

QUÉBEC'S POLITICAL AUTHORITIES' REACTION TO THE 1973 OIL CRISIS

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In 1973, the oil crisis reminded Quebecers that oil, in addition to being a finite resource essential to their standard of living, was also a commodity vulnerable to unrest in oil-producing countries. Thus, on a political level, the crisis propelled oil into the centre of very animated debates on energy. The fear of a possible shortage or an endless embargo pushed Québec's political authorities to readjust provincial energy policies, whose foundations had been laid the previous year¹. They were also driven to examine the origins of the crisis and the situation in the Middle East. Finally, they developed a specific policy concerning the region and the troubling conflicts behind the oil crisis.

Researchers who have looked at relations between Québec and Middle-Eastern countries have noted the dominant role played by energy within this framework². They have also highlighted the undeniable interest that fluctuations in gas prices had aroused for this region³ and empirically demonstrated – through studies on bilateral relations – the will of the provincial authorities to encourage investments from Arab countries while

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1. Ministère des Richesses naturelles du Québec, *Les objectifs d'une politique québécoise de l'énergie* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1972).

2. Gérard HERVOUET and Hélène GALARNEAU (eds.), *Présence internationale du Québec. Chronique des années 1978-1983* (Québec, Centre québécois des relations internationales, 1984) : 293-312.

3. Lyne SAUVAGEAU and Gordon MACE, "Les relations extérieures du Québec avec l'Afrique et le Moyen-Orient", in Louis BALTHAZAR *et al.* (eds), *Trente ans de politique extérieure du Québec, 1960-1990* (Québec, Centre québécois de relations internationales, Éditions du Septentrion, 1993) : 251-289.

guaranteeing Québec's oil supply⁴. The question of Québec's policies regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict has never been the subject of an in-depth study⁵. However, some historians and political analysts have shown interest in the general attitude of Quebecers toward international conflicts. Their studies show that, since the Second World War, Québec society has gradually adhered to the principles of internationalism⁶. With this perspective in mind, an analysis of Québec's policy toward the Middle East during the 1960s and 1970s should allow for a better understanding of the effects that the oil crisis had in Québec and, regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, of how Québec's values played out on at the international level.

In fact, a state's reaction to this type of event could be explained several ways⁷. In this specific case, the geographical location of Québec, its membership in the Canadian federation, its political and economical interests, and pressure groups all limit its room to manoeuvre. However the actions of Québec's political authorities are also oriented by shared cultural factors such as norms, values and representations. More than a specific reaction to external stimuli, the response of the provincial authorities to the 1973 oil crisis demonstrated their gradual adhesion to the principles of internationalism and their changing perception of the Middle-Eastern states and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, during the 1960s, they did not see the emerging Arab nations as important players on the international stage, while the Arab-Israeli conflict was perceived as a regional issue which did not concern Québec. After the oil crisis, the Arab Middle-Eastern countries became key figures in the world and the conflict which opposed them to Israel became an international crisis, the unfolding of which directly affected the province.

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4. Robert AIRD, "Les débuts d'une politique particulière au Moyen-Orient", in Stéphane PAQUIN (ed.), *Histoire des relations internationales du Québec* (Montréal, VLB, 2006) : 108-117.

5. The subject is discussed in a few studies, but the references to the behaviour of the Québec authorities regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is part of a much wider discussion. See, among others, Jacques LANGLAIS and David ROME, *Juifs et Québécois français. 200 ans d'histoire commune* (Montréal, Fides, 1986) ; Gary CALDWELL, "L'antisémitisme au Québec", in Pierre ANCTIL and Gary CALDWELL (eds.), *Juifs et réalités juives au Québec* (Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1984), 292-323 ; Jean-François LISÉE, *Dans l'œil de l'aigle, Washington face au Québec* (Montréal, Boréal, 1990).

6. According to Roussel, for example, "[...] Québec society has gone from a vision of the world tinged with neutral, pacifist, and antimilitarist ideas to a strategic culture resolutely more internationalist, in which the respect of international law and the participation in multilateral institutions are considered essential [...]". Stéphane ROUSSEL, "Une culture stratégique en évolution", in Stéphane Paquin (ed.), *Histoire des relations internationales du Québec* (Montréal, VLB, 2006) : 279. See also Jame Ian GOW, "Les Québécois, la guerre et la paix", *Revue canadienne de science politique, Société québécoise de science politique*, 3, 1 (1970) : 88-122.

7. On this subject, see, among others, Dario BATTISTELLA, "L'intérêt national. Une notion, trois discours", in Frédéric CHARILLON (ed.), *Politique étrangère. Nouveaux regards* (Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2001) : 139-166.

