

## A New Foreign Policy Agenda

Environmental Politics is Resource Politics is Peace Politics



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Wolfgang Sachs and Hermann E. Ott | **National welfare is no longer an effective frame of reference for enlightened foreign policy. Policy consideration must encompass the common welfare of a world society. Environmental and resource crises are inextricably tied to security and justice. Sixty years after the founding of the United Nations there should be a new effort to establish a genuinely sustainable global order—a “San Francisco 2.0.”**

Since the emergence of the nation state the fundamental task of national foreign policy has been to assert the interests of one’s own state over and against those of other states. On the one hand, preventive measures were taken to thwart external dangers to the state, its territory, and its population. On the other hand, internally, domestic demands for prestige and power were satisfied in the realm of foreign affairs. This order, known as the “Westphalian System,” was created in the wake of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which established the principle of territorially based sovereignty. In this context, the European nation state became the dominant state form that, like a container, held society together, enclosing it within a defined territory.<sup>1</sup> In the last decades of the twentieth century this system broke down as the old division between “internal” and “external” disappeared. In today’s transnational and globalized world, economy, culture, and mobility are now borderless.

A quarter of a century ago, before the term “globalization” became popular, German Chancellor Willy Brandt identified the political consequences of an increasingly interdependent world. According to Brandt, taking up a term coined by the German philosopher and physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, foreign policy in the post-national age had become “world domestic politics” (*Weltinnenpolitik*). When the planet is understood as a

1) Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?* (Frankfurt a. M. 1997).

worldwide society characterized by crossborder networks, as opposed to a collection of nation states colliding with one another like billiard balls, then the distinction between internal and external affairs becomes obsolete. Domestic affairs are now influenced by the external world and the external world is influenced by domestic affairs.

With increasing interdependence comes increasing vulnerability. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the internal affairs of a country are influenced by a vast array of transnational forces. So it was that the United States was unable to defend itself against the 9/11 terrorists, “because interdependence permits the weak to use the forces of the strong jujitsu style to overcome them.”<sup>2</sup> No ocean is wide enough, no wall is high enough to shield even the most powerful countries from economic crises, epidemics, ecological dangers, and stateless violence. In our transnational age, the degree of global integration at an international level is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the biosphere. Environmental and resource crises generate transnational threats that are in turn fuelled by other transnational factors. What challenges arise for world domestic politics as a consequence of the global environmental and resource crises?

#### Environmental and Resource Conflicts Drive Global Strife

Since time immemorial resource conflicts have been fuelled by desire, scarcity, and rivalry. This is true of disputes between parties bordering a river in the Middle Ages and the skirmishes between European nations over natural resources in Africa at the time of Bismarck. However, since the finite nature of the biosphere has become apparent, global social equilibrium can no longer be secured by means of yet further economic growth. In a limited environmental space, conventional growth is unable to guarantee greater equity among nations. Thus resource conflicts now point to a fundamental contradiction: between economic expansion and environmental limits.

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This contradiction expresses itself in social as well as natural crises. Twenty-five percent of the world’s population consumes 75 percent of the world’s resources. The greater the scarcity of important natural resources, the more urgent becomes the question of their allocation. Who owns the oil reserves, the rivers, the forests, the atmosphere? Who has what rights to the life-supporting processes of the biosphere? How much may each actor take without impinging on the rights of others? These are just some of the questions behind many of today’s looming resource and environmental conflicts. This article examines four of these conflicts.

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<sup>2</sup>) Benjamin Barber, *Imperium der Angst: Die USA und die Neuordnung der Welt* (Munich, 2003), p. 21.

### Survival Conflicts

Since early modern times the Earth has been combed for valuable raw materials. However, in the present day the search for and exploitation of raw material sources has shifted to the remotest zones. Oil is now extracted from the heart of the rainforests or deep under sea; timber is logged in distant Patagonia or Siberia; floating fish factories plough the seas from the Arctic Circle to the Antarctic. Energy sources such as oil and gas are especially coveted, followed by metals like gold, tin, silver, cobalt, and biotic raw materials like wood and fish. It is in these places, where the exploitation of raw materials advances into previously undeveloped areas, that the territories of indigenous societies have become integrated into the worldwide network of resource flows.

This is the case in the Amazon region of Ecuador. Since 1964 when the consortium Texaco-Gulf opened the first drilling stations, the oil age has come to the region known as “Oriente.” Water pollution resulting from oil exploitation is especially dramatic. Poisonous waste and effluent have polluted streams

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and rivers that serve the inhabitants as sources of water for cooking, drinking, and washing. Oil has seeped into the soil and water through leaks in the pipelines. It is estimated that over the last 20 years more than half a million barrels of oil have leaked into Ecuador’s waterways. Yet the indig-

enous groups living in Oriente—the Quichua, Huaorani, and Shuar—are still dependent on the natural environment of forests, flooded regions, and riverbanks. Plants, fish, and wild animals have also disappeared as a result of deforestation and pollution, eroding the means of existence of the indigenous groups. Malnutrition, social decline, and displacement are the consequences.

