had turned into a "crisis."⁵¹ Only three weeks later, Nixon maintained that the embargo had intensified the expected energy shortages and produced a "major energy crisis."⁵² Finally, in his January speeches, Nixon further deemphasized the long-term domestic causes of the energy crisis while dramatizing the developments since October 1973. This rhetorical construction of a "crisis" heightened the sense of urgency and the need for political action. In general, "crisis" signifies an open situation in which a decision between two existentially different futures is pending.⁵³ Thus, it constructs a situation in which political leaders can and have to prove their authority by bringing about the good and avoiding the bad option.

When Nixon spoke about ways to overcome the energy crisis, he used notions of individual sacrifice and morality, nationalism and national sovereignty – a language that also dominated the public discourse about energy. It is com-

⁵⁰ Office of the White House Press Secretary: To the Congress of the United States, 18 April 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24.

⁵¹ Office of the White House Press Secretary: Address by the President on the Energy Emergency on Nationwide Radio and Television, 7 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 45.

⁵² Energy Speech, November 25, 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Pres Pers Files, Box 89.

⁵³ Koselleck 1982.

monly assumed that Jimmy Carter turned energy usage into a moral question with his famous “crisis of confidence” speech.⁵⁴ Yet, already Nixon had demanded that the nation develop a national conservation ethic, arguing that energy consumption was the cornerstone against which both the nation’s greatness and the individual citizen’s morality had to be measured: “As a matter of simple prudence and common sense, we must not waste our resources, however abundant they may seem. To do otherwise, in a world of finite resources, reflects adversely upon what we are as a people and a Nation.”⁵⁵ State-sponsored campaigns to encourage energy conservation further intensified the nationalization and moralization of the debate with slogans like “Don’t Be Fuelish” or “SavEnergy.” Moral language continued to influence the national energy debate, while the escalating Watergate scandal eroded the president’s credibility with the American public.⁵⁶

After the embargo was announced in October 1973, energy czar Love suggested that Nixon should address the nation in a televised speech.⁵⁷ Aware of the government’s credibility problem, the speech was held at 7:00 p.m., so that as many people as possible would hear and see Nixon in real time and not through a news summary. Moreover, a subsequent debate with Nixon’s energy advisors would demonstrate that the president consulted with competent and honorable experts.⁵⁸ Following Herbert Stein’s idea, the overall governmental effort to overcome the energy crisis was called “Project Independence.” With the bicentennial celebrations of the Declaration of Independence approaching, the name would mark the vital importance of energy supplies for the nation’s sovereignty.⁵⁹ In his speech, Nixon not only referred to the US independence of British rule, but also put energy challenges on par with the two biggest threats to US sovereignty in the twentieth century: the Second World War and the Cold War. He announced:

⁵⁴ Hakes 2008.

⁵⁵ Office of the White House Press Secretary: Statement by the President, 29 June 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24; see also in the same vein: Office of the White House Press Secretary: To the Congress of the United States, 18 April 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24.

⁵⁶ Office of the White House Press Secretary: Statement by the President, 9 Oct. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24; Citizens’ Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality 1973, 5; Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 1.

⁵⁷ Memo for Kissinger: Emergency Oil Contingency Program, 14 Oct. 1973; John A. Love: Memo for Henry A. Kissinger: Emergency Oil Contingency Action Plan, 15 Oct. 1973, Nixon Library, NSC-Inst Files, WSAG Meetings, Box H-093; John A. Love: Memo for Alexander Haig: Administration Response to the Oil Emergency, 1 Nov. 1973; John A. Love: Memo for the President: U.S. Domestic Response to Arab Oil Boycott, 27 Oct. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 35.

⁵⁸ Dave Gergen: Memo for Alexander Haig and Ronald Ziegler: Recommendation for Energy Presentation, 2 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Pres. Pers. Files, Box 102.

⁵⁹ Alexander Haig: Memo for the President: Draft Energy Speech, 6 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Pres. Pers. Files, Box 89.

[A]n endeavor that in this bicentennial era we can appropriately call 'Project Independence.' Let us set as our national goal, in the spirit of Apollo, with the determination of the Manhattan Project, that by the end of this decade we will have developed the potential to meet our own energy needs without depending on foreign energy sources.⁶⁰

In order to realize this goal, Nixon demanded voluntary energy conservation from everybody and claimed that he would set an example by lowering the thermostats in the White House.⁶¹ The moral challenge of the oil crisis was, thus, directed at the government, as much as at the citizens.