To verify this hypothesis, it is first necessary to understand the energy situation in Québec and to define the international role it played before 1973. It then becomes possible to study the behaviour of provincial political authorities toward the Middle East and to identify their shared representations of the region and of the conflict unfolding there. Finally, the article analyzes the years following the oil crisis in order to better understand its effects.

THE ENERGY SITUATION AND FOREIGN POLICY IN QUÉBEC DURING THE 1960s

During the 1960s, disruptions caused by the brinkmanship in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the resulting impact of a potential embargo on Canadian oil policies, created a fragile situation in Québec. Also, even if the international role of the province was becoming more significant, it was still quite limited. Finally, Québec's political authorities had reservations about the Middle East and did not see any advantage in maintaining close relations with the oil-exporting Arab states. All these elements explain the vulnerability of the province in 1973.

On an international level, the Arab states' expanding control of oil prices gave them political power. Latin America was the first region to struggle with the oil companies, at the turn of the 1940s⁸, but in the Middle East, the key moment was the creation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960. This cartel, reinforced over the years with the admission of new members, soon controlled close to 50 % of the world's production⁹. It could therefore influence the international price of oil, a privilege that only oil companies had enjoyed up until then. At the same time, the unity of the Arab world was reinforced with the creation of the Arab League (1945), the coming to power of charismatic and prestigious leaders – Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt (1953) and Mouammar Kadhafi in Libya (1969) –, the outbreak of conflicts that united the Arab states against Israel and the West (1948, 1956, 1969), and the creation of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC, 1968). Thus, when countries which favoured a more uncompromising approach toward Israel –

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8. Mexico nationalized the hydrocarbon resources when Petrolios Maxicanos (PEMEX) was created in 1938 and Venezuela made the sharing of profits compulsory for all oil companies in 1943. Iran tried to follow this path by creating the National Iran Oil Company in 1951.

9. André NOUSCHI, *Pétrole et relations internationales depuis 1945* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1999), 116.

such as Syria, Algeria, Iraq and Egypt – joined OAPEC between 1972 and 1973, a potential oil crisis became imaginable.

Meanwhile, on the Canadian political front, changes to the country's oil policy meant that Québec was no longer assured secure access to oil from western Canada. Indeed, after 1945, world demand for hydrocarbons grew rapidly and the Middle East, with its impressive reserves and low cost of extraction, gradually became the main oil-producing region. The competitive price of Middle-Eastern crude oil represented a threat to western Canada, which was already affected by the 1957 American protectionist policies on oil imports. In 1961, the federal authorities divided the Canadian market into two regions, east and west of the Ottawa Valley (Borden Line), to protect western Canada's oil production¹⁰. From then on, Ontario and the Western provinces would use Alberta oil, whereas Québec and the Atlantic Provinces imported their oil from abroad. During the 1960s, Québec was paying less for oil, which increased the share of oil among its energy sources, to the detriment of other sources¹¹. With no supply from the West, Québec's refineries could not compete on the Ontario market and, more importantly, the province remained totally dependent on supplies from overseas.

In spite of the gradual changes brought on by Québec's Quiet Revolution, the international role that the province could play remained limited. The provincial authorities continued to consider that any response to an eventual international oil crisis remained a federal responsibility. Indeed, until the end of the Second World War, international relations largely involved questions falling under federal jurisdiction, such as defence. In the years that followed, international relations began to extend to new sectors – such as culture, health, labour and education – which were under provincial jurisdiction according to the constitution. Nevertheless, between 1944 and 1959, the Union nationale government, like the French-Canadian voters who had elected it, appeared to strongly favour minimal governmental

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10. Before 1957, Canada was exempted from American protectionist measures on oil imports, but, without this protection, Canadian producers lost access to this important neighbouring market. The restoration of the exemption from American controls on Canadian oil in 1959 required that Canada, like the United States, maintain higher prices than those on the world market. It therefore became necessary to put an end to the competition between products that were refined in Québec – bought at a lower price on the outside market – and Western crude oil in Ontario. To do so, the federal authorities divided the country in two regions each side of the Ottawa Valley. Québec continued to buy its crude oil from other countries, but lost its access to the Ontario market. Jean-Paul CUSTEAU, "L'impact de la politique nationale du pétrole (1961) sur l'industrie québécoise de raffinage" (Master's essay (Economy), Montréal, McGill University, 1981) : 20-41.

