The End of the Energy Security Paradigm under Obama - Trump and Energy Security: Revival of an Old Concept?

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Ever since the 1970s oil prize crises, oil has taken on a strategic importance for the United States that has led energy scholars such as Daniel Yergin to talk about the "energy security paradigm." The U.S. response to the combined raising of posted prizes for crude oil by OPEC and the oil embargo by its Arab members in October 1973 was to incorporate energy security into its foreign policy agenda making it an integral part of its national security narrative. The 1980 Carter Doctrine turned this link between national security and access to petroleum into an explicit foreign policy objective, when the President warned that:

[A]n attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of

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¹ Daniel Yergin, "Ensuring Energy Security," Foreign Affairs 85, 2 (2006): pp. 69-82.

² Jerry Taylor and Peter van Doren, "The Energy Security Obsession," *The Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy* 6, 2 (2008): pp. 475-86; Roger Stern, "Oil Market Power and United States National Security," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 103, 5 (2006): pp. 1650-55.

America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.³

The durability of this energy security paradigm could be witnessed in 2014, when, despite the increasing domestic production in the US due to the so-called shale revolution, American policy-makers and the general public were still hesitant to lift the federal export ban on U.S. crude oil, that dated back to the 1970s. According to an October 2014 Reuters-IPSOS poll, the population was still divided over this question. As Jason Bordoff, former Obama administration advisor and director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University explained at the time,

[t]hese latest polling results are a reminder of the significant hurdle that opponents of the oil export restriction still face in persuading the American people that free trade in oil will not lead to higher gasoline prices.⁴

The experience of the 1970s, which included Americans waiting in long queues at gas stations, had created powerful images of US dependence on foreign oil and had driven US energy diplomacy ever since. Because such national narratives are not easily replaced, it took a while before the impact of the shale revolution, which led to US crude oil production surpassing crude oil net imports since October 2013,⁵ would also cause the end of the oil export ban in December 2015.⁶ Dramatic increases in U.S. drilling, which made the US one of the world's leading oil and gas producers again, had reversed the four decades old policy.

Thus, under the Obama administration the energy security paradigm seemed to become obsolete. Foreign policy agendas, that were partly driven by securing access to

³ Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," p. 23 January 1980, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

⁴ Jonathan Leff, "POLL-Unmoved by oil export proponents, Americans still fear gasoline spike," *Reuters online*, 9 October 2014, http://uk.reuters.com/article/usa-oil-exports-idUKL2N0S12C220141009 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

⁵ U.S. Department of Energy, "US Crude Oil Production Surpasses Net Imports," https://energy.gov/maps/us-crude-oil-production-surpasses-net-imports (last accessed 30 January 2017). ⁶ Amy Harder and Lynn Cook, "Congressional Leaders Agree to Lift 40-Year Ban on Oil Exports," *Wall Street Journal online*, 16 December 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/congressional-leaders-agree-to-lift-40-year-ban-on-oil-exports-1450242995 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

oil, lost their traction in some regions of the world. For example, interest in the Arctic was more defined by considerations of free navigations of the sea, including through the Northwest Passage, than by securing access to oil and gas in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. The existence of plenty of energy resources in the Lower 48 also facilitated an energy policy towards offshore and Arctic drilling that could be subsumed under an emerging climate change agenda, which would come to characterize Obama's legacy. Not surprisingly then, one of the last decisions made by the Obama administration was to announce a drilling ban for large offshore regions in the Arctic in December 2016.⁷

The Rediscovery of Energy Security under Trump

When Donald Trump entered US politics, these significant shifts in energy security had already occurred and energy played a significant role in his election campaign. However, he addressed the issue of energy in a very domestic and inward-looking way. If at all, energy security was redefined to mean securing jobs in the energy industry in America. Thus, in early May 2016, he promised Appalachian coal miners that "[w]e're going to get those miners back to work!" In another statement, just a month later, he vowed "I want clean coal, and we're going to have clean coal and we're going to have plenty of it. We're going to have great, clean coal. We're going to have an amazing mining business."