Ecuador is not an exception. On the one hand, worldwide demand for natural resources of all kinds is increasing; on the other hand, these resources are not simply waiting to be harvested in some no man’s land. To the contrary, they are frequently found in the environs of local inhabitants and constitute the very basis of their existence. The use of ecosystems as “commons” comes into conflict with their use as “assets” for generating profit. The need for firewood, honey, or meat stands directly opposed to the need for pulp magazines, paper napkins, and high-grade furniture; subsistence needs compete with luxury needs. Thus, the overconsumption of the global consumer class has become a matter of life and death for many people in the southern hemisphere. (Western) politics committed to human rights is unable to ignore this. In particular the industrial countries must pursue policies that protect the right of the most disadvantaged to existence. Domestically, this implies a reduction in dependence on resources. Externally, this means securing the means of existence of indigenous peoples and other subsistence communities by means of bi- and multilateral treaties. “Human security” comes before the security of national resources. A world committed to human rights is unable to ignore this.

### Regime Conflicts

Until recently, the discovery of mineral deposits was reason for a state to celebrate. Empirical findings, however, have corrected this assumption. Comparative studies have shown that countries rich in resources actually demonstrate slower growth rates compared to other countries, including those with a lower per-capita income. The more a country is dependent on the export of natural resources, the lower its ranking in the Human Development Index, a worldwide comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living. The figures for child mortality rates, life expectancy, and child education lag considerably behind the average for less resource-rich countries. Against the background of these experiences, the resource blessing thesis has now been replaced by that of the “resource curse.”<sup>3</sup>

In countries such as Iran and Russia, in the Arab world, and in parts of Africa, the “oil curse” has far-reaching consequences. Nigeria is a exemplary case of a country fallen victim to oil. Other oil rich countries such as Angola, Cameroon, or Sudan are similarly opaque and repressive. This also applies to established oil states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq,

Brunei, and Russia—hardly shining examples of democracy. States whose incomes rely predominately on the sale of resources and not on the taxation of citizens tend toward cultures of corruption. The ruling elite no longer feels a responsibility to its people since its income is already secure.

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The demos is held hostage by a power clique and a spiral of violence and counterviolence sets the agenda. When the population is disenfranchised or when the state loses control, poverty intensifies, and whole regions can be sucked into the maelstrom of lawlessness.

Such conflicts appear far removed from the petrol pumps, heating tanks, and air conditioning systems in the richer parts of the world. Nevertheless, the oil—along with diamonds, coltan, and hardwoods—ends up in the hands of affluent consumers in the countries of the southern as well as the northern hemisphere. At the end of the day it is the strong demand of affluent states that makes the exploitation of resources so lucrative, enabling kleptocratic regimes to thrive. Furthermore, it is the vested interest in establishing reliable supply lines that can lead governments and companies—even those of democratic countries—to enter into complicity with authoritarian regimes. Saudi Arabia and, increasingly, Russia are such regimes.

In this case too, both internal and external demands are placed on foreign policy. A reduction in dependency on resources, traditionally the subject of domestic politics, will now fall under the aegis of foreign policy. The vigorous persecution of crimes involving bribery also falls into this category. Dealing with dictatorial regimes, the transparency of monetary transactions, the conduct of transnational companies, as well as the financial guarantees provided for projects in such states, will all be issues of the new foreign policy.

3) Phillipe Le Billon (ed.), *The Geopolitical Economy of “Resource Wars”* (Wilton Park, 2005).

### Distribution Conflicts

Secure access to oil has long been a central factor in geopolitical strategy. Oil is the life-blood of industrial civilization. However, of late, upon recognition that oil resources are finite, the geopolitical importance of oil is even greater. Annual rates of extraction are now significantly larger than the volume of new discoveries. For every newly-discovered barrel of crude oil approximately four barrels are extracted. Applied to all oil fields worldwide, a maximum stage of extraction will be reached soon, the so-called “depletion mid-point,” after which the rate of production will inevitably fall. Indicators suggest that the maximum level of oil extraction will be reached sometime between 2008 and 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Development based on oil, gas, or coal can spur geopolitical conflict.

This crisis has become apparent at a time when thirst for oil is increasing. Worldwide demand is growing, particularly in the new consumer countries, above all China, India, and Brazil. China is already ranked the second largest importer of oil worldwide. Even countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, which are exporters today, will be net importers within a decade.

As the cake is getting smaller, the hunger is growing—and the number of guests is increasing. This is causing a permanent field of conflict to emerge. And it is the poor countries that will pay the highest price. Analyses of the International Energy Agency show that the primary effects of an oil price rise of between 15 and 25 dollars per barrel would lead to a reduction in economic growth in the industrial countries of around 0.4 percent. In the Asian developing countries, the reduction would be about 0.8 percent, and in the countries sub-Saharan Africa as much as 3 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the social limits of fossil fuel use are discernible far in advance of its ecological limits. Finite reserves of oil are becoming a destabilizing factor, long before the last barrel has been pumped out of the earth. The “limits to growth” thesis is returning in the shape of geopolitical conflicts. A long cherished axiom is now reversed: development no longer promotes peace, instead it leads—as long as it is based on oil, gas, or coal—to the absence of peace.