11. Carl E. BEGIE and Judith MAXWELL, *Les points faibles de la situation énergétique du Québec* (Montréal, Institut de recherches C. D. Howe, 1977), 33.

intervention in external events, which seemed to concern it little. It was only after the election of the Liberals in 1960 that reforms in health, education and energy were introduced, along with changes to the provincial government's role in international relations¹². Admittedly, as Stéphane Paquin has noted, the Liberal program did not include a chapter on international relations¹³, but the wish to modernize and affirm the identity inherent to the Quiet Revolution pushed the provincial authorities to concern themselves with the outside world¹⁴. For them, it was not a question of interfering in Ottawa's affairs, but to recover sectors that had been abandoned by previous provincial governments¹⁵. In short, on the international scene, provincial authorities considered that Québec must be proactive in attracting the know-how and investments necessary to modernize the province and contribute to the growth and promotion of its culture in Québec, Canada and the world. However, the Middle East continued to attract little interest and the planning of a strategy for this turbulent region did not correspond to the new conception of Québec's role in the world.

QUÉBEC'S RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST DURING THE 1960s

During the 1960s, the Arab states of the Middle East, caught between the American and Soviet blocs, never imposed themselves as leading partners in the eyes of Québec's provincial authorities. Also, for these authorities, primarily in need of expertise and funding, the Arab-Israeli conflict was seen



12. It must be said that circumstances favoured the development of international relations : the flexibility of the Canadian constitution regarding the international role of the provinces, the flexibility of the Lester B. Pearson government with regards to Québec's demands, Charles de Gaulle's openness to the Francophonie, and Expo 67 held in Montreal all contributed to an environment favourable to Québec playing a greater role on the international scene. On this subject, see, among others, Louis BALTHAZAR, "Les relations internationales du Québec", in Alain G. GAGNON (ed.), *Québec. État et Société* (Montreal, Québec/Amérique, 1994) : 506-510.

13. Stéphane PAQUIN (ed.), *Histoire des relations internationales du Québec, op. cit.*, 23.

14. For example, France was the source of many innovations in various fields, notably in education, while the United States had the necessary financial assets to complete numerous projects, such as the nationalization of electricity-producing companies. Recognition by France and the international Francophonie contributed to the legitimacy of Québec's demands regarding its cultural identity.

15. The well-known Gérin-Lajoie doctrine is very eloquent in this matter : [Translation] "There was a time when the exclusive rights of Ottawa to intervene in international affairs was not very detrimental. [...] But nowadays, it is otherwise. [...] When the Québec government becomes conscious of its responsibility in the fulfillment of the particular destiny of Québec society, it does not wish to leave the power to apply conventions concerning objects that are of provincial competence to the federal government". See Paul GÉRIN-LAJOIE, "Doctrines Gérin-Lajoie. Allocution du ministre de l'Éducation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, prononcée devant les membres du Corps consulaire de Montréal le 12 avril 1965", Ministère des Relations internationales : http://www.mri.gouv.qc.ca/fr/ministere/histoire_ministere/documents_archives/discours_gerin_lajoie.pdf (accessed 10 January 2010).

as a regional crisis whose origins and issues did not concern the province. Finally, a nationalist interpretation of the conflict led them to see its solution as the political and economic emancipation of the countries of the Middle East.

During the 1960s, relations with the Middle East were therefore limited to timid contacts within the framework of a multilateral Francophonie. But at the beginning of the 1970s, there was some interest in gaining access to the markets of the Middle East. Because Lebanon, like Québec, was a member of the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique (ACCT) and a Québec immigration agent was already present in Beirut, some provincial authorities saw this country as a possible stepping stone to the Middle East. When questioned about the agent's presence in Beirut, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Gérard D. Lévesque, explained that, even if it was not the only objective, it would be interesting if the post helped direct oil and petrodollars toward Québec¹⁶. However, despite this development, Québec's position regarding the situation in the Middle East had changed very little. The Arab countries were still seen as being caught up in a long process of emancipation, within a framework where the old colonial empires were being replaced by the American and Soviet superpowers. In such a context, the Arab-Israeli conflict generated little interest: it was seen as a regional conflict, "an added rivalry superimposed on that between the two super powers¹⁷". Québec's elected representatives saw the gradual political and economic emancipation of the Arab states as a solution to the conflict. According to them, it was important to avoid "the premature exhaustion of national petroleum resources so as to insure future economic development", and thus contribute to a rebalancing of the forces present in the south-eastern part of the Mediterranean¹⁸. Jacques-Yvan Morin was very explicit in underlining the legitimacy of the pressures that the Arab states generated by nationalizing their natural resources and by joining forces: "OPEC countries seek to reclaim, as they must, the production of hydrocarbons extracted from their soil¹⁹".