Once in power, one of the immediate actions to support coal mining in the US was to weaken the Environment Protection Agency whose emissions regulations had made it costlier for coal industry to produce in the United States. Trump further announced that he would terminate the Clean Power Plan, which was introduced by President Obama in August 2015 and which set a national carbon dioxide emissions

⁷ Darryl Fears and Juliet Eilperin, "President Obama bans oil drilling in large areas of Atlantic and Arctic oceans," *Washington Post online*, 20 December 201, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/20/president-obama-expected-to-ban-oil-drilling-in-large-areas-of-atlantic-and-arctic-oceans/?utm_term=.732ad055d177 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

⁸ Https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZlbUxs6vyA (last accessed 30 January 2017).

⁹ Quoted in Robert Rapier, "The Elusive Search for Clean Coal," *Forbes online*, 5 June 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/rrapier/2016/06/05/the-elusive-search-for-clean-coal/#49cafeab65e4 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

limit on power plants. However, most experts agree that a revival of the coal industry in the United States, which would create thousands more jobs, as was promised by Trump during his campaign, is impossible. The downturn in coal jobs partly owes to long-term structural shifts in the industry. Increasing mechanization and automation mean that fewer workers produce the same output. In addition, within the US, traditional coal regions have shifted away from Appalachia to Wyoming and the West while all coal regions compete domestically with cheap natural gas. Fracking and the shale gas revolution have forced coal out of utilities. In search of other markets, eastern seaboard producers were increasingly exporting to coal-fired plants in Europe. However, currently Columbian coal is much cheaper and crowding out US coal. In the long run, as more and more countries in Europe and elsewhere introduce stricter carbon emission laws, these foreign destinations will disappear as substitute markets. These developments were further reflected by the growing insolvency of US coal producers and a ten per cent production drop in 2015. It is also a development that had begun before Obama's presidency. While in 2008 about half of electricity generation in the US was provided by coal, this share dropped to 30 per cent in 2016.10 By focusing on one energy industry, Trump also failed to acknowledge the intersections between different energy resources and their competition. While he promised coal workers in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio to create more coal jobs, his assurance to champion the construction of more pipelines ran directly counter to his former objective as the latter would make it even easier for natural gas to replace coal domestically.

If 'energy security' was translated to mean 'job security' during the election campaign, it took on another, more traditional meaning after Donald Trump's inauguration. Amongst the six "top issues" that are listed on the official White House webpage as of 20 January 2017, energy ranks first. With its "America First Energy Plan" the Trump administration promises to "lower costs for hardworking Americans and maximize the use of American resources, freeing [the US] from dependence on foreign oil." This new prioritization shifts the emphasis away from creating coal jobs to ensuring prosperity for American workers as consumers of energy. It is coupled with

¹⁰ Clifford Krauss and Michael Corkery, "A Bleak Outlook for Trump's Promises to Coal Miners," *New York Times online*, 19 November 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/energy-environment/a-bleak-outlook-for-trumps-promises-to-coal-miners.html?_r=0 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

the strife for US energy independence, especially "from the OPEC cartel and any nations hostile to [US] interests." 11

Trump did, of course, mention this already on his campaign trail, but it was not as prominent as his job creation narrative and predominantly used when addressing very specific audiences, such as the oil and gas producers in North Dakota. For example, at the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference in May 2016 he vowed that under his presidency "complete American energy independence" would be achieved encouraging his audience to "[i]magine a world in which our foes, and the oil cartels, can no longer use energy as a weapon." However, these statements were immediately preceded by his criticism of curtailment of energy production under President Obama, who left "America's incredible energy potential [...] untapped." In order to portray these restrictions as undermining US national interest, Trump made the link to energy independence accusing President Obama of leading the US into ever greater dependence on hostile nations. Even as Trump guaranteed that "American energy dominance will be declared a strategic economic and foreign policy goal of the United States," this promise was directed inwards and subsumed under a "make America wealthy again" agenda.¹²

In September 2016, Trump elaborated further on his "America-First energy plan." Assuring his oil and gas audience again that he would "unlock shale oil and gas" and produce more energy at home through opening up federal lands and lifting bans on offshore drilling, he criticized both the Obama administration and Hillary Clinton for exporting all this energy wealth outside of the US lamenting that "every energy dollar that isn't harvested [...] in America is harvested instead in a foreign country – often foreign countries not very friendly to [the US]." ¹³

US Energy Security and Russia

¹¹ The White House, "An America First Energy Plan," https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-energy (last accessed 30 January 2017).

