

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Politics of international energy crises and resentment

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(Received 27 October 2025 UTC; revised 2 July 2026 UTC; accepted 15 July 2026 UTC)

Abstract

Since World War II, energy producers have deliberately triggered two major international energy crises. The first was the energy crisis of the 1970s that was linked to economic and political turbulence in the Middle East. The second was the energy crisis in the 2020s that was generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Understanding the underlying sources of these exceptional producer-led forms of energy coercion is the focus of the article. This involves asking why, in both these crises, energy producers took actions that involved a high risk that they would damage long-term economic interests and undermine the trust of the customers that they had cultivated for a long time. We argue that a key causal factor in these two cases of energy coercion is the role of emotions and, specifically, that of resentment. The legacies of colonialism also provide a key context for both these energy crises, though in different ways. The article is original in highlighting the role of resentment in International Relations theory and in energy studies and in comparing the energy crises of the 1970s and those of the 2020s.

Keywords: colonialism; crises; emotions; energy; resentment

There have been two major producer-engineered international energy crises since the end of World War II. The first is the energy crisis of the 1970s that was linked to the economic and political turbulence in the Middle East, originally sparked by the Arab–Israeli war of 1973 and culminating in the Iranian revolution in 1979.¹ The second is the energy crisis of the 2020s that was generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.² Both these international energy crises involved a fundamental loss of trust and a disillusionment between the producers instigating the energy shock and the targeted consumer countries. The geopolitical turbulence that triggered the energy crises had both short-term negative effects, such as price increases and fears of scarcity, and longer-term implications, notably the targeted consumer countries developing policies to diversify away from dependence on energy supplies from these regions.³ Importantly, the two cases also differ in market structure: the 1970s crisis primarily involved oil, a globally traded commodity largely controlled by Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) producers, whereas the 2020s crisis centred on natural gas, a market shaped by long-term contracts and regional pipeline networks. These structural differences are central to understanding variations in how producers exerted leverage and how consumer countries experienced and responded to these energy shocks.

¹Fiona Venn, *The Oil Crisis* (Routledge, 2002).

²Michael C. LaBelle, 'Energy as a weapon of war: Lessons from 50 years of energy interdependence', *Global Policy*, 14:3 (2023), pp. 531–547.

³Caroline Kuzemko, Mathieu Blondeel, Claire Dupont, and Marie Claire Brisbois, 'Russia's war on Ukraine, European energy policy responses & implications for sustainable transformations', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 93 (2022), p. 102842, pp. 1–8.

In this analysis, an international energy crisis is defined both by its immediate negative supply effect and by its longer-term diversification consequences. In general, such energy crises are relatively rare. There have been many geopolitical shocks that have not generated international energy crises, such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Arab–Israeli wars in 1956 and 1967, and more recently, the multiple wars waged by Israel in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran since 2023.⁴ These have, at times, raised short-term concerns and price rises but have not resulted in significant longer-term shifts in energy security policies. In the European context, there have been multiple geopolitical conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, in 2006 and 2009 and with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, that led to short-term energy conflicts but did not develop into major international energy crises.⁵ Major disruptions associated with the 2026 conflict, resulting from US and Israeli military actions against Iran, are largely by-products of the conflict rather than deliberate energy coercion, highlighting the analytical importance of distinguishing producer-driven crises from those emerging incidentally from broader geopolitical events.

The question that this article addresses is to explain the causes of these relatively rare cases of international energy crises. The question can be reframed as asking what prompts energy producers to take such drastic actions that present significant risks to their long-term economic interests and that undermine the trust of the consumers that they have cultivated for so long. The article recognises that the principal International Relations (IR) theories provide important insights into the causal mechanisms that contribute to an energy crisis.⁶ However, what is notable is that, while offering plausible general explanations for why such crises emerge, they do not answer the question of why they occur relatively rarely. This article argues that in both the Arab and Russian cases the missing factor for explaining this exceptionality is the strong emotional and non-rational dimension to the decisions taken to weaponise energy resources and that this is best understood in terms of resentment. Both the Arab states in 1973 and Russia in 2022 took drastic actions to disrupt energy supplies to their key Western consumers due to an intense emotional feeling of resentment at the injustices of the unequal distribution of power in the energy and the geopolitical spheres. In addition, these actions generated significant resentment on the side of the Western consumer states as they judged these actions as fundamental threats to the liberal international order.

The main contribution of this article is to highlight the role that resentment plays in the generation of these two international energy crises of the 1970s and the 2020s. It also highlights that the source for this powerful sense of resentment is the continuing legacy of colonialism and imperialism, though in different ways. In the case of the Middle East, it was resentment of ex-colonial powers at the perceived perpetuation of a neo-colonial energy and geopolitical order.⁷ In the case of post-Soviet Russia, it was the case of the resentment of a wounded ex-colonial power at its perceived subjugation to a neo-imperial Western order.⁸

The article contributes both to an understanding of the role of emotions in energy studies and to expanding the research agenda of the study of emotions in IR theory by including case studies from the international politics of energy. The article also contributes to the theoretical development of the role of emotions in IR by demonstrating the causal mechanisms through which resentment

⁴David S. Painter, 'Oil and the American century', *The Journal of American History*, 99:1 (2012), pp. 24–39; Khalid Khan, Adnan Khurshid, and Javier Cifuentes-Faura, 'Energy security analysis in a geopolitically volatile world: A causal study', *Resources Policy*, 83 (2023), p. 103673, pp. 1–9.

⁵Thijs Van de Graaf and Jeff D. Colgan, 'Russian gas games or well-oiled conflict? Energy security and the 2014 Ukraine crisis', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 24 (2017), pp. 59–64.

⁶Caroline Kuzemko, Andreas Goldthau, Michael Keating, *The Global Energy Challenge: Environment, Development and Security* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Roland Dannreuther, *Energy Security* (Polity, 2017); Thijs Van de Graaf and Benjamin K. Sovacool, *Global Energy Politics* (Polity, 2020).

⁷Christopher R.W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁸Kseniya Oksamytna, 'Imperialism, supremacy, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 44:4 (2023), pp. 497–512.

and *ressentiment* generate, intensify, and securitise the politics of energy, which has potential generalisability to other issue areas in IR. In addition, the article is original in its comparison of the two cases of the energy crises in the 1970s and 2020s, seeking to understand more generalisable patterns for why such crises emerge. Again, such comparative analysis of the two crises is rare, with only one academic study that we could find that directly makes the comparison and, in this case, it is focused on the response of the European Union.⁹

Energy politics, IR theory, and emotions

Mainstream IR theories have made significant contributions to the study of the international politics of energy. The dominant paradigms of realism and liberalism have traditionally provided the main framework within the sub-discipline for conceptualising the causal relationship between energy, particularly oil and gas resources, and geopolitical conflict.¹⁰ For realists, energy is a source of power for states and thus a key element in the geopolitical struggle between nation-states in an anarchic international system. It is natural, from a realist perspective, that energy, particularly the high-value oil and gas resources that are geographically distributed in some of the most conflictual parts of the world, might be weaponised in self-defence or in aggressive offence.¹¹ However, realism and its variants do not have a clear answer to why such weaponisation is relatively rare and why only some but not other geopolitical conflicts lead to international energy crises.¹²

Liberalism has a different conceptualisation of the root causes of energy-related conflicts but has a similar problem in articulating the reasons for the relative rarity of international energy crises. From the liberal perspective, the international energy system is under-institutionalised, with no body like the World Trade Organisation managing international energy flows, and many of the key energy producers are authoritarian regimes who are inclined to use their energy resources to engage in external aggression.¹³ However, as with the realist approach, it is the relative success of the informal energy markets in containing energy conflicts that is not fully explained. For example, the development of the East-West gas network in the 1970s and 1980s, a paradigm of liberal energy interdependence, occurred at the time of sustained geopolitical conflict between the Soviet Union and Western Europe.¹⁴ Liberal approaches were also ill-prepared for explaining why exactly 40 years later Russia then decided to weaponise its gas supplies to Europe.