In fact, even as the Arab states took control of their resources, the eventuality of an oil embargo was not always seen as a menace. For example,

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16. *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 29^e législature, 4^e session, mercredi 30 mai 1973, B-2522.

17. [Translation]. Ministère des Richesses naturelles du Québec, *Les objectifs d'une politique québécoise de l'énergie*, op. cit., 1972, 91.

18. *Ibid.*, 94.

19. [Translation]. *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 1^{ère} session, 13 décembre 1973, 430.

the Minister of Natural Resources noted that, during the Six-Day War, the Arab suspension of supply to England did not really have the anticipated effects because “Iranian and American oil substituted for the usual supplies²⁰”. Moreover, Canada had considerable hydrocarbon resources of its own and most of Québec’s supply came from Venezuela²¹, one of the countries which had not reduced its exports in 1967. Finally, even if the provincial authorities were conscious of the risks of an eventual embargo and recognized the differences of opinion between Canada and Québec concerning the oil supply to the eastern part of the country, each government remained in their respective fields of responsibility as defined by their shared conception of Québec’s role in the world.

Thus, while the Arab states acquired significant control over the price of hydrocarbons and foresaw the possibility of using their oil resources as a means of modifying the policies of countries that supported Israel, Québec became more dependent than ever on foreign resources while continuing to favour negotiations at the federal level in the event of a world oil crisis²². Faced with an increase in the price of crude oil in the spring of 1973, Québec’s Minister of Natural Resources, Jean-Gilles Massé, explained that the situation was caused by the members of OPEC and said that he regularly conveyed the province’s concerns to Ottawa²³. His behaviour never gave rise to any objection on the part of the opposition in the National Assembly and there was never any suggestion that Québec should intervene directly in the matter.

And yet, when the Yom Kippur War broke out a few months later, the members of the opposition changed their attitude. In December of 1973, Jacques-Yvan Morin blamed the Liberal government for not having bypassed Ottawa to negotiate directly with the Arab countries so as to prevent Québec from being hit so hard by the oil crisis. Robert Bourassa defended himself by pointing out that Québec could not intervene within the framework of the Middle East conflict. But this time his argument did not convince the members of the opposition who believed that it was somehow

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20. [Translation]. *Ibid.*, 92. Between 1970 and 1971, although way behind Venezuela, among Middle-Eastern countries Iran was the main supplier of crude oil to Québec.

21. In 1972, Québec imported close to 60 % of its oil from Venezuela, whereas the countries of the OAPEC provided just over 15 % (Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/45, Bernard CLOUTIER, *Réflexions sur l’approvisionnement pétrolier du Québec*, 1973).

22. Ministère des Richesses naturelles du Québec, *Les objectifs d’une politique québécoise de l’énergie*, op. cit., 109 and 133.

23. *Débats de l’Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 29^e législature, 4^e session, jeudi 31 mai 1973, B-2555.

possible for the province to take control of the situation²⁴. Since the federal government had not been able to adequately defend Québec's interests in this vital issue, it became important to find Québec-specific solutions. The crisis in the Middle East gave Québec the opportunity to develop a more comprehensive policy of its own. With this change of attitude it was clear that Québec's political community was undergoing a cultural transformation. During the 1960s, the provincial authorities gradually realized the importance of the impact of international forces on internal affairs, and with the 1973 oil crisis this awareness reached a climax.

THE EFFECTS OF THE OIL CRISIS ON QUÉBEC'S ENERGY SITUATION AND ITS EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

When the impact of the 1973 oil crisis reached Québec, it revealed the province's weaknesses with regard to energy. Its political authorities drew up new objectives to protect the province against the repercussions of such an event. The fact that Québec was concerned by a crisis that was taking place beyond Canada's borders also prompted it to become more active internationally.

It is important to mention that even if Canada was not directly targeted by the 1973 boycott, since it was labelled a "neutral country²⁵" by OPEC, the action did lead to a reduction of its oil supply. Thereafter, it became difficult for Québec to rely exclusively on the federal government to remedy such a situation, especially since the pan-Canadian energy policy that Ottawa was developing was far from reassuring to Québec's political authorities, who saw it as an encroachment on provincial jurisdictions²⁶.

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24. *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 1^{ère} session, jeudi 13 décembre 1973, 431.

25. The position of the Arab countries was apparently explained by an Arab embassy in Canada. There were three categories of countries: the *friendly*, the *semi-friendly*, and the *neutral*. The first category received crude according to their internal and export uses, the second according to a quota based on their internal needs, and the third according to a fixed quota that would be reduced during the winter of 1973. *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 1^{ère} session, 13 décembre 1973, 437.