¹² Donald Trump, "An America First Energy Plan," 26 May 2016, https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/an-america-first-energy-plan (last accessed 30 January 2017).

¹³ Donald Trump, "Trump Outlines Plan for American Energy Renaissance," 22 September 2016, https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-outlines-plan-for-american-energy-renaissance (last accessed 30 January 2017).

While energy independence has become a vital objective of the Trump administration and while it is geared towards OPEC and hostile countries, one country, that is usually associated with using energy as a foreign policy weapon, is not mentioned, and that is Russia. Even with the decreasing significance of energy security due to the shale revolution during the Obama administration, the concept of energy security retained some saliency after the Ukraine crisis. For example, in 2014 the Group of 7, which brings together major advanced economies including the United States, warned in its Brussels Summit Declaration that "the use of energy supplies as a means of political coercion or as a threat to security is unacceptable."14 This was clearly aimed against Russia. In addition, the European and US sanctions against Russia, that were imposed in July 2014, targeted Russian oil and gas production and put a stop on any American-Russian joint ventures in the oil and gas sector. This hit US companies such as Exxon Mobil, who were involved in a \$723 million joint venture with state-owned Rosneft, very hard. According to the U.S. company a maximum of \$1 billion was lost as a result.¹⁵ The sanctions also came at a time when a major offshore find in the Russian Arctic was just about to lead to new drilling there. However, in light of the downward price spiral for crude oil, this might have been a welcome respite.

Considering that in a saturated international oil market, energy security had only continued to be discussed because of Russia's actions in the Ukraine, it is surprising that none of the foreign policy and strategic discussions of energy by Donald Trump made any mention of this. But then, it fits perfectly into a foreign policy that is inward-looking and pursues a national interest that is built on *Realpolitik*. Russia may be using energy as a weapon, but not against the US And the US does not depend on energy exports from Russia, thus Moscow's energy diplomacy does not directly impact American interests. It also speaks to a business approach in foreign policy. As Thomas Wright from the Brookings Institution suggested, Trump rather wants to "cut deals

¹⁴ Global Affairs Canada, "The Brussels G7 Summit Declaration," http://www.international.gc.ca/g7/g7_brussels_declaration-g7_bruxelles_declaration.aspx?lang=eng (last

accessed 30 January 2017).

¹⁵Kenneth Rapoza, "Here's What Exxon 'Lost' From Russia Sanctions," *Forbes online*, 27 February 2015, http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2015/02/27/heres-what-exxons-lost-from-russia-sanctions/#1ba60c8e56b3 (last accessed 30 January 2017).

with Russia instead of containing it."¹⁶ This may also be the reason why Trump did not see any issue in nominating Rex Tillerson, the long-time CEO of Exxon Mobil, as Secretary of State in December 2016, after all, "he knows many of the players in the world and he knows them well."¹⁷ A surprise to many, Tillerson's nomination caused quite some consternation and criticism because of his close ties to Putin's Russia. In 2013 he received the Russian Order of Friendship and through the above-mentioned joint venture with Rosneft he has been in close contact with a Putin confidant as well as the Russian leader himself. Exxon Mobil has a commercial interest in the lifting of the sanctions, which were opposed by Tillerson in 2014, as this would allow them to go back to drilling in Russia's Arctic waters.

In order to become Secretary of State and meet ethics standards, Tillerson retired on 31 December 2016 and worked out an arrangement to divest from his former employer while receiving a retirement package worth more than \$170 million. While he has become more critical of Russia during his confirmation hearings and even received endorsement from Republicans John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who acknowledged that Tillerson "give[s] us confidence that he will be a champion for a strong and engaged role for America in the world," he remains a businessman who takes on the highest diplomatic position in the US While he may be a brilliant negotiator of business deals, it is not clear how good he will be as a diplomat. The joint resignation of a number of senior diplomats in the State Department in early January 2017 made the transition between administrations certainly more difficult. 19

U.S. energy security and Keystone XL

¹⁶ Quoted in Julian Borger, "Rex Tillerson: an appointment that confirms Putin's US election win," *The Guardian online*, 13 December 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/11/rex-tillerson-secretary-of-state-trump-russia-putin (last accessed 30 January 2017).