Similar problems are evident across various critical theoretical approaches applied to energy politics. Within the Marxist tradition, two related strands can be distinguished. First, Marxist scholars highlight how oil and gas have been used by ex-colonial states in the Global South as a weapon against the Global North.¹⁵ Second, critical political economy approaches focus on the role

⁹Lukas Schramm, 'Some differences, many similarities: Comparing Europe's responses to the 1973 oil crisis and the 2022 gas crisis', *European Political Science Review*, 16:1 (2024), pp. 56–71.

¹⁰Marco Siddi, 'EU-Russia energy relations: From a liberal to a realist paradigm?', *Russian Politics*, 3:2 (2017), pp. 364–381; Pinar Buket Kilinç-Pala, 'Approaches in energy exclusive security: Theories of energy security and the dominance of realism', *Politics & Policy*, 49:3 (2021), pp. 771–794.

¹¹Michael T. Klare, *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy* (A OneWorld Book, 2008); Jason Bordoff and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, 'The age of energy insecurity: How the fight for resources is upending geopolitics', *Foreign Affairs*, 102:3 (2023), pp. 104–119.

¹²Llewelyn Hughes and Andrew Long, 'Is there an oil weapon? Security implications of changes in the structure of the international oil market', *International Security*, 39:3 (WINTER 2014/15), pp. 152–189; Robert Vitalis, *Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security That Haunt U.S. Energy Policy* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

¹³Thijs Van de Graaf, *The Politics and Institutions of Global Energy Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jeff D. Colgan and Miriam Hinthorn, 'International energy politics in an age of climate change', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 26 (2023), pp. 79–96.

¹⁴Frank Bösch, 'Energy diplomacy: West Germany, the Soviet Union and the oil crises of the 1970s', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 39:4 (2014), pp. 165–184; Dunja Krempin, 'Rise of western Siberia and the Soviet–West German energy relationship during the 1970s', in Jeronim Perović (ed), *Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 253–281.

¹⁵Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Middle East: Oil and political order', in Roland Dannreuther and Wojciech Ostrowski (eds), *Handbook on Oil and International Relations* (Edward Elgar, 2022), pp.142–160.

of corporate interests within advanced capitalist economies. For example, Nitzan and Bichler argue that a 'weapon-dollar–petrodollar coalition' linking major oil companies with defence contractors has historically benefited from geopolitical instability in the Middle East.¹⁶ In addition, securitisation approaches examine how political actors frame disruptions to energy supply as matters of urgent national security.¹⁷ While these frameworks are useful for understanding the framing and management of crises once they emerge and for explaining historical cases in the Middle East, they provide a more limited account of why similar geopolitical tensions, such as the Russia–Ukraine war, escalate into full-scale international energy crises and at other times do not.

Some influential political economy approaches provide insights into this question, also, but only partially. The theory of the rentier state and the related resource curse theory highlight the authoritarian nature of resource-rich states and the subsequent unpredictability and insecurities of these regimes, which lead them to use this key resource in their conflicts with other states.¹⁸ But, again, these theories do not specify the conditions in which this does or does not happen. A partial exception is Colgan's work, which argues that revolutionary leaders in petro-states are more likely to use oil to achieve their political goals.¹⁹ Vernon's well-known Obsolescent Bargaining Theory is also unhelpful, as it explains the triggers for commercial disputes between producer states and extractive companies but downplays broader geopolitical and political factors.²⁰

The argument of this article is that the limitations of these accounts result from a failure to take into account the role of emotions in affecting state behaviour. The history of the relationship of geopolitical conflicts and energy crises indicates that oil and gas producing states tend to be risk-averse and generally avoid using their energy resources as weapons in conflicts that they have instigated or been drawn into.²¹ Insulating this vital trade from the exigencies of geopolitical conflict ensures the long-term loyalty of their customers and avoids inciting them to diversify to other forms of energy or to different suppliers. From the perspective of most energy producers, this is the rational response to the challenge of an unstable geopolitical environment.²² The question is, therefore, why such caution and temperance can, in relatively rare cases, be discarded and energy-producing states take the substantial economic and political risks of the weaponisation of their energy resources against their main trading partners. The argument of this article is that the missing element is the emotional dimension of such decisions and that it is a powerful accumulation of a sense of resentment, in various ways linked to the legacies of colonialism, that provides the key to why some, but not other, geopolitical conflicts spill over into international energy crises.

The rest of this article develops this argument in two main sections. The first develops an analytical framework for thinking about the role of emotions in energy politics and the role played by resentment. The second section applies this framework to a comparative study of the two energy crises of the 1970s and the 2020s.

¹⁶Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, 'Bringing capital accumulation back in: The weapon-dollar–petrodollar coalition–military contractors, oil companies and Middle East 'energy conflicts'', *Review of International Political Economy*, 2:3 (1995), pp. 446–515; see also Emily Meierding, 'Dismantling the oil wars myth', *Security Studies*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 258–288.

¹⁷Alexandra-Maria Bocse, 'From the United States with shale gas: Ukraine, energy securitization, and the reshaping of transatlantic energy relations', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 69 (2020), p. 101553, pp. 1–12; Andrew Judge, Timothy Maltby and Kacper Szulecki, 'Energy securitisation: Avenues for future research', in Kacper Szulecki (ed), *Energy Security in Europe: Divergent Perceptions and Policy Challenges* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 149–173; Jeffrey D. Wilson, 'A securitisation approach to international energy politics', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 49 (2019), pp. 114–25.

¹⁸Hye Ryeon Jang and Benjamin Smith, 'Pax petrolica? Rethinking the oil–interstate war linkage', *Security Studies*, 30:2 (2021), pp. 1–23.

¹⁹Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁰Wojciech Ostrowski, 'The twilight of resource nationalism: From cyclicity to singularity?', *Resources Policy*, 83 (2023), p. 103599, pp. 1–9; Peter Newell, *Power Shift: The Global Political Economy of Energy Transitions* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

²¹Emma Ashford, *Oil, the State, and War: The Foreign Policies of Petrostates* (Georgetown University Press, 2022).

²²David G. Victor, David R. Hults and Mark C. Thurber (eds), *Oil and Governance: State-Owned Enterprises and the World Energy Supply* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Emotions, resentment, and energy politics

The role of emotions in energy politics has generally been under-studied, with some exceptions. Ganz's applies emotions to an innovative securitisation framework to analyse energy politics in Azerbaijan. In her work, she explores the role of pride in constructing threats and in managing domestic and international challenges to the Azerbaijani political regime and the interlinkages between energy and the military-security complex.²³ In a more historical study, Kreienbaum argues that the 1970s international energy crisis generated an emotional feeling of solidarity between OPEC and the non-OPEC states in the Global South that represented a turning point in North-South relations with the subsequent debate over the New International Economic Order (NIEO).²⁴ But, apart from these studies, the dominant approach in the study of energy politics is to conceptualise political agency in terms of rational calculation where, if emotions do affect such decisions, they are judged to be irrational.

In the broader discipline of IR, the study of emotions has only been relatively recent. The traditional IR approach, particularly during the dominance of behaviouralist approaches in the 1970s and 1980s, conceptualised emotions as irrational exceptions to the norms and expectations of rational decision-making. It was only in the 2000s that pioneer IR scholars, such as Mercer and Crawford, argued that emotions needed to be taken more seriously and challenged conventional IR accounts that ignored or marginalised them. Mercer showed how emotions were embedded in rational decision-making as well as in the construction of group identities relating to war and peace.²⁵ Crawford similarly challenged conventional wisdom in IR by arguing that security actors act rationally not despite, but because, they are emotional actors.²⁶ These pioneering efforts were then followed by a second phase that focused on the specific ways emotions contribute to various research areas, such as security, diplomacy, war, conflict management, and international institutions. This article contributes to this agenda of expanding the theoretical application of the role of emotions in IR by operationalising it to the issue area of energy studies, which, as noted above, is new and innovative. The article also contributes more broadly to the study of emotions by identifying and developing the causal mechanisms through which resentment and *ressentiment* escalate into international crisis and conflict.