26. The federal authorities were to establish a price for all of Canada that would be artificially maintained below the international price. They would also protect Canadian consumers by imposing a tax on exports. For Alberta, the main Canadian producer, it was seen not only as an encroachment on their jurisdictions – namely, the control of their natural resources –, but also as a direct menace to profits and wealth that the province could generate from this resource. In Québec, these measures are just as coldly received. On the one hand, the hike in the price of energy suggested greater profitability in the long term for hydro-electricity, then in full expansion in Québec. The provincial authorities absolutely did not wish to reduce the anticipated profits generated by the James Bay project. On the other hand, they feared that the federal policy would ultimately reduce their exclusive responsibility for the field of energy by fixing the price and by favouring the greater interconnectedness with the Atlantic Provinces. On this subject see, among others, Bertrand DOUCET, "Le fédéralisme canadien et l'énergie. Les négociations fédérales-provinciales dans le domaine de l'énergie pétrolière (1973-1977)" (Master's essay (political science), Université Laval,

Even the construction of a pipeline between Sarnia and Montreal would not correct the situation in the medium and long term, because the province could not count on a continuous supply from western Canada, and would therefore remain dependent on foreign countries²⁷. It was also difficult to rely on South America, because the embargo created too much competition amongst buyers. Moreover, there were no oilfields in Québec. Finally, this vital commodity represented the majority of the energy consumed in the province (71 % in 1976)²⁸, it was expensive, harmful to the environment and, unlike the development of hydroelectricity, offered little in the way of economic spin-offs for Québec.

The provincial authorities saw several solutions which would allow them to diversify their sources of energy and their suppliers. For example, Québec could correct the weaknesses in its energy situation by increasing the share of electricity and natural gas the province used, by getting involved in the development of the Alberta oil sands, by participating in research and development related to the gas reserves in the Canadian Arctic, by intensifying the search for oil within Québec through the Société québécoise d'initiative pétrolière (SOQUIP), by increasing and securing imports from the Middle East²⁹, etc.

As for Québec's external affairs, the effects of the oil crisis are more difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, it seems that the crisis drove the provincial authorities to realize that international events could have an important impact on internal policies. It also taught them that it was not always wise to rely solely on the federal government to deal with an international crisis. Thus, it became clear that they had to defend Québec's interests abroad. The Department of Intergovernmental Affairs was restructured with, for example, the adoption in 1974 of the *Intergovernmental Affairs Department Act*. This showed the will of provincial authorities to consolidate the gains the province had made in the field of external affairs³⁰. According

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1980), and John Eric FOSSUM, *Oil, the State, and Federalism. The rise and the Demise of Petro-Canada as a Statist Impulse* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1977).

27. Direction générale de l'énergie, *L'énergie au Québec. 3/ Les problèmes. Livre blanc sur la politique énergétique québécoise, vol. 3* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1977), 10.

28. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

29. Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/45, Bernard Cloutier, *Réflexion sur l'approvisionnement pétrolier du Québec*, 1973; *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 2^e session, 28 mai 1974, B-2574-2575.

30. This law would, among other things, "[...] reinforce the department's decision-making capacity, in the drafting of intergovernmental policy, the negotiation and implementation of agreements made with other governments [...]" [Translation] (Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales. *Rapport annuel, 1974-1975* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec), 15-16).

to Shiro Noda, the province's activity on the international scene greatly increased and broadened to include the non-Western world during the 1970s³¹. Even if the changes were not only due to the oil crisis, the drafting of a specific policy for the Middle East was the clearest indication of the effect that the oil crisis had on Québec's international relations³².

THE EFFECTS OF THE OIL CRISIS ON QUÉBEC'S POLICY REGARDING THE MIDDLE EAST

This new attitude of the Québec's authorities was evidently the result of a change in their perception of the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. They now saw the Arab states as key actors on the international scene and the conflict which opposed them to Israel, "the main cause of the 1973 difficulties³³", as a political crisis with international implications that directly affected Québec. They therefore adjusted their behaviour according to this new reading of the situation. The creation of the Office of Arab Affairs in 1974 and the numerous projects of collaboration developed during the 1970s reflect the new importance given to the countries of the Middle East. The objective of the provincial authorities was to create a current of sympathy toward Québec in the Arab world³⁴, in order to solicit guarantees for the security of its oil supply, attract the funding necessary to develop large-scale projects, develop markets for Québec's know-how and, after 1976, find support for its sovereignty project.