¹⁷ Donald Trump, quoted in ibid.

¹⁸ Quoted in Alan Yuhas, "Rex Tillerson receives backing to be secretary of state from key senators," *The Guardian online*, 22 January 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/rex-tillerson-secretary-of-state-john-mccain-lindsey-graham (last accessed 30 January 2017).

¹⁹ "Senior Diplomat Resignations Accepted as Trump Team Enters," *The New York Times online*, 26 January 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/01/26/us/politics/ap-us-state-department-diplomats-resign.html (last accessed 30 January 2017).

As announced numerous times during his campaign, President Trump reopened the Keystone XL negotiations on day four of his presidency. On 24 January 2017, he signed an executive memorandum which offered to reopen negotiations with the Canadian pipeline company TransCanada to build the Keystone XL pipeline, which is to carry 800,000 barrels of oil per day from the oil sands in Alberta to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico.²⁰ President Obama had rejected the pipeline in 2015 citing its adverse effect on reducing carbon emissions. However, many observers agreed that this decision was more symbolic as a Department of State study had established a rather minimal effect on greenhouse gas emissions – which it only saw at less than 1 percent of the U.S. total – and on jobs – with an expected 42,000 temporary jobs for two years and only 35 permanent jobs. However, it assumed emblematic meaning for supporters as well as environmental critics. Arguably, it was this symbolic significance, which led President Trump to invite TransCanada to "to promptly resubmit its application to the Department of State for a presidential permit."²¹

While other energy decisions will have to wait for Congress to pass legislation to undo many of Obama's policies, Keystone XL was an immediate showing of action as well as of the new direction in energy policies under a Trump administration. Not only could President Trump use this to propagate his "Buy American" mandate but it also fitted into his "make America great again" agenda and would bring jobs. In fact, the official White House statement explicitly referred to "tens of thousands of jobs"²² that would be created in the US if the pipeline was approved. Not only would most of the construction on the US side create employment but the US government would also stipulate that all the steel used for the pipes would be made in the US To that effect President Trump signed a separate memorandum.²³ In addition, the White House also

²⁰ The White House, "Presidential Memorandum Regarding Construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline," 24 January 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/24/presidential-memorandum-regarding-construction-keystone-xl-pipeline (last accessed 30 January 2017). ²¹ Ibid.

²² The White House, "President Trump Takes Action to Expedite Priority Energy and Infrastructure Projects," 24 January 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/24/president-trump-takes-action-expedite-priority-energy-and-infrastructure (last accessed 30 January 2017).

²³ The White House, "Presidential Memorandum Regarding Construction of American Pipelines," 24 January 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/24/presidential-memorandum-regarding-construction-american-pipelines (last accessed 30 January 2017).

clarified later on the day that the president expected TransCanada to pay a "benefit" to the Treasury. While TransCanada, like the Canadian and Alberta governments, welcomed the invitation to renegotiate, it is not clear whether they could meet these Buy American stipulations since most of the steel has already been purchased. According to TransCanada reports from 2012, only half of the pipes were to be produced in the U.S. Another quarter was expected to be provided by the Canadian subsidiary of a Russian steel company and the remaining quarter was listed to be imported from Italy and India. There remain other obstacles before the pipeline can be completed, such as a permit to build the line in Nebraska as well as potential indigenous action against the construction plans in South Dakota.²⁴

Job creation was only one of the explicit reasons offered for the Presidential Memorandum. In the official White House statement Keystone XL was introduced as one of the "high priority energy and infrastructure projects that will create jobs and increase national security." While the above discussion has shown that the issue of American jobs dominated the way that the President presented his decisions to the American public, it is fair to say that oil imports from Canada were welcomed as supporting US energy security. These would make the US even more independent from deliveries from OPEC and hostile countries. However, this is not to say that the old energy security paradigm has returned. Rather, this focus on domestic (and this includes Canadian but not Mexican) oil and gas resources is embedded in an inward-looking (make America great again) and business-driven (create American jobs) energy agenda.