It is in this area that the mutual dependence of domestic and foreign policy becomes most apparent. Without a reduction in their dependence on oil the industrial countries—and soon the newly-industrialized as well—will continue to hang on the needle like junkies. A reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels, alongside the necessary diversification and the classical securing of resources through contracts, must become a central demand of security policy. National and European efforts to move away from oil would be considerably simplified and accelerated by a cooperative international regime. Economic cooperation also comes into play. The more successful the highly industrialized states are in supporting the process of “leap-frogging” in the Southern Hemisphere, the longer the oil will “last.” Foreign, environmental, and development politics must work hand in hand—that is, pursue world domestic politics in Brandt’s sense of the term.

4) Peter Hennicke and Michael Müller, *Weltmacht Energie* (Stuttgart, 2005).

5) International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2004* (Paris, 2004).

### Transferred Conflicts

In all likelihood, the harsh effects of climate change will primarily affect those countries and people who have least contributed to it. Relevant studies are unanimous in their prognosis that the countries in the Southern Hemisphere and their rural populations—those directly dependent on nature—are likely to suffer the brunt of the destabilizing effects of global warming. The industrial countries and their urban populations will be less severely affected. The economic basis of countless villages and cities will be hit by the changes in agricultural production and productivity.

The environment is likely to become increasingly unhealthy; harvests will increasingly fall victim to pests and weeds, while populations will increasingly suffer from malaria, dengue fever, and other infectious diseases. A rise in sea levels will render sections of the most densely populated countries, like Bangladesh, uninhabitable. According to prognoses, a global rise in temperature of 2 degrees centigrade by 2050 will threaten 25 million people with coastal flooding. Between 180 and 250 million will be threatened with malaria and between 200 and 300 million will face water shortages. Far from being a “soft” issue of environmental protection, climate change will become the invisible hand behind economic decline, social erosion, and displacement.

There are not many policy fields in which poorer states have a greater possibility of applying pressure than in the field of climate politics. This is because climate change will also wreak havoc in the metropolitan areas of the Northern Hemisphere. Hurricane Katrina was a powerful demonstration of the damage that a rise in sea levels would inflict on large cities such as Hamburg, London, New York, Rio de Janeiro, or Cape Town. The states of the Southern Hemisphere do not even have to take any action for this to occur, they simply need to continue on the “business as usual” path of economic growth. That is why industrial countries have a vested interest in seeing the emerging nations participate in climate protection measures. Here, foreign policy is both classical “danger prevention” and—mediated through the physical effects and the necessity of an economic change of course—domestic politics.

### Foreign Policy as Biosphere Politics

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, 30 years after Dennis and Donella Meadows’s *The Limits to Growth* report to the Club of Rome first raised the issue, the physical limits of our planet have once again become a theme. This recognition, together with economic and technological globalization and inevitable environmental and resource conflicts, must lead to a change in the working basis of foreign policy. It is no longer possible to think in terms of national “containers” or in ministerial areas of competence. Internal and external factors belong together—foreign climate policy is senseless without national cli-



mate protection measures. An effective foreign policy can no longer be satisfied with the defense of narrow “national interests.” In essence, the national interest now encompasses the well-being of all people on this planet.

This means that national welfare is no longer an effective frame of reference for enlightened foreign policy; it must be extended to encompass the common welfare of a world society. With his formulation “world domestic politics,”

Without an environmental organization with legal powers there will never be peace.

Willy Brandt aligned himself with that project first envisioned by Immanuel Kant in his 1795 essay “Perpetual Peace,” namely the establishment of a world civil society. For Kant, a sustainable world order would mean that states would refrain from acting like competing individuals pursuing their own power interests. He envisioned a transformation of relations of power into relations of cooperation, placing the rights of the citizen above the interests of their states.

Perhaps what is required, 60 years after the founding of the United Nations, is a new attempt to establish of a genuinely sustainable global order—a “San Francisco 2.0,” so to speak. The UN Charter, the Human Rights Charter, and the Human Rights Covenants—these were initial measures, not so bad but incomplete. Without an environmental organization with legal powers to combat global ecological crises and without an international social politics concerned with justice, there will never be peace, for rich and poor alike.

Without a respectful approach to the consumption of natural resources it will not be possible to establish a secure global order. Strategies for increasing the productivity of resources are also “peace policies.” But it would be misplaced to think of resource conflicts simply as security issues. At the end of the day the values at stake are those of justice and injustice, power and powerlessness. Those who talk just about security are generally only thinking about their own security and not that of others. That is why it is important to understand the conflicts around the globe as the consequence of injustice, not simply as security problems. It is not without reason that the phrase “peace is the work of justice” has long been a tenet of political wisdom.