Conceptualising resentment/ressentiment

This article focuses on the specific role of resentment in the generation of international energy crises. The core argument that it is the powerful intervention of the emotion of resentment that tips actors away from risk-aversion to the decision to use energy as a weapon of war. There is a growing body of research that identifies the significant role played by resentment in political developments.²⁷ Resentment has been identified as a key emotional response that explains populism and the underlying political grievances that have contributed to the rise of far-right parties.²⁸ Similarly, resentment has been seen as a force behind ethnic and inter-communal conflict and for understanding the dynamics between international terrorism and post-9/11 counterterrorism

²³ Aurora Ganz, 'Emotions and securitisation: A new materialist discourse analysis', *European Journal of International Relations*, 30:2 (2024), pp. 280–305.

²⁴ Jonas Kreienbaum, 'Between panic and feelings of empowerment: Emotional reactions to the first oil crisis and the debate about a new international economic order', *New Global Studies*, 17:2 (2023), pp. 193–218.

²⁵ Jonathan Mercer, 'Rationality and psychology in international politics', *International Organization*, 59:1 (2005), pp. 77–106.

²⁶ Neta C. Crawford, 'The passion of world politics: Propositions on emotion and emotional relationships', *International Security*, 24:4 (2000), pp. 116–56.

²⁷ Elisabetta Brighi, 'The globalisation of resentment: Failure, denial, and violence in world politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:3 (2016), pp. 411–432.

²⁸ Eric Fassin, *Populism: Right and Left* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2020).

strategy.²⁹ Contributing to this body of literature, this article seeks to address the significant role that resentment plays in the politics of energy.

To start with definitions, resentment is generally understood to be a bitter feeling that comes from a real or perceived harm that undermines a person's sense of dignity. Like many emotions, resentment has both positive and negative manifestations.³⁰ For enlightenment philosophers, resentment was a disagreeable and unpleasant feeling but one that nevertheless had a positive dimension. Resentment was understood to constitute a reasonable response to harms done, justifying claims for a restoration of wounded honour or for gaining due recognition and respect.³¹ In this regard, Adam Smith understood resentment and anger to be the 'guardians of justice'.³² Unlike revenge, this understanding of resentment meant that it could be attenuated through critical self-reflection and recognition of the harm done by the perpetrator. A just response would come in some form of reparation, whether as an apology or some material compensation. As such, resentment involves 'an expectation, and a demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of good will or regard on the part of other human beings towards ourselves'.³³ There is an expectation that the transgressor takes proper regard of the demands for justice and recognises the culpability of their actions and the need for some act of restoration. Seen in this light, resentment is a critical instrument for restorative justice.³⁴

However, even in this positive conceptualisation of resentment, there is the potential for more negative implications. For the resentful, the desire for an apology, for example, might not in itself be sufficient unless that apology includes an element of humiliation, compensating for the sense of humiliation that they have endured. However, this can lead to a situation where no act of apology is deemed sufficient and that, in practice, there can be no effective closure to the sense of victimhood. Nietzsche developed this negative dynamic of resentment through promoting the concept of *ressentiment*.³⁵ He sought to demonstrate how legitimate grievances can inexorably spill over into a form of radical envy, rancour, and negativity – a 'hatred of existence'. For Nietzsche, resentment/*ressentiment* was utilised by the weak to emasculate and undermine the virtues of the strong and this 'slave morality' was at the heart of his critique of modernity (and Christianity).

Max Scheler developed Nietzsche's psychological insights on *ressentiment* by highlighting how such negative emotions develop in sociopolitical conditions where individuals or societies are formally accorded political equality but are treated as socially, economically, or politically inferior.³⁶ *Ressentiment* breeds dangerously in these conditions of formal equality and informal structural inequality, becoming 'self-poisoning' with an escalation of negativity, anger, and impotence. This leads to 'indiscriminate unrelenting blaming, envious spoiling of the good and dangerous attempts to make politics the locus of metaphysical redemption'.³⁷ There is also an inversion of value where the resentful potentially entrap themselves in their sense of victimhood by seeking to spoil all forms of human flourishing and deny the positive virtues of others.

The differentiation between resentment and *ressentiment* is complex and multifaceted. There is a difference in intensity, with *ressentiment* involving an all-consuming feeling of resentment and a

²⁹ Elisabetta Brighi, 'The mimetic politics of lone wolf terrorism', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 11:1 (2015), pp. 145–164; Paul Saurette, 'You dissin me? Humiliation and post 9/11 global politics', *Review of International Studies*, 32:3 (2006), pp. 495–522.

³⁰ Michael Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', *Constellations*, 22:4 (2015), pp. 599–613.

³¹ Peter Frederick Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (Methuen, 1974); Robert C. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1995); Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1790]), p. 43.

³³ Strawson, 'Freedom and resentment', p. 23.

³⁴ Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Temple University Press, 2008); Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1887]).

³⁶ Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Marquette University Press, 2010 [1913]).

³⁷ Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', p. 610.

more unlimited scope. There is also potentially a difference between genuine sources of grievance and grievances that are constructed and imagined. Where *ressentiment* is prevalent, grievances are often manipulated or manufactured by interested elites to generate political support. This, in turn, leads to social and political polarisation. The anthropologist René Girard highlighted how *ressentiment* can escalate to a wider societal crisis and lead to violent conflict.³⁸ Girard's original insight is to see how *ressentiment* and the escalating nature of envy as a form of mimetic desire lead inexorably to violence.³⁹ In practice, the concepts of resentment and *ressentiment* are closely intertwined and represent different ways of experiencing and framing acute grievances. Resentment reflects the bitter feeling in response to a real or perceived harm, while *ressentiment* broadens and intensifies the feeling of bitterness, hurt, and pain due to the perceived lack of an adequate response, such as an apology, or due to an explicit or implicit denial or rejection of the harm claimed. What the concept of *ressentiment* especially highlights is how the political dynamics of mutual resentment, as Girard argues, can contribute to the spiralling of disputes into violent conflict.

Resentment and international energy crises: a framework

The critical role played by resentment in international energy crises is crucially interlinked with the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. The Arab energy crisis of the 1970s was in the context of former colonies resentful of the continuing neo-imperial imposition, while, for Russia, it was the resentment of a former imperial power at its perceived subordination to a neo-imperial West. The comparison is thus based not on historical similarity but rather on a shared dynamic in which experiences of marginalisation and perceived inequality within the international order contribute to the weaponisation of energy. These two otherwise dissimilar cases demonstrate how very distinct historical experiences can generate similar mechanisms linking grievance, emotions, and the use of energy as a weapon. In addition, what is common in both cases is an asymmetrical energy relationship between producers and European consumers that created opportunities for the use of the energy weapon along with a deep sense of resentment at an oppressive sense of neo-imperial inequality and injustice.⁴⁰ There is, in this sense, a strong inter-linkage between the perception of imperialism, neo-colonialism, and resentment.

For the colonised, resentment is viewed as a natural and legitimate expression of the grievances and injustices of the structural inequalities embedded in colonialism and imperialism. In contrast, for the colonial or neo-imperial powers, such inequalities are seen as a necessary condition for efficient and effective governance and for accelerating the transition from a backward to a more civilised society. Imperial powers have thus themselves often felt a sense of resentment that the benefits of the progress and development that they claim to have provided are so fully rejected by the purported beneficiaries of this enlightened rule. These multiple layers of feelings of resentment for both the colonised and the colonisers can generate perceptions of mutual *ressentiment*. On the side of the colonial or imperial powers, there is a perception that the resentment of the colonised is driven by a victim mentality and a denial of the positive civilisational values of liberty and rationality. But such condescension of the colonial subject only intensifies the sense of resentment of the colonised, mutating into a form of *ressentiment* – a wholesale rejection and hatred of the hypocritical nature of values and norms promoted by the colonial and imperial powers.

It is the argument of this article is that when the sense of mutual resentment intensifies and escalates to a critical level, it provides the trigger for the weaker producing power to attempt to use energy as part of an offensive strategy. This is the first stage of the evolution of an international

³⁸René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University Press, 1987).

³⁹Elisabetta Brighi and Antonio Cerella, 'An alternative vision of politics and violence: Introducing mimetic theory in international studies', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 11:1 (2015), pp. 3–25.

