

International networks for sustainable development: the world bank and Russian flaring legislation

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INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE WORLD BANK AND RUSSIAN FLARING LEGISLATION

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This paper deals with the international environmental norms on combatting the flaring of Associated Petroleum Gas (APG) and its adoption by Russia (decrees no. 7 and 1148). Flaring, or the systematic burning of associated gas during oil production, leads to the release of carbon dioxide and other harmful substances, endangering the surrounding and global environment. *Methods.* The authors use qualitative methods resting upon the analysis of primary and secondary documents, including articles from the media, legal texts, official communications and scholarly literature, to trace back the conditions that brought about the emergence of a distinct international norms condemning flaring. *Analysis.* The analysis of the norm through its life cycle reveals that the multi-faceted framing strategies employed by the Transnational Advocacy Network allowed the issue of flaring to gain salience in a relatively short timeframe. The flexible, durable, technical and apolitical approach adopted by the World Bank's Global Gas Flaring Reduction Private Public partnership explains the Russian Government's willingness to address the issue of flaring and to legislate on APG utilization. *Results.* The findings suggest that international campaigning for environmental protection need not be confrontational and that transnational advocacy networks may gain in efficiency if they adopt targeted strategies and systematically recode their message for each group of actors they plan to sensitize. *Authors contribution.* This article is based on research carried out by one of the authors, Anne Crowley-Vigneau for her dual doctoral thesis on international norms and Local Content policies completed at MGIMO University and the University of Reading. As the coordinating author she gathered the primary data through expert interviews. Andrey Baykov participated in coding, triangulating the data and studying legal documents. Prof. Yelena Kalyuzhnova, the supervisor of this research, provided guidance and created the research methodology. The writing of the paper was a joint effort of all three authors.

Key words: international relations, Russia, World Bank, flaring, norms, constructivism, transnational advocacy networks.

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ СЕТИ НА СЛУЖБЕ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ: ВСЕМИРНЫЙ БАНК И РОССИЙСКОЕ ЗАКОНОДАТЕЛЬСТВО В ОБЛАСТИ СЖИГАНИЯ ПОПУТНОГО ПРИРОДНОГО ГАЗА

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В данной статье рассматриваются международные экологические нормы по борьбе с сжиганием попутного нефтяного газа (ПНГ) и их применение в России (указы Президента № 7 и 1148). Факельное сжигание, или систематическое сжигание, попутного газа во время добычи нефти приводит к выбросу углекислого газа и других вредных веществ, создавая опасность для местной и мировой экологии. *Методы и материалы.* Через призму конструктивистской нормативной теории авторы рассматривают механизмы, ведущие к появлению и распространению международных норм, осуждающих факельное сжигание ПНГ, а также международные сети, участвующие в продвижении такого способа сжигания ПНГ. *Анализ.* Исследуя эволюцию данной нормы на протяжении всего ее жизненного цикла, авторы показывают, что многоаспектные рамочные стратегии, используемые транснациональной (международной) сетью защиты интересов, позволили проблеме факельного сжигания ПНГ стать заметной в относительно короткие сроки. Гибкий, долговременный, технический и аполитичный подход, принятый частно-государственным партнерством Всемирного банка по сокращению факельного сжигания ПНГ, объясняет готовность Правительства России решить проблему сжигания попутного газа и принять законы об утилизации ПНГ. *Результаты.* Полученные авторами данные показывают, что кампании по защите окружающей среды на международном уровне не обязательно должны носить конфронтационный характер и что транснациональные (международные) сети по защите интересов могут повысить их эффективность, если они примут целевые стратегии и правильно сформулируют свои послания для каждой группы субъектов, которых они планируют привлечь в такие кампании. *Вклад авторов.* Статья основана на исследовании, проведенном одним из авторов – Анн Виньо для ее двойной докторской диссертации по международным нормам и политике местного содержания, выполненной в Московском государственном институте международных отношений (Университете) МИД РФ и Университете Рединга. Как координирующий автор, она собрала первичные данные посредством интервью с экспертами. Андрей Байков участвовал в кодировании, триангуляции данных и изучении юридических документов. Профессор Елена Калюжнова, руководитель этого исследования, создала его методологию. Написание статьи осуществлялось авторами совместно.

Ключевые слова: международные отношения, Россия, Всемирный банк, факельное сжигание, нормы, конструктивизм, транснациональные сети защиты интересов.

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Introduction. Gas flaring went from being a rarely spoken topic and an industry specific phenomenon in the 1990s to a subject of

international concern in the 2010s as illustrated by the following quote by World Bank President Jim Yong Kim “Gas flaring is a visual reminder

that we are wastefully sending CO₂ into the atmosphere”.

While it was for decades seen as a necessary part of the oil production process, flaring or the deliberate and controlled burning of the Associated Petroleum Gas (APG) that naturally emerges when oil is extracted, is now considered a global and local environmental challenge, a waste of natural resources and a lost opportunity cost for oil companies. This change of perception has led multiple national governments to legislate on (APG) flaring and the O&G business and accompanying sectors to develop solutions to increase utilization rates. This paper attempts to uncover the actors and strategies that lie behind this rapid change in public consciousness.