However, Nixon's speech was received differently than intended. Most of the commentators argued that voluntary measures alone would be insufficient to solve the problem. Moreover, Watergate had cast its shadow. The NBC White House correspondent claimed that the speech had been made after long debates over whether it was not too obvious of an attempt to divert attention from Watergate.⁶² In the *New York Times*, Edward Cowan even claimed that Nixon's speech had two goals: "to tackle the substance of the energy problem and to show himself to the public as a president who has not been rendered politically impotent by the Watergate controversy."⁶³ With this explication and the criticism of Nixon's "belated awakening," the *New York Times* undermined its strategy. In politics and Congress, however, Nixon's speech had produced a paradoxical situation: many politicians were willing to augment the president's authority in the energy arena, as proposed in the Emergency Energy Act, while simultaneously questioning Nixon's legitimacy in general.⁶⁴

The moral approach publicly backfired when Nixon addressed the nation again less than three weeks later in another energy speech that announced further conservation measures.⁶⁵ These new demands for energy conservation struck a strange chord with many CBS viewers after Dan Rather introduced Nixon's speech with this remark: "The president will speak about the energy crisis, after he returned from Camp David Maryland Mountain Retreat by helicopter."⁶⁶ Nixon's allegedly excessive air travel had already been subject to considerable public debate. Now, even local newspapers, such as the *Hamilton Ohio Journal News*, stoked the debate by providing information about the fuel consumption of helicopters and planes to the public: "The truth is that the president and his aides haven't been practicing the austerity they have been preach-

⁶⁰ Office of the White House Press Secretary: Address by the President on the Energy Emergency on Nationwide Radio and Television, 7 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Film Archive, VTR# 6658, Weekly News Summary, all networks, 5-11 Nov. 1973.

⁶³ Cowan 1973b; see also 'Energy Gap' 1973; 'The Thermostat, Oil and Independence' 1973.

⁶⁴ See for the complicated debates in Congress Katz 1984, 22-9.

⁶⁵ Energy Speech, November 25, 1973, Nixon Library, WHSF, Pres. Pers. Files, Box 89.

⁶⁶ Film Archive, VTR# 6675 Presidential Energy Speech, 25 Nov. 1973, 19:00, all networks.

ing. He drafted his public appeal in balmy Key Biscane, FL. [...]. His luxury jet burned 8,000 gallons of fuel to make the round trip.⁶⁷ Many citizens were furious, such as Ruth S. from Hamilton, Ohio, who cut out the article and sent it to the White House complaining that the government could not expect the people to obey rules they themselves neglected.⁶⁸ The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* also deplored Nixon's double standards and the corresponding lack of presidential leadership in a time of crisis. According to one commentator, "The nation's most critical energy gap today is in the White House."⁶⁹ Nixon's aides reacted to the public uproar with a PR coup when the president took a scheduled flight to California shortly after Christmas 1973.⁷⁰ Even though the press coverage of Nixon's flight was positive, it could not fundamentally change the public critique of the president's energy consumption habits.

Due to Nixon's involvement in Watergate and the severe doubts about his integrity, the real and discursive space for alternative political leaders grew. Bill Simon, in particular, emerged as both the crucial energy policy maker and an important reference point for the media discussion of the energy crisis. Despite the fact that Simon always presented himself as the President's most devoted follower, he was soon depicted as the upright and sincere opposite of the morally questionable Nixon. In January 1974, he even made the cover of *TIME* magazine, which celebrated his rise: "Simon in the past month has become one of the most powerful and visible figures in a Government starved for leadership."⁷¹ According to *TIME*, Simon's credibility resulted from his allegedly exceptional work ethic, which juxtaposed him with a president troubled by Watergate. The magazine described Simon as "a decisive policymaker and superbly organized administrator" who had created a "superagency" of "young, eager troubleshooters" with whom he worked ceaselessly to overcome the energy crisis.⁷² Even his private life seemed to be impeccable when stories depicted Simon, his wife, and his seven children as the ideal energy-conserving family.⁷³ In the winter of 1973 and 1974 Simon was almost omnipresent in the

⁶⁷ Anderson 1973. See also the debate of Nixon's energy use in: Office of the White House Press Secretary: Press Conference of John A. Love and Charles DiBona, June 29, 1973, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 24.