U.S. energy security and environmental sustainability

Most current definitions of energy security also include environmental sustainability. For example, the International Energy Agency maintains that "long-term energy security mainly deals with timely investments to supply energy in line with

²⁴ Adrian Morrow and Shawn McCarthy, "Trudeau welcomes Trump's Keystone pipeline revival," The Globe and Mail online, 24 January 2017, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/trump-sign-order-to-approve-keystone-xl-pipeline/article33714341/ (last accessed 30 January 2017).

economic developments and sustainable environmental needs."²⁵ Sustainability became one of the central considerations in President Obama's energy policy. Through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), his administration implemented regulations that aimed to lower greenhouse gas emissions and support alternatives to carbon energy resources. Addressing climate change constituted an integral part of his energy agenda and contributed to his envisaged policy legacy. Specifically, with respect to coal, President Obama introduced legislation that banned leasing of federal lands for coal production and that limited carbon dioxide emissions from power plants (Clean Power Plan). These policies were all part of President Obama's Climate Action Plan, which aimed to reduce carbon emissions, increase energy efficiency and develop alternative energy resources. It also became part of an international agenda through signing onto the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and negotiating bilateral climate deals with China.

In contrast, Donald Trump has repeatedly disputed the scientific evidence for climate change and claimed that it was a hoax created by the Chinese to stifle US industrial production. He announced that his administration would "cancel the Paris Climate Agreement and stop all payments of US tax dollars to U.N. global warming programs." In his explanation for such a drastic step, he made clear that he would only focus on "rational environmental concerns." He further elaborated that for him the "real environmental problems" are "the need for clean and safe drinking water." As these quotations clearly show, Trump revives an older understanding of environmentalism, one that focuses on conservation and not on addressing climate change. He also tries to depoliticize the latter kind of environmentalism by juxtaposing "true specialists in conservation" with "those with radical political agendas." As a result, the EPA's mandate will undergo drastic change under President Trump and only pursue its "core mission of ensuring clean air, and clean, safe drinking water for all Americans." Trump's avowed firm belief in "conserving our wonderful natural resources and beautiful natural habitats" does not leave any room for sustainability in his energy

²⁵ International Energy Agency, "What is Energy Security?,"

https://www.iea.org/topics/energysecurity/subtopics/whatisenergysecurity/ (last accessed January 2017).

²⁶ Donald Trump, "An America First Energy Plan," 26 May 2016, https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/an-america-first-energy-plan (last accessed 30 January 2017).

(security) approach. ²⁷ His nomination of former Texas governor Rick Perry as Secretary of Energy further confirms this. In a 2010 book, Perry had called anthropogenic climate change a "contrived, phony mess." ²⁸

Conclusion: A new type of energy security

As this discussion has shown, while some of the announcements and approaches to energy by Donald Trump may sound like familiar stories of energy security, they are significantly different. First of all, any discussion on energy security is driven by an inward-looking perspective, which highlights the economic dimension of creating jobs while tapping into a discourse that emphasizes America's greatness. Thus, Trump talks about US energy dominance, which needs to be achieved to be truly independent. In such an understanding, energy diplomacy is not following geostrategic considerations, nor is it geared toward a stable international energy regime. Instead, only immediate US interests are addressed. And they are addressed as businessmen would address them, i.e. negotiations are based on explicit US economic interest, unimpeded by values of international cooperation. In this sense, Trump is reversing the usual securitization of energy by taking away the strategic foreign policy and traditional national security dimensions and replacing them by economic considerations. As a consequence, he depoliticizes energy and his references to US national grandeur are only used as rhetoric to sell this economic approach as part of his "make America great again" agenda.

²⁷ Donald Trump, "Trump Outlines Plan for American Energy Renaissance," 22 September 2016, https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-outlines-plan-for-american-energy-renaissance (last accessed 30 January 2017).

²⁸ Quoted in Coral Davenport, "Rick Perry, Ex-Governor of Texas, Is Trump's Pick as Energy Secretary," *The New York Times online*, 13 December 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/politics/rick-perry-energy-secretary-trump.html (last accessed 30 January 2017).

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