In 1974, the objective of the contacts made with Syria, Iraq and Iran was to ensure Québec's oil supply. The tourism partnership with Syria would be "[...] capable of attracting the attention of neighbouring countries, including the oil supplying states, and to generate considerable profits for its authors [...]"³⁵. As for the opportunities presented by agreements with Iran

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31. Noda also notes a change in the priorities of priority sectors during the Quiet Revolution – culture, education, health – toward other sectors – immigration, industry and commerce, justice. Shiro NODA, *Entre l'indépendance et le fédéralisme, 1970-1980. La décennie marquante des relations internationales du Québec* (Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001), 283-5.

32. In fact, several factors could explain these changes. It was the case, for example, for many developing Third-World countries. This phenomenon created a new demand for North-American technology and Québec tried to jump at the opportunity to sell its expertise, particularly in the French-speaking countries of Africa, in the Middle East and in Asia.

33. [Translation.] Direction générale de l'énergie, *L'énergie au Québec. 3/Les problèmes. Livre blanc sur la politique énergétique québécoise*, vol. 3 (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1977), 15-6.

34. André Patry – who was named director of the Office of Arab Affairs in 1974 – proposed a series of measures which could enhance Québec's reputation. On this subject, see Robert AIRD, *André Patry et la présence du Québec dans le monde* (Montréal, VLB éditeur, 2001), 106.

35. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/64, André PATRY, *Les relations du Québec avec la Syrie, 1975; Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 2^e session, 28 mai 1974, B-2574-2575.

and Iraq, according to Robert Aird, the province “[...] was not able to respond to offers from both countries³⁶”. Consequently, Robert Bourassa chose Iran. Strategic considerations³⁷ no doubt guided this choice: contrary to Iraq, Iran was not part of OAPEC and, as shown by the 1967 war, the hazards of the Arab-Israeli conflict were less likely to affect relations with this country³⁸. However, the involvement of Syria in the civil war in Lebanon, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq War prevented Québec from moving forward in its relations with these three countries.

The quest for funding and markets also affected Québec’s relations with the Middle East. Since the nationalization of Québec’s hydroelectric companies, the provincial government had become increasingly involved in Québec’s energy development. The numerous projects in this sector, the scope of which often surpassed the province’s means, required foreign capital. Also, Québec expertise, developed thanks to its state-owned company, could also be developed as an object of international exchange. From this perspective, the technological needs of oil producing countries, as well as their capacity to pay, made the Middle East an attractive market. After Robert Bourassa’s trip to Iran in 1975, there was much debate in the National Assembly between the premier and the head of the Ralliement Créditiste on Iran’s economic potential. There was the possibility of selling bonds to Iran to finance the James Bay project at lower interest rates than those offered by American investors³⁹. Energy and cooperation with Hydro-Québec International were also at the heart of the discussions with authorities in Riyadh and Bagdad⁴⁰.



36. [Translation] Robert AIRD, “Les débuts d’une politique particulière au Moyen-Orient”, *op. cit.*, 113.

37. For Robert Aird this decision offered a more prestigious visibility offered by Iran to a premier concerned with his image and by the friendly relations that unite Claude Simard – Robert Bourassa’s brother-in-law and a minister in his Cabinet – and the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This interpretation has the merit of taking into account the human factor too often neglected in the field of history, to which it seems necessary to add undoubtedly fundamental strategic considerations. See Robert AIRD, “Les débuts d’une politique particulière au Moyen-Orient”, *op. cit.*, 114.

38. Ministère des Richesses naturelles du Québec, *Les objectifs d’une politique québécoise de l’énergie*, *op. cit.*, 92.

39. *Débats de l’Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 30^e législature, 3^e session, 4 novembre 1975, B-1715.

40. In 1979, for example, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who organized visits of Manic 5 and of the Institut de recherche d’Hydro-Québec for Saudi guests and for the Office of African and Middle East affairs, suggested to the elected members to be careful when commenting on the Arab-Israeli conflict so as to not compromise the Middle-Eastern dignitaries’ visit during the inauguration of the La Grande-2 (LG 2) dam. See Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales, *Rapport annuel: 1978-1979* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1978), 48; Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales, *Rapport annuel: 1979-1980* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1979), 55; Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/44, *Invitation aux ambassadeurs d’Israël et d’Arabie Saoudite*, 1979.

The Middle East also figured in the Parti Québécois government's pre-referendum strategy. France's support and the neutrality of the United States were essential to the viability of independence, but the support of a larger number of sovereign countries would undoubtedly make the process easier⁴¹. Therefore when Iraq's political authorities said they were ready to collaborate in the political and economic emancipation of Québec, René Lévesque's government studied with much interest the possibilities of commercial exchange with Bagdad, because "[...] Arab investments in Québec (in particular the purchase of Québec or Hydro-Québec bonds) would be a positive counterweight to the economic uncertainty that the federal government seeks to create [...]"⁴².