⁶⁸ Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Box 7, Folder, 1-43. The extensive public opinion mail is collected in Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Boxes 6-17.

⁶⁹ 'Energy Gap...' 1973; see also Baker 1973; Cowan 1973a; Kraft 1973; Smith 1973.

⁷⁰ Cannon 1973b; Herbers 1973; 'Nixon Feels Flight to Coast on Commercial Plane 'Scored Points' 1973.

⁷¹ 'The Whirlwind' 1974, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷³ 'A Fitzgerald Hero' 1974.

media, and the children's game "Simon says..." acquired a new meaning when the band The Energizers sang, "(Save Our Energy) That's What Simon Says."⁷⁴

Whereas the oil crisis put into question the government's sovereignty, the Nixon administration simultaneously tried to use the crisis as an opportunity to reaffirm its authority and demonstrate its capacity to lead. Yet its efforts to moralize and nationalize the energy crisis were not very successful. Nixon's approval rating dropped from sixty-eight percent in January 1973 to twenty-seven percent in October and did not change significantly for the rest of his presidency.⁷⁵ Watergate had demolished his credibility so thoroughly that he could not even invoke the impression that he lived up to his own standards anymore. This predicament enabled the rise of Bill Simon as a Nixon-devoted anti-Nixon. Simon and other experts created a double bind for Nixon. On one hand, Nixon needed seemingly trustworthy and competent advisers to support his authority. On the other hand, they made him look bad in comparison. However, apparently even someone as media savvy as Simon could not reestablish the people's trust in their government.⁷⁶ According to a Gallup poll in December 1973, only six percent of the Americans believed that the Arab nations were responsible for the oil crisis, twenty-five percent blamed the oil companies, twenty-three percent the federal government, nineteen percent the Nixon administration, and sixteen percent the American consumers.⁷⁷

5. Strength and Cooperation: Maintaining International Sovereignty

In the acute oil crisis of 1973/74, the most concrete attack to US sovereignty was the Arab oil embargo and production cuts, which were supposed to force the government to change its policy vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. The embargo challenged US international sovereignty to a much greater extent than the economically more important price hikes. Since America's European allies were affected by the production cuts, the oil crisis also tested the stability of the Atlantic alliance and US hegemony in the West. As giving in to economic pressure would have resulted in a considerable loss of sovereignty and the military option was excluded, there remained three different strategies: first, bilateral negotiations with the producing countries; second, the formation of a

⁷⁴ LCL, WSP, Series IX, Drawer 50, Folder 3; LCL, WSP, Series VIII, Drawer 48, Shelf III, Volume II Jan-March. 'Simon says' also occurred frequently in cartoons, as for example in *The New Yorker* on 11 Feb. 1974.

⁷⁵ Gallup 1978, 95, 206.

⁷⁶ Federal Energy Office: Press Conference, William E. Simon and John C. Sawhill, 3 Jan. 1974, LCL, WSP, Series III A, Drawer 13, Folder 39.

⁷⁷ Gallup 1978, 226.

consumer block against the producers; and, third, a multilateral approach involving both producing and consuming countries. Bilateral and multilateral strategies had different implications for the assertion of sovereignty, which the contemporaries discussed intensively. Like most other consuming countries, the US government pursued a mixture of all three strategies. However, it put a surprisingly strong emphasis on consumer cooperation, even though this implied the sacrifice of some sovereign rights.

By the time of the declaration of the embargo, Henry A. Kissinger was primarily responsible for the conduct of US foreign policy.⁷⁸ While he was admittedly not versed in oil and energy matters, Kissinger had a very clear conception of the consequences of the oil crisis for sovereignty and power politics. When his advisers explained that the United States was far less dependent on Middle Eastern oil than its European allies, Kissinger concluded that “we might even turn this crisis into a certain kind of an asset, if we could take a leadership position.”⁷⁹ After the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, Kissinger mainly tried to establish a peace settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors, because he thought that a solution of the oil crisis would automatically follow suit. With respect to oil, American diplomacy pursued a twofold goal. First, the embargo should end as soon as possible, and the future increase in Middle Eastern production in accordance with American needs had to be secured. Secondly, a rift between the United States and its more energy dependent European and Asian allies had to be avoided and US hegemony maintained. The latter was particularly important to Kissinger who, above all, wanted to prevent an expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East.⁸⁰