⁴⁰Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Great Betrayal: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2025); Maxime Audinet, "Down with neocolonialism!" Strategic narrative resurgence and foreign policy preferences in wartime Russia', *European Journal of International Security* (published online 2025), pp. 1–22.

energy crisis, and it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. For a full-blown energy crisis to develop, a second stage is needed when the targeted consumer countries perceive the use of energy as a weapon against them as an existential threat, intensifying the feeling of resentment at the perceived illegitimacy and injustice of the use of the energy weapon to enforce a radical change in their policy that moreover threatens the Western-dominant liberal international order. A producer-led international energy crisis thus only develops when there is this combustible interaction of resentments driven by a sense of radical injustice on both the side of the energy producers and of the Western energy consumers. The crisis then moves to a third phase when the distrust generated by the crisis, as well as the continuing fears and resentments of the targeted consumer countries, leads them to take radical actions to reduce their dependence on the producer countries that have targeted them and to neutralise the political threat that their actions present. Overall, there is a clear sequential dynamic of escalation here. Historical grievances are initially experienced and interpreted as resentment. In the absence of meaningful change or recognition, these grievances may escalate into *ressentiment*. This emotional transformation subsequently shapes elite strategic calculations and intensifies the dynamics of mutual *ressentiment* that, as Girard argues, can contribute to the spiralling of disputes into violent conflict. It is this dynamic which we argue provides an explanation for the specific cases of the development of international energy crises.

The next three sections apply this framework of the escalating effects of resentment/*ressentiment* through a comparison of two case studies of international energy crises. These three sections represent three different stages of the evolution of the international crises. The first stage examines the underlying historical sources of resentment that had built up over the years in post-colonial Middle East and in post-Soviet Russia and which resulted in highly antagonistic relations with the West in these two different periods. In the Arab case, this process is traced through extensive historical scholarship, including detailed accounts of the relevant events and the associated decision-making record. In the Russian case, the evidence is derived primarily from political speeches and the public rhetoric of Russian policymakers, most importantly Putin, advocating an ambition to restore Russia's status as a great if not imperial power. The second stage examines how this underlying resentment was translated into the critical decisions by the Arab states and Russia to weaponise energy, oil in the case of the 1970s crisis and gas in the case of the 2020s crisis, against the West. The third section examines what happened after this initial crisis and how the targeted Western consumer states responded to these crises, and the distrust and resentments that they generated, and sought to restore a favourable balance of power that confirmed continued Western dominance.

Stage 1: sources of resentment

In both the cases of the producer states of post-colonial Middle East in the post-World War II period and in post-Soviet Russia since 1991, the sources of resentment at the Western consumer states had both an energy-specific and a more general geopolitical context. In relation to the specific energy-related grievances, they had a common source of resentment at the private ownership of their sovereign energy resources. The context and conditions differed, though, with the Middle East producers resentful at the continued ownership and control by Western oil companies of these resources while the Russian source of resentment was at the post-1991 privatisation of their large oil companies.⁴¹ For the Middle East, the post-colonial challenge was to nationalise these resources, while for Russia the post-Soviet challenge was to reverse the privatisations that had taken place during the 1990s.

In both the Middle Eastern and Russian cases, these energy-related grievances were incorporated into larger and more political sources of resentment at the perceived perpetuation of neo-colonial and neo-imperial relations of inequality and subordination. In the Middle East context, this was primarily driven by resentment of the Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, which

⁴¹Valerie Marcel, *Oil Titans: National Oil Companies in the Middle East* (Brookings Institution Press, 2006); Thane Gustafson, *Wheel of Fortune: The Battle for Oil and Power in Russia* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

led to the creation of the state of Israel. The failure to defend the Palestinian cause and the loss of territory, which was viewed as an integral part of the Arab and Muslim world, including Jerusalem, fuelled a deep anti-Western resentment.⁴² In post-Soviet Russia, the resentment at the West was driven by a shift in power from the early Western-oriented and democratic leadership within post-Soviet Russia to a more statist and nationalist leadership, seen in the transition from the Yeltsin to the Putin Presidencies in 2000.⁴³ For this new leadership, the privatisations of the oil industry were perceived to be part of a broader Western neo-imperial strategy to weaken and fragment Russian power and to ensure Western global geopolitical domination through a unipolar US-led system. Increasingly, these resentments focused on perceived Western encroachments on Ukraine. In contrast to the semi-privatised oil industry, the gas sector and pipeline networks remained under state control, preserving strategic leverage over Europe's energy supplies.

Oil, resentment, and the Middle East

In the Middle East, the key source of resentment in their post-colonial energy relationship with the US and the former European colonial powers was the continued legal validity of the concession agreements, signed by the seven International Oil Companies, commonly referred to as the 'Seven Sisters' before the Second World War. The concessions were particularly controversial because the areas covered were often nearly the size of the countries involved, averaging about 88% of their territory, and the contracts lasted for almost a century, averaging around 82 years.⁴⁴ Moreover, the governments that entered these agreements had committed to not raising tax rates for the duration of the contracts. The perpetuation of these concession agreements was viewed in the Southern producer states as stark evidence of the Western resolve to institutionalise a long-lasting neo-colonial relationship despite formal political decolonisation.⁴⁵ This grievance and source of resentment resonated with the ideological discourse of neo-colonialism, which meant, in the words of the post-independence Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah, that the post-colonial state is 'in theory independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.'⁴⁶ According to Mitchell, there was an additional reason for the long-term concessions.⁴⁷ The extended duration of the agreements and the focus on Middle Eastern oil reflected a deliberate effort to weaken coal trade unions in the UK and the US. By securing control over vast oil reserves for decades, Western companies and states ensured that oil could supplant coal as the dominant energy source, be less vulnerable to labour unrest, and thereby weaken the forms of carbon-based political mobilisation on which the emergence of industrial democracy had depended.

To liberate themselves from these economic and political grievances, the key weapon that the producer states had was to nationalise the resources that were present on their sovereign, independent territory. This was supported by the development of international law that saw the rise of the concept of permanent sovereignty over natural resources originally developed by UN delegates from Iran, Bolivia, and Mexico in 1952 and which led to 14 December 1962 General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII).⁴⁸ This legal development was part of a broader campaign by the Global

⁴²Erica Augenstein and Akram Salhab, 'Collective consciousness in motion: Palestinian nationalism, anti-colonialism and the struggle for liberation', in Michael Dumper and Amneh Badran (eds), *Routledge Handbook on Palestine* (Routledge, 2025), pp. 173–182.

⁴³Tina Burrett, 'Making Russia great again? Vladimir Putin's changing sources of legitimacy 2000–2024', *Politics and Governance*, 12 (2024), Article 9029, pp. 1–20.

⁴⁴Paul Stevens, 'National oil companies and international oil companies in the Middle East: Under the shadow of government and the resource nationalism cycle', *Journal of World Energy Law & Business*, 1:1 (2008), pp. 5–30.

⁴⁵Norman Girvan, 'Economic nationalism', *Daedalus*, 104:4 (1975), pp. 145–158.

⁴⁶Nicola Degli Esposti, 'What happened to neocolonialism? The rise and fall of a critical concept', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 30:3 (2024), pp. 687–707, p. 689.

⁴⁷Timothy Mitchell, 'Carbon democracy', *Economy and Society*, 38:3 (2009), pp. 399–432.

⁴⁸Christopher R. W. Dietrich, 'Mossadegh madness: Oil and sovereignty in the anticolonial community', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 6:1 (2015), pp. 63–78.

South to develop an NIEO that would radically restructure the economic relations with the Global North. As such, these economic strategies and policies were perceived in the West as undermining the open liberal international economic system and to undermine Western economic and political interests.

The Middle East was central to this struggle to promote a new economic order, with full or partial nationalisation driven by anti-colonial regimes in Iraq and Libya in the 1960s, followed by other OPEC members in the 1970s. Since OPEC countries controlled 80% of the world oil production at the time, 'it was an important step towards changing the balance of power between oil companies and governments in favour of the latter'.⁴⁹ Nationalisation also represented a fundamental break from that era of entrenched corporate control and discriminatory labour structures. For example, Vitalis in his work demonstrated how the oil companies, such as ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia, openly instituted Jim Crow-style segregation and racially stratified labour practices in the oil camps, reflecting the projection of US racial hierarchies into the Middle East.⁵⁰

The nationalisations radically eroded the control of the Western private oil companies over the international oil industry. It was a rare success story. As Robert Gilpin stated, 'world history records few equivalent redistributions of wealth and power in such a short period'.⁵¹ This shift in the balance of power was not only problematic from the perspective of companies but also for Western European governments and industries who came to heavily depend on cheap Middle Eastern oil. In 1947, Western Europe imported 43% of its oil from the Middle East; in 1948, 66%; and by 1950, close to 85%.⁵² Overall, the nationalisations that took place during the 1960s and 1970s generated and exacerbated a mutual sense of resentment between the Southern oil-producing and the Northern energy-consuming states.⁵³ In the Middle East context, this struggle for economic justice was fought alongside a political struggle over Palestine, a struggle which intensified the feelings of *ressentiment* for the Arab world.