Québec's policy on the Middle East was reinforced by an official line of conduct regarding the conflict with Israel. The province adopted a position of flexible neutrality according to which "Québec would not require that its bilateral relations with the Arab countries and Israel be symmetrical or that their accounts be equivalent [...]" Québec's position was to be one of "neutral benevolence"⁴³ toward the Arab states that could further the interests of the province in the Middle East⁴⁴. The development of such a policy showed that the provincial authorities were now concerned by the issues affecting the region. Also, the fact that they systematically based their position on the principles of international affairs – such as condemning forceful measures, respecting international law and multilateral institutions – tended to confirm their gradual acceptance of this approach. This orientation



41. Moreover, the Office of African and Middle East Affairs would have learned that following a discussion amongst its members, the Arab League authorities would have informed him – confidentially – that "all the Arab countries were favourable to Québec's independence [...]" and that they were just waiting for the "moment when the United Nations would be informed of the problem to intervene in favour of Québec". Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, P422, Fonds André Patry, S2, contenant 1995-01-008/4, coopération de plusieurs pays arabes à l'économie québécoise, 1978.

42. [Translation] *Ibidem*.

43. The expression was used by Gérard Laliberté, François Leduc, and Denis Lacasse of the Office of African and Middle East Affairs to describe the approach that they recommended to the Arab states. See Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/44, Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, *Sans titre*, 1979.

44. As such, if it was true that the presence in the Parti Québécois government of individuals favourable to the Palestinian cause could have nourished this benevolent attitude, the official position of the Government was also – and mostly – based on strategic considerations. As Jean-François Lisée describes, the pro-Palestinian elements were mostly found in the labour-union wing of the party. See Jean-François LISÉE, *Dans l'œil de l'aigle...*, *op. cit.*, 289. Besides, the creation of the Québec-Palestine Committee was a labour-union initiative and the péquiste members of the National Assembly – Guy Bisailon, Roland Dussault, Adrien Ouellet and Jean-Pierre Charbonneau – who visited members of the PLO in 1980 were all labour-union activists. See Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2001-04-003/44, *Explication sur le récent voyage des députés du Parti Québécois au Liban*, 1980.

guided their reactions to the federal government's anti-boycott bill and when it was announced that the Canadian Embassy would be moving from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In 1979, the federal government announced its intention of legislating against the Arab boycott of Israel and its "allies". Québec's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs indicated in his 1979-1980 report that Québec "[...] had to dissociate itself from the federal position [...] because it jeopardized the development of promising economic exchanges for many of Québec's companies⁴⁵". And yet, the provincial authorities also condemned some aspects of the boycott that applied sanctions not only against Israel's allies, but also against any country or company wishing to do business with Israel. According to them, these aspects were "[...] contrary to the dispositions of the Charter of Rights [and an] intrusion in Québec's affairs and were difficult to accept [...]"⁴⁶. The Office of African and Middle-Eastern Affairs suggested that Québec's authorities tell the boycotting Arab countries that Québec's support for them was the result of a "positive attitude toward the Arab world [...] [and not] a negative attitude toward Israel"⁴⁷. Nevertheless, the Québec authorities decided not to support the federal anti-boycott legislation, considering that it might jeopardize the province's interests and that the Charter of Rights already condemned this type of discriminatory practice.

Furthermore, when Joe Clark announced that he intended to transfer the Canadian Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (which was not recognized as a capital city by the United Nations), the provincial authorities dug in their heels to defend Québec's position. In this case, their reaction was even more intense because, besides going against the resolution of the UN, Clark's gesture was strategically difficult to justify. According to André Patry, not only was it detrimental to Québec, but "[...] [the transfer] was giving something to a state and there was nothing in return for Canada, all while defying the international community which still refuses to recognize Jerusalem's territorial unity [...]"⁴⁸.

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45. [Translation] Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales, *Rapport annuel, 1979-1980* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1979), 54.

46. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/44, *sans titre*, 1979.

47. [Translation] *Ibidem*.

48. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/44, bureau des Affaires d'Afrique du Nord et du Proche-Orient, *Le Liban: un partenaire d'avenir ou un pays brûlé ?*, 1977.