While the administration tried to expand its authority over energy matters domestically, Kissinger also eliminated voices that might have interfered with his sovereign conduct of foreign policy. This concerned, for example, big oil companies, such as Mobil, Socal or Texaco, which, at King Faisal’s suggestion, had warned the American public and politicians that US oil supplies might be threatened if the government did not alter its policies towards the Near East.⁸¹ In Kissinger’s view, it was outrageous that “political idiots” like the oil companies might compromise his diplomatic efforts.⁸² Therefore, he told their chairmen that they should leave the conduct of US foreign policy to him and just tell their “Arab friends” that he was putting all his efforts towards achieving peace

⁷⁸ Dallek 2007, 533–66; Siniver 2008.

⁷⁹ Secretary’s Staff Meeting, Friday, 26 Oct. 1973, DNSA, KT00871, 29, 32.

⁸⁰ See Graf 2010a.

⁸¹ ‘Mobil Oil’ 1973, 30; see concerning Faisal’s role Koven and Ottaway 1973, 15; MEES XVI/42, August 10, 1973; MEES XVI/48, 21 Sept. 1973.

⁸² Secretary’s Staff Meeting, Minutes, 18 Oct. 1973, DNSA, KT00856; see also Washington Special Actions Group Meeting: Middle East, Minutes, 17 Oct. 1973, DNSA, KT00854.

in the region, but would not give in to pressure.⁸³ This was, indeed, Kissinger's position in the negotiations with the Arab oil-producing countries – most importantly with Saudi Arabia, which, due to its vast reserves, was essential for the future US and world oil supply and any meaningful oil embargo.⁸⁴ Talking with King Faisal, Kissinger repeatedly emphasized that the United States could easily withstand the embargo, and, even if it were hit, as a matter of principle and national sovereignty it would not change its policies.⁸⁵ When sovereignty was under attack, Kissinger clearly realized, making a self-assured claim was the first step to securing it. However, in the delicate communicative situation of the embargo, assuming a position of strength could be counterproductive if it encouraged the Arab countries to implement harsher measures.⁸⁶ Therefore, with some notable exceptions, Kissinger avoided public allusions to retaliatory measures.⁸⁷

Over the course of the embargo, Kissinger sometimes saw his strategy of strength undermined by Nixon's wish to end the embargo as soon as possible, in order to prove his capacity to act and boost his popularity. In November, Kissinger advised not to invite King Faisal to Washington because it “would be interpreted throughout Arab world as collapse,” and “magnify, not reduce, Arab incentives to keep pressure on US via oil weapon.”⁸⁸ In mid-January, he became increasingly annoyed by the President's desire for what he saw as “tawdry PR gains” and wrote angrily to Brent Scowcroft that

we have gotten where we have in this exercise by dealing from (or appearing to deal from) a position of strength. Should the president now indicate to the Arabs the vital importance to the [United States] and to him of ending the oil

⁸³ Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with Oil Company Executives, 26 Oct. 1973, DNSA, KT00872.

⁸⁴ See for example Memo: Oil Supply Arrangements: Alternative Approaches to the Major Producer and Consumer States, 2 Oct. 1973, Nixon Library, NSC, Inst. Files, SRG Meetings, Box H-069.

⁸⁵ Charles A. Cooper: Memo for Secretary Kissinger: Arab Oil Embargo and Production Cutbacks, 3 Nov. 1973, Nixon, NSC, Subject Files, Box 321; Memorandum of Conversation between King Faysal and Kissinger, 8 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, Mandatory Review 07, Box 34; Kissinger to General Scowcroft for the President, 16 Nov. 1973 [090850Z NOV 73], Nixon Library, NSC, HAK Office Files – Trips, Box 41; Memorandum of Conversation with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, 14 Dec. 1973, DNSA, KT00951.

⁸⁶ For an extension of the argument concerning the communicative logic of embargoes, see Graf 2012.