The post-colonial Arab states viewed the Zionist endeavour to establish a Jewish state as a neo-colonial enterprise to undermine the territorial integrity of the Arab nation and as an alien incursion into an historic Muslim land.⁵⁴ In 1948, the military victory of the Jewish forces to establish the state of Israel fed into a powerful anti-Zionist political movement that formally united the Arab world, despite the divisions between the radical nationalist Arab regimes and the more conservative Western-oriented regimes in Iran and the Gulf States.⁵⁵ The Israeli military victory in the 1967 war, which involved not only loss of the remaining territory of historic Palestine but also included sovereign territories of Egypt and Syria, was a source of deep political paralysis and political resentment. In 1967, there was a tentative attempt to utilise oil as a weapon to support the Arab cause. This was unsuccessful but nevertheless set a significant precedent of the potential linkage between oil and Palestine.⁵⁶

Oil, resentment, and post-Soviet Russia

The context and conditions of the development of a deep sense of resentment at the private ownership of the oil industry in post-Soviet Russia were, in many ways, very different from that of the

⁴⁹Ekim Arbatli, 'Resource nationalism revisited: A new conceptualization in light of changing actors and strategies in the oil industry', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 40 (2018), pp. 101–108, p. 103.

⁵⁰Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁵¹Robert G. Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 232.

⁵²Simon Bromley, 'The United States and the control of world oil', *Government and Opposition*, 40:2 (2005), pp. 225–255.

⁵³Stephen J. Kobrin, 'Diffusion as an explanation of oil nationalization: Or the domino effect rides again', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 29:1 (1985), pp. 3–32.

⁵⁴Avi-ran Tzoreff, 'The (third) world of yesterday: Global anti-colonial struggles, Palestinian consciousness, and Zionist-colonial alliances', *Journal of Global History*, 20:3 (2025), pp. 293–312.

⁵⁵Kirsten E. Schulze, 'The 1948 war: The battle over history', in Joel Peters and David Newman (eds), *Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 63–73.

⁵⁶Mohammed Suleiman Dajani Daoudi and Munther Suleiman Dajani Daoudi, 'The 1967 oil embargo revisited', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 13:2 (1984), pp. 65–90.

Middle East. Unlike the Middle East, where private ownership was a legacy of colonialism, the de-nationalisation and privatisation of the oil industry in post-Soviet Russia were something initially willed and supported by the Russian government during the 1990s.⁵⁷ The Yeltsin government divided the Soviet monopolistic oil industry into multiple integrated companies, which resulted in a substantial reduction of state ownership in all but one of these companies. The privatisation of the oil sector led to an unprecedented transfer of wealth into the hands of a few individuals, who came to be known as oligarchs.⁵⁸ These oligarchs accumulated not only economic wealth but also increased political power.⁵⁹ At the same time, privatisation of the gas sector was prevented by the influential gas lobby, and even Gaidar, architect of Russia's neo-liberal reforms, agreed that gas and pipeline infrastructure should remain under state control, preserving strategic leverage over energy exports.⁶⁰

The sense of resentment at this process of privatisation only emerged with the shift in power away from liberal and pro-Western elites to statist and nationalist elites who were determined to restore Russia as a Great Power.⁶¹ The election of Putin to the Presidency in 2000 consolidated this shift in political sentiment. In his doctoral dissertation, Putin famously emphasised the necessity for the state to control the country's resources.⁶² For Putin and those in his entourage, the privatisation of the oil sector in the 1990s was widely perceived as humiliating and as part of a Western-supported strategy to weaken and emasculate Russia. This sense of intense resentment or *ressentiment* was not limited to elite opinion. Among the general populace, oil privatisation was viewed as the theft of the country's natural resources by a group of well-connected businesspeople who used it for their political advantage. There was, therefore, a widespread belief that the takeover of Russia's wealth could not have happened without the tacit, if not active, involvement of the West, which sought to subjugate or colonise Russia through institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The echoes of neo-imperial discourse, last heard in the 1980s, infiltrated Russian television and other media outlets.⁶³ It also provided the political context for the renationalisation of the industry that began earnestly with the downfall of Khodorkovsky and his oil company, Yukos, one of the original oligarchs.

Like the Middle East, these specific energy-related grievances were incorporated into broader political sources of anti-Western resentment. Over time, these grievances became increasingly focused on Ukraine as a country that had been wrested away from its natural roots with Russia through Western manoeuvrings and political and military pressures. This was seen to involve several Western-supported initiatives.⁶⁴ The first was the process of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement that was initiated in the 1990s, gradually incorporating the former Soviet satellite states in Eastern and Central Europe as well as the Baltic states. Russia, even in its more liberal manifestation in the 1990s, was strongly opposed to this expansion of NATO but nevertheless managed to maintain a pragmatic if conflictual accommodation with the organisation.⁶⁵ However, the decision in 2008 to confirm that Ukraine and Georgia would become members of NATO, even if no actual pathway for this was then agreed, stepped over a red line

⁵⁷David Lane, 'The political economy of Russian oil', in Peter Rutland (ed), *Business and the State in Contemporary Russia* (Westview Press, 2001), pp. 101–128.

⁵⁸Li-Chen Sim, *The Rise and Fall of Privatization in the Russian Oil Industry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁵⁹Thomas Graham, 'From oligarchy to oligarchy: The structure of Russia's ruling elite', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 7:3 (1999), pp. 325–340.

⁶⁰Gustafson, 'Wheel of fortune', p. 71.

⁶¹David Lane, 'From chaotic to state-led capitalism', *New Political Economy*, 13:2 (2008), pp. 177–184.

⁶²Harley Balzer, 'The Putin thesis and Russian energy policy', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 21:3 (2005), pp. 210–225.

⁶³Matthew Blackburn, 'Mainstream Russian nationalism and the "State-Civilization" identity: Perspectives from below', *Nationalities Papers*, 49:1 (2021), pp. 89–107.

⁶⁴Erica Harris, 'What is the role of nationalism and ethnicity in the Russia–Ukraine crisis?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:4 (2020), pp. 593–613.

⁶⁵Leonid A. Karabeshkin and Dina R. Spechler, 'EU and NATO enlargement: Russia's expectations, responses and options for the future', *European Security*, 16:3–4 (2007), pp. 307–328.

for Moscow. This precipitated the Russian intervention into Georgia and the annexation of the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was a clear signal to Ukraine.⁶⁶

Second, there was the phenomenon of the so-called pro-Western coloured revolutions in 2004, which included most notably the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, that confirmed the belief in Moscow that the West was using multiple tools, such as Western-supported NGOs and the nefarious activities of Western security services, to undermine and weaken Russia's natural dominant role in its immediate neighbourhood.⁶⁷ This culminated in the third dimension where a resentful post-Soviet Russia increasingly perceived Ukraine as an indissoluble part of Russia, that it was, as Putin stated, an artificial state and that its continued independence was solely due to its being an anti-Russian Western proxy. In this way, there is an analogy between the *ressentiment* generated by the Arab and Muslim belief of Palestine as an integral part of the Arab and Islamic world and the Russian belief that Ukraine is an integral part of the Russian world.

As with the tentative attempts by the Arabs to use the energy weapon in 1967, Russia did use energy as a form of economic and political coercion prior to 2022, most notably with the Russian–Ukraine gas crises in 2006 and 2009, but these never escalated to a geopolitical level. This was largely because both crises were framed primarily as commercial pricing and contractual disputes between Gazprom and Naftogaz, rather than as direct geopolitical confrontation, limiting their broader political impact.⁶⁸ Yet, in retrospect, they can be seen as precedents.