Québec's attitude regarding Israel worried certain members of the Jewish community who saw it as being too favourable toward the Palestinians. It must be said that the provincial authorities had sometimes criticized the Jewish state. In 1978 for example, Paul Bernier, of the Office of African, Asian and Pacific Affairs, attacked Israel for trying to safeguard the new boundaries following the 1967 annexation "[...] by setting up settler colonies [and deploying...] a disproportionate military effort [...]"⁴⁹. Once again, the critics, preferring an international approach, argued in favour of the respect of the UNs resolutions which ordered a withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and condemned the use of force. In fact, the same principles also informed René Lévesque's unambiguous condemnation of the 1972 Palestinian attacks in Munich⁵⁰. In 1975, Paul Bernier stated that the PLO should display more moderation if it was to be accepted as a spokesman for the Palestinian people⁵¹. Claude Forget criticized the organization "[...] which was [in 1980] still engaged in terrorist activities⁵²". Furthermore, Israel generally seemed to be admired. For Paul Bernier, Israel was "an example for Québec" because "it succeeded with minimal resources in creating a viable country⁵³". The relations established with this new nation are a telling testimony to the admiration of many for its numerous successes⁵⁴.

Nevertheless, during the 1980s, the situation in Québec changed once again. The reduction of the share of oil in Québec's total energy consumption, the possibility of being supplied outside of OPEC (for example, from the North Sea) and the political instability in the Middle East

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49. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, 2002-04-003_44, Paul BERNIER, *Commentaire sur la demande d'entrevue de Monsieur Solomon auprès du Premier ministre*, 1978.

50. René Lévesque, « La Jungle », *Journal de Montréal*, 6 September 1972, 8.

51. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/44, bureau des Affaires d'Afrique du Nord et du Proche-Orient, *Le Liban : un partenaire d'avenir ou un pays brûlé ?*, 1977.

52. *Débats de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*, 31^e législature, 6^e session, 12 novembre 1980, 98.

53. [Translation] Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, 2002-04-003_44, Claude MARCHAND, *Suggestion pour l'interview de Monsieur Solomon*, 1978.

54. During the 1970s, Israel established itself as one of Québec's main partners in the Middle East. During the 1980s, the province sent missions there to study their linguistic experience and to become aware of the successes of Histadrut, the main labour organization of the country. The two countries also began an annual exchange program of university speakers. Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales, *Rapport annuel : 1979-1980* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1979), 55 ; Ministère des Affaires intergouvernementales, *Rapport annuel : 1980-1981* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1980), 64-5 ; Archives nationales du Québec à Québec, E42, Fonds du ministère des Relations internationales, contenant 2002-04-003/57, *Rapport de la Mission québécoise en Israël*, 1980 ; HERVOUET et GALARNEAU (eds.), *op. cit.*, 301.

were factors which disrupted the province's relations in this region of the world. In fact, Québec almost completely withdrew from this region during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the oil crisis changed Québec political authorities' perception of the Middle-Eastern countries and of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However it was not the cause of all the changes that occurred during the 1960s. Québec had already begun to intervene in the energy sector and in international affairs. The Middle East was slowly taking its place in the province's external relations. However, the energy crisis which followed the Yom Kippur War sped up developments. From then on, in the eyes of Québec's political authorities, the Arab states play a major role on the international scene and were no longer considered merely emerging powers. It also became impossible to ignore the Arab-Israeli conflict, which could no longer be seen as a regionalized crisis, but had to be regarded as an inter-state antagonism which affected many countries, including Québec. The Québec Government ultimately drafted a special policy for the Middle East, a policy centred on the energy sector. Finally, even if one simple case study cannot validate a hypothesis regarding a change of this magnitude, the increasing presence of international principles in the speeches of provincial authorities shows without a doubt the internationalization of Québec values.

From all appearance, the oil crisis did not only affect relations with Middle-Eastern countries, but also contributed to the emergence of an idea of interdependence which would, in time, become a fundamental characteristic of Québec's external affairs⁵⁵. The provincial authorities gradually become conscious of the impact that external events had on the local scene. Episodes such as the 1973 oil crisis and the civil war in Lebanon, which would drive many Lebanese citizens to Québec, or of the 1982 recession, which would be a severe blow to the province's economy, reinforced the idea of a community of nations whose fate was organically linked. Because the misfortune or prosperity of others may have



55. It is reflected in the wording of the central principle of the Parti Québécois' international policy in 1985 and that of the Liberal Party in 1991. See Ministère des Relations internationales, *Énoncé de politique de relations internationales : Le Québec dans le monde, le défi de l'interdépendance* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1985) ; Ministère des Relations internationales, *Le Québec et l'interdépendance : le monde pour horizon : Élément d'une politique d'affaires internationales* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1991).

repercussions in Québec, since the 1990s international aid has occupied an ever-growing place in Québec's relations, notably in North-African and Middle-Eastern countries.

(translation : Jeanne Valois)