⁸⁷ Responses to the Arab Oil Embargo, 28 Nov. 1973, Nixon Library, NSC-Institutional Files, WSAG Meetings, Box H-095; Memorandum of Conversation: Bipartisan Leadership Meeting, 27 Nov. 1973, DNSA, KT00926, 4; as an example of such an escalation see: MEES XVII/5, 23 Nov. 1973, 8f.; MEES XVII/6, 30 Nov. 1973, 13; concerning the exceptions with a different assessment see David Painter's contribution in this HSR Special Issue.

⁸⁸ Kissinger to General Scowcroft for General Haig, 16 Nov. 1973 [080745Z NOV 73], NARA Nixon, NSC, HAK Office Files, Trips, Box 41; Telcon with Alexander Haig, 17 Nov. 1973, 0850 Local Time, DNSA, KA11608; see also, Nixon and Kissinger, 537.

embargo – and ending it with an announcement from Washington – we will give strength to the Arabs in their determination to deal with us harshly.⁸⁹

However, after the Arab leaders had indicated to him that they were willing to lift the embargo soon, Kissinger worked with Nixon on the most effective way to frame this news in the President's State of the Union address.⁹⁰

As these episodes show, Kissinger realized that, in international politics, appearing to be sovereign and being sovereign are closely related, if not essentially the same. However, US sovereignty had to be maintained in negotiations not only with both oil-producing and oil-consuming countries. Since the European allies and Japan were far more dependent on oil from the Middle East and North Africa, they were less inclined than Kissinger to assume a position of strength against the producing countries. Moreover, the different classification of the European countries with respect to the production cuts made it difficult to find a common position within the European Communities (EC). Governments of "friendly" and "neutral" countries, such as France or Great Britain, feared losing their privileged positions when expressing solidarity with the "hostile" Netherlands. All countries pursued bilateral negotiations with the producing countries and could only agree upon a common declaration that supported a peace settlement on the basis of UN-resolution 242. This was widely considered a pro-Arab move and criticized as a submission to blackmail, leading to a loss of international sovereignty.⁹¹ Kissinger was furious about the European initiative for two reasons. On one hand, it undermined his peace efforts, showing that the embargo actually had an effect. Angrily, he tried to convince his European colleagues that a peace settlement would soon end the embargo, provided that the West showed no weakness and ended the "blatant show of disunity."⁹² On the other hand, the declaration was the first assumption of a common European (EC) foreign policy stance, an effect of the only recently intensified European Political Cooperation.⁹³ While Kissinger had named 1973 the "Year of Europe," in which transatlantic cooperation was to be strengthened, the Europeans intensified their collaboration independently of the United States. In a time of *détente*, the European allies were, apparently, more worried about their oil supplies than about the expansion of Soviet influence.

⁸⁹ Kissinger to General Scowcroft, [200755Z JAN 74], 22 Jan. 1974, NARA Nixon, HAK Office Files, Box 43.

⁹⁰ Kissinger, Telcon with Nixon, 28 Jan. 1974, 1123 Local Time, DNSA; KA11913; Kissinger Telcon with Nixon, 28 Jan. 1974, 1910 Local Time, DNSA, KA11919; Kissinger Telcon with Nixon, 29 Jan. 1974, 1325 Local Time, DNSA, KA11921.

⁹¹ For an account of the negotiations on European Political Cooperation, see Möckli 2009, 184-247.

⁹² 'Botschafter von Staden, Washington, an das Auswärtige Amt'. In: Schwartz 2004, 1736-42; Ministerialdirektor van Well, z.Z. Brüssel (NATO) and Staatssekretär Frank. In: Schwartz 2004, 409-11.

⁹³ Möckli 2010.

Even the West German government risked conflict with the US over the shipment of weapons from American military bases in Germany to Israel, because it was afraid of a termination of Libyan oil deliveries.⁹⁴