Stage 2: resentment and the triggering of the energy weapon

As has been argued earlier, international energy crises are relatively rare. The conditions that make this radical step conceivable are when the economic and political resentments accumulate to such an intense level that geostrategic priorities override economic rationality. However, this is not sufficient on its own to generate an international crisis and what is also required is the counter-reaction of the Western consumer states that includes their own intense resentment that this use of the energy weapon is not only legally and morally wrong but also represents a fundamental threat to Western values, economic interests, and the liberal international order. These actions of energy coercion need, therefore, to be a form of *ressentiment* for the Western consumer states that mirrors the *ressentiment* of the producer states. For the West, both the acts of energy coercion by Arab states in the 1970s and Russia in the 2020s were viewed as representing existential threats to the liberal Western order.

These conditions of mutual intense resentment on both sides apply to both the Middle Eastern and Russian cases. In the Middle East, it was the fear that the initial victories in the 1973 Arab–Israeli war might turn to defeat, with Israel being steadfastly supported by the US, that prompted the cumulation of resentments and *ressentiment* leading to the unveiling of the oil weapon.⁶⁹ In Russia, the crisis was more proactively sought with the decision in 2022 when the resentments over Ukraine had reached such an intense level of *ressentiment* that it was perceived that a full-scale invasion was required and that this would also need to incorporate the use of energy as a weapon of war.⁷⁰ In both the Arab and Russian cases, the West was caught by surprise and interpreted both moves as a radical rejection of Western economic and political interests and as a radical form of *ressentiment*.

⁶⁶Andrew T. Wolff, 'The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis', *International Affairs*, 91:5 (2015), pp. 1103–1121.

⁶⁷David Lane and Stephen White (eds), *Rethinking the Coloured Revolutions* (Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁸Simon Pirani, Jonathan Stern and Katja Yafimava, *The Russo-Ukrainian Gas Dispute of January 2009: A Comprehensive Assessment* (Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2009).

⁶⁹David Tal, 'Israel and the United States 1948–1973', in Joel Peters and Rob Geist Pinfold (eds), *Routledge Handbook on Israel's Foreign Relations* (Routledge, 2024), pp. 81–92.

⁷⁰Ákos D. Hartvig, Bence Kiss-Dobronyi, Péter Kotek, Borbála T. Tóth, Ioannis Gutzianas and András Z. Zareczky, 'The economic and energy security implications of the Russian energy weapon', *Energy*, 294 (2024), Article 130972, pp. 1–11.

The trigger of the 1973 Arab–Israeli war

It was the October 1973 Yom Kippur War that triggered the first major international energy crisis. The Arab offensive had caught the Israelis by surprise, leading to initial Egyptian and Syrian gains but, within 2 weeks, Israel had counter-attacked and threatened to encircle and destroy the Egyptian Third Army. This led to two developments that created a sense of significant threat to US and Western interests. First, on 24 October, the Soviet Union threatened ‘unilateral action’ unless Israel stopped its military actions and started to move warships into the region. The US responded by raising the DEFCON alert for US military forces to 3 that was the highest level ever during the Cold War. This reflected a genuine fear that the Middle East region might be slipping under Soviet control.⁷¹ Second, there was the decision on 17 October by a Conference of Arab Oil Ministers to cut production by 5% per month and to raise prices by 70%, which was followed 4 days later by the Saudi decision to support a full oil embargo on the US. This was a radical shift for King Faisal and Saudi foreign policy, which had generally sought to avoid using oil as a weapon and relied on the US to fend off radical Arab nationalist threats.⁷² However, at this historical juncture, the general Arab resentments at Israel’s military and geopolitical dominance, materially and openly supported by the US, created pressure that Faisal could not resist. He also wanted to cement the improved bilateral relationship with Egypt under its new President, Anwar Sadat.⁷³

The Saudi decision to support the oil embargo caught the US by surprise. Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, joined James Schlesinger, the Secretary of Defence, in considering a military response. Kissinger reportedly claimed that ‘it is ridiculous that the civilized world is held up by 8 million savages. ... Can’t we overthrow one of the sheikhs just to show that we can do it?’⁷⁴ Plans were considered to invade Abu Dhabi. However, it quickly became clear that such a traditional colonial intervention would no longer work. However, this realisation of military impotence only exacerbated the general sense that the West was now vulnerable to the Arab oil weapon and that the US-dominated Western order had been fatally breached. In practice, Western vulnerability was less affected by the oil embargo, which was easily overcome, and more by the oil production cuts and oil price rises that went from a pre-war \$1.8 to a post-war \$11.65. Furthermore, scholars have argued that the internal dynamics and pricing mechanisms of the US market contributed more significantly to the severity of the 1973 crisis than is typically recognised.⁷⁵ This all had a direct material and negative impact on Western consumers and was a significant cause behind the emergence of a severe global economic recession.⁷⁶

The 1973 war was, therefore, a key constituent element in the 1970s oil energy crisis. It was not just that oil prices rose but that this was joined with a sense of existential threat in the West of a shift in power to the Arab world.⁷⁷ This perception of threat in the West set the stage for interpretations of the crisis that went beyond material factors, highlighting the role of narratives, media, and policy discourse in shaping understanding and response. For instance, Wellum, who takes a cultural approach to the 1970s energy crisis, argued that the crises were not only about material reality but also reflected competing, and sometimes overlapping, narratives that framed events

⁷¹ Galia Golan, *Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁷² Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America’s Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷³ Jeff D. Colgan, *Partial Hegemony: Oil Politics and International Order* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁷⁴ Sultan Alamer, ‘How Henry Kissinger bungled the Arab oil embargo’, *New Lines Magazine* (8 April 2024), available at: <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/how-henry-kissinger-bungled-the-arab-oil-embargo/>, accessed 21 January 2025.

⁷⁵ M.A. Adelman, ‘Is the oil shortage real? Oil companies as OPEC tax-collectors’, *Foreign Policy*, 9 (1972), pp. 69–107; Robert M. Solow, ‘The economics of resources or the resources of economics’, *American Economic Review*, 64:2 (1974), pp. 1–14; Robert D. Lifset, ‘A new understanding of the American energy crisis of the 1970s’, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 39:4 (2014), pp. 22–42.

⁷⁶ Øystein Noreng, *Crude Power: Politics and the Oil Market* (I.B. Tauris, 2005).

⁷⁷ Rüdiger Graf, ‘Making use of the “oil weapon”: Western industrialized countries and Arab petropolitics in 1973–1974’, *Diplomatic History*, 36:1 (2012), pp. 185–208.

to serve various agendas.⁷⁸ Similarly, Mitchell contends that the ‘energy crisis’ was actively constructed through economic expertise, government policy discourse, and media narratives.⁷⁹ In this view, the framing and interpretation of events helped justify new economic policies, energy strategies, and shifts in political power, including the promotion of neo-liberal reforms. Taken together, these works underscore how both structural market conditions and the discursive construction of the crisis shaped its political and economic consequences. The sense of vulnerability that the crises created, feeding on the feelings of intense resentment, was only exacerbated by the Iranian revolution in 1979, followed by the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan in 1980. In this sense, the 1979 shock can be seen as a continuation of the dynamics initiated by the 1973 crisis that had reconfigured the global oil market and strengthened OPEC’s pricing power. These structural and political shifts amplified the impact of 1979 and reinforced Western insecurity and the broader economic and political repercussions of the decade-long energy turbulence.