In this delicate constellation, Kissinger and Nixon invited the major oil producing countries to an energy conference. In an internal meeting, Kissinger explained his goals: to form a consumer organization in order to bargain with the producers more effectively, to undermine European cooperation that excluded the United States, and to destroy the “sense of panicky impotence” that the Europeans conveyed.⁹⁵ At the Washington Energy Conference in mid-February 1974, unilateral and multilateral visions of how to secure sovereignty in an increasingly globalized – in contemporary words “interdependent” – world clashed. Kissinger purported that he did not “dispute the right of sovereign nations to make individual arrangements” with the producing countries but, due to increasing economic interdependence, unrestricted uni- or bilateralism would be detrimental to everybody. The central question was thus, “Will we consume ourselves in nationalistic rivalry which the realities of interdependence make suicidal? Or will we acknowledge our interdependence and shape cooperative solutions?”⁹⁶ Thus, he called for an institutionalized coordination of the energy policies of North America, Western Europe, and Japan. While most countries acknowledged the need to cooperate, the French government remained obstinate, describing Kissinger’s suggestion as a means to secure American hegemony.⁹⁷ According to the French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert, the name “Project Independence” betrayed the real intentions of the US government. He was enraged by what he perceived as the failure of his European colleagues to maintain a common front and suggested continuing with bilateral negotiations until a conference of both consuming and producing countries would find a cooperative solution.

In general, there is much to the French suspicion that the US policy was not driven by the desire for cooperation, but rather by its national interest. This is particularly obvious as all attempts to develop larger cooperative schemes including the producing countries – be it within the United Nations in the General Assembly’s Sixth Special Session in April/May 1974 or the Conference on International Economic Cooperation, which was sponsored by the French government – failed, not the least because of the United States’ and other industrialized countries’ reluctance to give up economic privileges. Yet, despite the

⁹⁴ Graf 2010b; concerning East-West energy relations see the contributions by Frank Bösch, and Jeronim Perović and Dunja Krempin.

⁹⁵ ‘Document 305. Memorandum of Conversation, Energy Conference, Washington, February 6, 1974’, in: U.S. Department of State 2012.

⁹⁶ Opening Remarks of the Honorable Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, 11 February 1974, Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt), Berlin, B 71 (Referat 405), 113894.

⁹⁷ On the negotiations, see Möckli 2009, 253-300.

limits of the American willingness to cooperate and the instrumentalization of the Washington Conference to re-affirm its hegemony, the results of the conference and its follow-up process are significant for a history of sovereignty. With the foundation of the International Energy Agency, the US government agreed to participate in an oil-sharing mechanism that was automatically implemented if one country's supplies fell below a certain threshold and could only be suspended by a qualified majority of all countries.⁹⁸ Thus, the United States voluntarily sacrificed certain sovereign rights in the energy field in order to maintain energy security and stabilize the transatlantic alliance – that is, to maintain sovereignty in more meaningful ways. Even for the United States, maintaining energy security and, thus, economic and political sovereignty implied international cooperation – a fact that was only partly obscured by the nationalistic rhetoric of Project Independence and its claim the country would become energy independent by 1980.

Many contemporary political scientists have argued that increasing economic interdependence necessitated closer cooperation in international organizations and rendered the pursuit of unilateral, sovereign, hegemonic power politics obsolete.⁹⁹ Under the impression of the oil crisis, even hardcore realists, such as Herman Kahn or Hans J. Morgenthau, reconsidered their assumptions about world politics and diagnosed the rise of a multi-polar world in which the United States' capacity to conduct foreign policy would be more narrowly circumscribed by other powers.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the hegemonic view that increasing interdependence would impede sovereign power politics was by no means consensual. For Robert Tucker, not more interdependence but more independence offered the solution to the energy crisis. In the conservative magazine *Commentary*, he advocated for an American intervention in the Gulf region and attributed the government's cooperative strategy to "political incompetence and the failure of will."¹⁰¹ This view of a world in which the great powers unilaterally determine their fate, even with military means, resonated later with the so-called new sovereigntists in the 1990s, who claimed that the United States should not be bound by international norms and treaties.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Scott 1994; 'Gesetz zu dem Übereinkommen vom 18. November 1974' 1975; see also Henning Türk's contribution to this HSR Special Issue.

⁹⁹ Most explicitly, see Keohane and Nye 1977; Keohane 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Morgenthau 1974; Bruce-Briggs and Kahn 1972.

¹⁰¹ Tucker 1975, 30; see also Tucker 1981.

¹⁰² Spiro 2000; as an example see Rabkin 1998 or Rabkin 2004.