The trigger of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine

The trigger for the Russian international energy crisis was, in contrast to the Arab case, proactively determined by Russia rather than a reactive response to an immediate external threat. The trigger was the decision to initiate a full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the aim to overthrow the government and conquer the country.⁸⁰ This decision was at a qualitatively different level and scale compared to earlier military interventions which had either been internal (such as Chechnya) or involved border regions of neighbouring countries (Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014).⁸¹ In these earlier conflicts, Russia largely refrained from signalling, through its rhetoric and actions, that energy could be wielded for political purposes. It had long sought to protect, going back to the Soviet period, its reputation as a reliable supplier of oil and gas and that, like other suppliers, continually sought to maintain its market share.⁸² Europeans mainly bought into the belief that the interdependence between Russia and West European energy markets meant that it was inconceivable that Russia would be willing to risk the loss of these long-term economic benefits through short-term political calculation.⁸³

This type of conciliatory, engagement-oriented approach was particularly strong in Germany, France, and Italy. It reflected long-standing economic and energy ties with Russia, which developed since the late 1960s.⁸⁴ By contrast, East and Central European states, particularly Poland and the Baltic countries, often viewed Russia with considerable apprehension. Tensions began to emerge following the accession of the Eastern and Central European countries to the EU.⁸⁵ Moreover, in the 2000s, Moscow also became concerned about European Commission initiatives, such as the Third Energy Package, which it perceived as attempts to undermine Russian influence. In response, Russia sought to circumvent the package by building the South Stream pipeline, although the project ultimately failed to materialise, much to Putin’s personal displeasure.⁸⁶ The main point of

⁷⁸ Caleb Wellum, *Energizing Neoliberalism: The 1970s Energy Crisis and the Making of Modern America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023).

⁷⁹ Timothy Mitchell, ‘The resources of economics: Making the 1973 oil crisis’, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3:2 (2010), pp. 189–204.

⁸⁰ Taras Kuzio, ‘Imperial nationalism as the driver behind Russia’s invasion of Ukraine’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 29:1 (2023), pp. 30–38.

⁸¹ Maria Snegovaya and Alexander Lanoszka, ‘Reclaiming what is ours: Elite continuity and revanchism’, *European Journal of International Security*, 10:2 (2025), pp. 252–270.

⁸² Per Högselius, *Red Gas: Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence* (Springer, 2013); Thane Gustafson, *The Bridge: Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁸³ Huawei Zheng, ‘Fragile interdependence: The case of Russia–EU relations’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 34:6 (2021), pp. 818–836.

⁸⁴ Jeronim Perović (ed), *Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁸⁵ Wojciech Ostrowski and Eamonn Butler (eds), *Understanding Energy Security in Central and Eastern Europe: Russia, Transition and National Interest* (Routledge, 2018).

⁸⁶ Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe* (Yale University Press, 2017).

friction in these disputes was over gas rather than oil. This reflected the strategic role of pipeline gas in Europe's energy security in both the West and the East. Despite all the setbacks and frustrations, Moscow continued to prioritise maintaining good relations with Western states, particularly with Germany, well into the early 2020s, culminating in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

However, with the 2022 invasion, Russia put to one side all its traditional caution in protecting its reputation as a reliable supplier, demonstrating that the level of intense resentment or *ressentiment* had reached a point where it was willing to allow geopolitical interests to override economic rationality. Prior to the invasion, Gazprom drastically reduced gas in the storage facilities it owned in Europe to a bare minimum.⁸⁷ In the next move, as the support for Ukraine deepened, Russian energy companies cut off gas supplies to Poland, Bulgaria, and Finland, and in the summer of 2022, Gazprom rapidly decreased the gas flow to other European customers, including Germany.⁸⁸ A pivotal moment came in September 2022 when three pipeline strings were seriously damaged: both strings of Nord Stream 1, which carried the bulk of Russian gas to Europe, and one string of Nord Stream 2.⁸⁹ Overnight, on the eve of winter, Europe was almost completely cut off from Russian gas.⁹⁰ The Russian supplies fell from 155 billion cubic meters (bcm)/year in 2021 to 69 bcm/year in 2022 and further to 30 bcm/year in 2023.⁹¹

This second international energy crisis was not just driven by these immediate economic costs. The invasion of Ukraine also finally removed any doubt that Russia now represented an existential threat to European and international security. For the US and Europeans, the cumulative resentments in Russia that underpinned the invasion of Ukraine appeared as a form of *ressentiment* – a deep and unequivocal rejection of Western values and of the liberal international order. This generated its own sense of intense resentment at Russia itself, which was now viewed unambiguously, even by traditionally more sympathetic countries such as France, Italy, and Germany, as a radical revisionist state, dissatisfied with its post-Soviet borders and must now be seen as a major threat to NATO.⁹² The realisation after 2022 that Russia poses an existential threat to European security powerfully shifted the narrative, transforming its efforts to wield energy as a political weapon into a genuine international energy crisis. For Europeans, it shattered the complacency that the energy interdependence between Russia and Europe was a way to engage and pacify Russia and led to a profound resentment that its long-term trust in energy relations with Russia was now a vulnerability through which Russia could seek to punish Europe.⁹³

⁸⁷ European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Certain Aspects Concerning Gas Storage Based on Regulation (EU) 2017/1938 COM(2023) 182* (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023), available at: {<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TEXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0182>}, accessed 23 January 2025.

⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, 'Russia-Ukraine war: Gazprom cuts gas supplies to Poland, Bulgaria', *Al Jazeera* (27 April 2022), available at: {<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/27/russia-ukraine-war-gazprom-cuts-gas-supplies-to-poland-bulgaria>}, accessed 11 October 2025.

⁸⁹ Mark Bowden, 'The most consequential act of sabotage in modern times', *The Atlantic* (13 December 2023), available at: {<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/12/nord-stream-pipeline-attack-theories-suspects-investigation/676320/>} accessed 5 August 2026.

⁹⁰ Michael Finley and Anna Mikulska, 'Wielding the energy weapon: Differences between oil and natural gas', *Baker Institute for Public Policy* (26 June 2023), available at: {<https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/wielding-energy-weapon-differences-between-oil-and-natural-gas>}, accessed 23 January 2025.

⁹¹ Szymon Kardaś, 'Conscious uncoupling: Europeans' Russian gas challenge in 2023', *European Council on Foreign Relations* (13 February 2023), available at: {<https://ecfr.eu/article/conscious-uncoupling-europeans-russian-gas-challenge-in-2023/>}, accessed 23 January 2025.

⁹² Timothy Garton Ash, 'Postimperial empire: How the war in Ukraine is transforming Europe', *Foreign Affairs*, 102 (2023), pp. 64–75; Mitchell Orenstein, 'Securitisation of EU policy: How Russia's invasion of Ukraine is changing Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 33:1 (2025), pp. 1–22.

⁹³ Michael C. LaBelle, 'Breaking the era of energy interdependence in Europe: A multidimensional reframing of energy security, sovereignty, and solidarity', *Energy Strategy Reviews*, 52 (2024), Article 101314, pp. 1–13.

Stage 3: moving beyond resentment: political strategies and energy diversification

It was noted earlier that a key part of the definition of an energy crisis is that it has longer-term effects, beyond the short-term mutual grievances and resentments of the time, which include a determination by the targeted consumer states to reduce their exposed vulnerabilities through political diplomacy and energy diversification. This is a natural consequence of the significant degree of distrust that emerges through the surprise and trauma of the economically weaker energy producers using energy as at least partially an effective weapon of coercion. In the economic context, the energy crises of the 1970s and 2020s contributed to inflation and significant economic turmoil.⁹⁴ They also had major political effects with the rise of neoliberalism in the early 1980s and radical right-wing populism in the mid-2020s. At the same time, both crises, contrary to intention, reinforced the US-led energy order instead of derailing it, with successful counter-measures taken to either reduce the sense of resentment of the energy producers or materially to weaken their capacity to inflict economic and political pain.

Counter-reaction to the Middle East energy crisis

In the context of the 1967 Arab–Israeli conflict, the immediate US task was to assuage the immediate Arab source of resentment and dissuade Israel from exercising its military advantage and destroying the Egyptian Third Army. To do this, the US placed considerable pressure on Israel to agree to a ceasefire on 26 October 1973. Kissinger then followed the ceasefire with a very public exercise of ‘step-by-step’ diplomacy that resulted in several partial interim agreements between Israel and Egypt and Syria in 1974 and 1975.⁹⁵ The momentum towards a regional peace was dramatically increased by the decision of Sadat to visit Jerusalem in November 1977 that resulted in a separate Israeli–Egyptian peace deal 2 years later. In the context of these movements towards an Arab–Israeli peace agreement which appeared to seek to resolve the underlying sources of Arab resentment, the Arab embargo was lifted in March 1974 and the traditional pro-Western and cautious nature of Saudi diplomacy was restored.