6. Conclusion

The Arab oil embargo and production cuts in October 1973 challenged the international sovereignty of the United States and other industrialized countries. While it had to be countered in the international arena, the challenge could not be met by diplomatic means alone. Connecting international and domestic politics, the concept of sovereignty allows us to scrutinize the close interaction between two realms that are often treated separately. Already the energy supply problems that had emerged before the oil crisis produced the widespread conviction that, despite numerous interventions into the energy sector, the US government was ill-equipped to conduct sovereign energy policy, as it lacked competence, centralized institutions, and expertise. Under the external pressure of the oil embargo the quest for a transformation of US energy policy accelerated and was couched in a language of “independence” and “sovereignty.” While focused on domestic changes, Project Independence was also designed to improve the country’s international sovereignty and avoid future embargoes. American diplomats referred to it in their negotiations with producing countries, maintaining that the United States would soon need no foreign oil anymore. Conversely, the threat to US international sovereignty was used domestically in order to legitimize political changes. That interdependence sovereignty was limited, in the sense that the government could not guarantee the sufficient influx of oil, was an argument to both encourage conservation and increase domestic production.

Understanding sovereignty not as a property that states can have or not have, but as a claim they make and try to vindicate against other powers highlights these connections and emphasizes the symbolic dimension of the material conflict over energy resources. After decades in which rising affluence had helped to legitimize Western democracies in the global conflict of the Cold War and higher living standards had been equated with higher energy and, above all, oil consumption, the prospect of scarcer oil resources or their control by rulers in remote countries who could not easily be influenced was highly worrisome and affected the core of the state. For how long would the government be recognized as internationally and domestically sovereign if it could not cope with the energy challenge? A flood of letters to the Energy Policy Office and the White House documents the disruptive potential of the energy crisis for a highly mobile society.¹⁰³ Because of the social and communicative dimension of the concept, government measures were not only designed to maintain sov-

¹⁰³ Golubin Memo to Simon: Administrator’s Correspondence, 29 Jan. 1974, in: LCL, WSP, Series III A, Drawer 14, Folder 4; Flow Chart for Mail Processing, LCL, WSP, Series III A, Drawer 14, Folder 4; NARA, Nixon Library, WHCF, SMOF, EPO, Boxes 6-17: John A. Love Public Opinion Mail 1973.

ereignty but also to demonstrate that the government maintained its sovereignty. The centralization of competences, the development of state expertise, Project Independence, and the foundation of the International Energy Agency were designed to prove that the government was independent and in charge.

Not the least due to their largely symbolic function, the success of the Nixon administration's sovereignty strategies is difficult to ascertain. The institutional reorganization and centralization of the widely dispersed energy competences turned out to be tedious and incomplete, producing power conflicts and not eliminating the public suspicion that political mismanagement was responsible for the energy crisis. Satisfying demands for government expertise proved to be equally difficult, as experts generally contradicted each other, but were united on one point: energy independence was no viable solution in an increasingly globalized economy. Even diplomatic attempts to establish the autonomy of US foreign policy and its hegemony in the West were more difficult than expected, as OPEC countries turned out to be resilient and the allies difficult to bring in line. In the end, energy security and, thus, national sovereignty could only be achieved by cooperating closely with other consuming and at least some producing countries. Despite the sacrifice of certain sovereign rights, however, the international cooperation that led to the creation of the International Energy Agency increased, not decreased, national sovereignty.¹⁰⁴

If we treat sovereignty as a claim and not property, the first oil crisis does not easily fit into the grand narratives of sovereignty's rise and demise. It supports neither claims that it marked the early end of the "American Century" nor the beginning of America's decline.¹⁰⁵ Rather, the oil crisis appears as a complex set of events in which many important conflicts of the time crossed and which, therefore, could be used in order to support various claims about sovereignty. Economists and representatives of the oil industry saw it as evidence that the states should withdraw from the economy; environmentalists conceived it as foreshadowing a time in which scarce resources would limit state sovereignty; for some political scientists, it was the end of hegemony and the breakthrough of international cooperation, while others saw it as an incentive to claim sovereignty more forcefully. This discursive polyvalence ensured the oil crisis' lasting significance and simultaneously proved that the notion of sovereignty had, contrary to the prognoses of many contemporaries, not become obsolete as a claim governments make and try to defend against all challenges.

¹⁰⁴ In general, see Rudolph 2005 and Litfin 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Ferguson 2010; Bacevich 2008.

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