Although the Iranian revolution and the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan created their own significant geopolitical turbulence and consequences for the West, the paradoxical effect on the US-dominated international energy order was to consolidate its strength and stability. For Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States, there was now no alternative but to rely fully on US military and political support to counter the heightened threats of Iranian revolutionary Islam and of Soviet penetration.⁹⁶ They could no longer contemplate challenging the US as they did in 1973. Western defences against the oil weapon were also strengthened by the OECD requirement for all member states to have 90 days of oil storage and by diversifying energy supplies, developing non-OPEC sources of oil and by promoting renewables and conservation measures. This in turn placed pressure on OPEC, never a unified force, with conflicts emerging over quotas, and general indiscipline and cheating.⁹⁷

Most importantly, these developments contributed to a broader structural transformation of the global oil system. From the late 1970s onwards, the oil market increasingly evolved into a genuinely global network characterised by a large and diverse set of producers, intermediaries, refineries, and consumers. As scholars working within the liberal tradition in the politics of energy have emphasised, the organisation of the oil market gradually shifted away from a relatively concentrated,

⁹⁴ Gerald A. Pollack, ‘The economic consequences of the energy crisis’, *Foreign Affairs*, 52:3 (1974), pp. 452–471; Annastiina Papunen, ‘Economic impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine: European Council response’, *European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)* (February 2024), PE 757.783, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757783/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)757783_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757783/EPRS_BRI(2024)757783_EN.pdf), accessed 11 October 2025.

⁹⁵ William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decision: American Policy toward the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1967–76* (University of California Press, 1977).

⁹⁶ Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, ‘Hegemony, force posture, and the provision of public goods: The once and future role of outside powers in securing Persian Gulf Oil’, *Security Studies*, 23:3 (2014), pp. 548–581.

⁹⁷ Giuliano Garavini, *The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

producer-dominated structure towards a more complex and highly interconnected system.⁹⁸ The expanding role of multiple actors, including independent traders, financial intermediaries, and global trading institutions, increased market liquidity and contributed to a greater capacity of the system to absorb and adjust to geopolitical and economic shocks.

Counter-reaction to the Russian energy crisis

In contrast to the Middle East energy crisis of the 1970s, the diplomatic attempts to find a way to resolve the conflict over Ukraine, and thereby to reduce Russian and Western sources of mutual resentment, failed to find significant traction, despite the efforts of the second Trump administration. As a consequence, most of the effort on the side of the Western consumer states was to diversify supplies, with the EU increasing Liquified natural gas (LNG) imports by 50 bcm and supplies of non-Russian pipeline gas by at least 10 bcm/year. As a result, LNG imports nearly doubled from 46 bcm/year before the war to just over 90 bcm/year in 2023.⁹⁹

The rise of LNG, prophesied for the last 20 years, as a way of moving gas from regionally isolated to internationally independent markets, ending traditional 'point-to-point' approaches, accelerated with the war in Ukraine. This development fitted well with the US-built international energy system in which the gas market should resemble the current commodity oil market and become another pillar of the post-1970 system.¹⁰⁰ Russia, on its part, had to reduce its output and was left with 150 bcm of spare capacity, the volumes that Gazprom had exported to Europe before the war. Consequently, Gazprom turned to Central Asia and the Caucasus for new markets and customers while China dragged its feet on the Power of Siberia 2.¹⁰¹

During the post-2022 period, the situation looked very different regarding oil. The Western countries were keen to use energy weapons in reverse (i.e., punishing the producer) but only up to a point. Shortly after the invasions, the G-7 states stopped oil imports from Russia. Yet, the policymakers did not want to remove Russian oil from the market altogether and create highly damaging price shocks akin to those in the 1970s. Instead, the objective was to reduce Russia's capacity to fight the war.

The war and the role that energy has played revealed some underlying truths about the US-led energy order. In essence, both sides want to uphold rather than radically restructure the system and have shown restraint. The sanctions the West imposed on Russia followed the pattern developed in 2012 in response to the Iran nuclear issue.¹⁰² In this sense, the Russians knew what to expect and could easily adjust to the new reality, which they did. The changes in the Russian–EU gas relationships are much deeper. Yet, in real terms, the Russian use of energy weapons only accelerated the inevitable. On the eve of the war in Ukraine, countries such as Poland had already diversified away from Russian supplies, whereas major customers such as Germany saw gas as merely a bridge rather than a future.¹⁰³ Russia's search for new markets in Asia, which is currently underway, was not a matter of if but when. Yet, in the short term, the Russian misadventures

⁹⁸ Andreas Goldthau and Jan Martin Witte, 'Back to the future or forward to the fast? Strengthening markets and rules for effective global energy governance', *International Affairs*, 85:2 (2009), pp. 373–90.

⁹⁹ Michael Bradshaw and Simon Pye, 'Future of Russian gas looking bleak as Ukraine turns off taps and Europe eyes ending all imports', *The Conversation* (13 January 2025), available at: {<https://theconversation.com/future-of-russian-gas-looking-bleak-as-ukraine-turns-off-taps-and-europe-eyes-ending-all-imports-246734>}, accessed 23 January 2025.

¹⁰⁰ James Henderson, 'The impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on global gas markets', *Current Sustainable/Renewable Energy Reports*, 11:1 (2024), pp. 1–9.

¹⁰¹ Michael McFaul and Evan S. Medeiros, 'China and Russia will not be split', *Foreign Affairs*, 4 (2025), pp. 1–14.

¹⁰² Thijs Van de Graaf, 'The "oil weapon" reversed? Sanctions against Iran and US–EU structural power', *Middle East Policy*, 20:3 (2013), pp. 145–163.

¹⁰³ Maximilian Hess, 'How Eastern Europe overhauled its natural gas market', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (22 April 2025), available at: {<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/04/how-eastern-europe-overhauled-its-natural-gas-market?lang=en>}, accessed 23 January 2025.

strengthened the US–EU energy ties. In short, the war in Ukraine, as was the case in the aftermath of the 1970s crises, further consolidated the US energy order rather than undermined it.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The central research puzzle that this article has sought to answer is why international energy crises are relatively rare, with only two major international energy crises occurring since the end of World War II. Traditional IR theoretical approaches, most notably realism and liberalism, offer insights into why such crises occur but do not explain why they occur only relatively rarely. The central argument of the article is that it is only when there is a heightened sense of resentment and *ressentiment*, not just in the producing but also the targeted consuming countries, that energy becomes weaponised and energy conflicts escalate into major international energy crises. On the side of the energy-producing states, it is only when there is a radicalisation of feelings of resentment and *ressentiment* that prompts them to shift from their normal risk-averse strategy, protecting a trade vital for their national prosperity, to a willingness to use their energy resources as a means of economic and political coercion. On the side of the targeted consumer states, this coercive strategy generates its own deep sense of resentment, with these states perceiving the energy coercion as not only legally and morally wrong but also as directly aimed at undermining core Western interests. These intensifications of mutual resentments lead the conflict to escalate into a full-blown international energy crisis.

The role of emotions in energy studies is relatively neglected, and this article seeks to provide new insights and explanations for understanding developments in the politics of energy, which draws from the growing body of work on emotions in IR. The article is also original in comparing the two major international energy crises of the 1970s and the 2020s. From a Western perspective, the longer-term outcomes of these energy crises that led to the restoration of the dominance of the US-led global energy system might appear to be reassuring. However, the rapid and unexpected escalation in these energy conflicts, and the significant economic and political costs that they posed, also highlight the fragility of a Western-dominated international order and the powerful resentments and anti-imperial struggles that this has historically generated. In the contemporary world, where populist resentments are becoming ever more intense, the prospects for a future international energy crisis cannot be discounted.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102125>.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers and the editor of the Review of International Studies for their thoughtful and constructive comments on the manuscript. We would also like to thank Dag Harald Claes from the University of Oslo and the participants at the workshop on Turbulence in Energy Politics that took place in London in December 2024 when the first draft of this manuscript was presented. Their comments and insights refined and significantly improved our argument.

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¹⁰⁴Boris Levebvre, 'How American energy helped Europe beat Putin', *Politico* (23 February 2023), available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/23/american-energy-europe-putin-00083750>, accessed 23 January 2025.

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