The authors apply the theoretical framework of constructivist norm theory to reveal how a limited group of states concerned about flaring set up a platform to promote their message at the World Bank and gradually became an organized transnational network with leverage on the international community. The need to bring on board oil producing countries responsible for the majority of the flaring, including Russia, resulted in an original strategy based on compromise seeking rather than confrontation through ‘naming and shaming’. This paper follows the norm’s life cycle from its emergence to its diffusion and maturation in the international stage with the adoption of the Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 Initiative by which a number of states and oil companies committed to a complete discontinuation of flaring. The case of Russia’s adoption of the international norm with the national governmental decrees 7 and 1148, which limit flaring to 5% of APG, also considers. An analysis of the situation in Russia and the growing environmental awareness that resulted in the creation of the legislation reveals how the World Bank’s Global Gas Flaring Reduction Public Private Partnership’s multifaceted strategy attained its goals [31]. By representing flaring as a painless way for a state to meet its Kyoto protocol commitments on carbon dioxide reduction, framing it as a double lost opportunity cost and avoiding public criticism of flaring countries while providing technical support, the GGFR succeeded after some persistence in its communication campaign with Russia. By grafting flaring onto

the mature norm on climate change, the issue was removed from the national context of oil production and put into the international arena of shared environmental challenges. The findings of the case study suggest that international campaigning for environmental protection need not be confrontational and that Transnational Advocacy Networks may gain in efficiency if they adopt targeted strategies and systematically recode their message for each group of actors they plan to sensitize.

After presenting the research methods employed to carry out the case-study this paper is based on, the authors consider the context of the emergence and diffusion of international norms, putting them in their theoretical frame of the academic literature. The analysis of the emergence of an international norm to combat flaring and its adoption by the Russian government is followed by a review of the actors involved and the strategies adopted. The last part presents the authors’ findings, based on the Russian case-study, on the best strategies that allow transnational networks to successfully ensure the diffusion of international norms.

Methods and materials. A qualitative research design was employed to conduct this study, that is guided by “what” and “why” research questions: ‘What factors led to the emergence of the international norm on combatting flaring?’ and ‘Why did Russia adopt the international norm through decrees 7 and 1148?’. A constructivist and interpersonal approach was used to better understand the realities on the ground and the changes that brought about the adoption of the novel legislation but also its implementation. A qualitative approach helps not only to identify the different processes under way but also to understand the causal mechanisms that guide how they unfold. The study investigates the reasons behind norm adoption by means of a case study. The research was conducted with different data collection techniques, including a thorough review of official and legal documents, existing reports on the creation of the flaring legislation, media coverage and expert interviews. One of the authors conducted between February 2019 and March 2020 fourteen semi-structured interviews with international and Russian environmental experts working in spheres related to the fossil fuel industry

Table 1. List of respondents

Interview number	Gender	Place of work	Previous place of work	Position	Nationality	Interview Language
II-1	M	University	Oil company	Deputy Director	Russian	Russian
II-2	F	University	/	Director	Russian	Russian
II-3	F	Oil company	/	Director	UK	English
II-4	M	Oil company	/	Special Advisor	US	English
II-5	M	Private consultant	World Bank	Consultant	UK	English
II-6	F	Oil company	/	Director	Australian	English
II-7	M	Oil company	/	Project manager	Italian	English
II-8	F	Oil company	/	Environmental Specialist	Italian	English
II-9	M	World Bank	/	GGFR Program Manager	US	English
II-10	M	Russian Gas Society	Oil company	Executive Director	Russian	Russian
II-11	F	University	/	Associate Professor	Russian	Russian
II-12	M	Oil company	/	Director	Russian	Russian
II-13	F	Oil company	/	Environmental Specialist	Russian	Russian
II-14	M	University	/	Professor	Russian	Russian

Note. Compiled by one of the authors.

and in the World Bank (detailed list of interviews is given in Table 1). The interview process was set up to meet ethical best practices and to allow participants to remain anonymous. Respondents were debriefed on the objectives of the research and were told how the data would be processed and stored. Information sheets were given to all interviewees as well as consent forms to read and sign. The authors informed participants that their contribution could be retracted at any point until the final processing of the data. The reliability of the data provided and the final findings was checked by using different methods among which triangulation. Peer debriefing allowed the authors to make sure the codes created based on interview data truly reflected the information provided by the participants. First level thematic codes were processed to provide insights helping to respond to the research question. Through the analysis of primary and secondary documents, the authors trace back the conditions that brought about the emergence of a distinct international norm condemning flaring and its adoption by the Russian Federation.

Analysis. This section first considers the scholarly research on international norms and transnational actors, before describing the context of the case-study by defining flaring and qualifying

its place in the environmental agenda. It then traces back the emergence of the international norm and offers an original analysis of why it was adopted by the Russian government.

The interest of IR scholars in international norms increased sharply in the 1990s as constructivist scholars developed a new understanding of their emergence and functions. The analysis of international regimes from the 1980s onwards and the increased attention paid to international actors justified this new focus on international norms, which were no longer perceived as statecraft instruments [18] or a basis for international interaction [13], but as shared understandings of right and wrong [9]. In this light, international norms came to be interpreted not as the outcome of negotiations between states, but as intersubjective constructs arising through collective identities and beliefs [22]. In this novel line of thinking, states were viewed as exercising limited control over the emergence of norms. Conversely, the constructivist scholarship was asserting that norms were powerful enough to create new collective identities for states altering their motives, behavioral modes and outcomes [28]. The next generation of constructivist researchers focused on how international norms influence how state and social governance, domestically and

internationally, was thought of and organized in practice [8]. According to this strand of literature, norms in International Relations need not be codified and can develop regardless of their being formally recognized. Whereas international norms may not be universally respected, the infringement of mature norms typically leads to criticism and reputational damage. Indeed, breaking an international norm amounts to behaving in a way that is unacceptable to the international community. Furthermore, norms that are internalized may not even be recognized as being prescriptive norms [8]. While the acceptance of new international norms may at first result from a “logic of consequences” linked to fear of different forms of punishment, states rapidly embrace the “logic of appropriateness” and the desire to meet expectations of good conduct outweighs fear of reprisal as a motivation for their conduct [16]. Habit may also explain why states continue to respect international norms, which may not play to their material advantage [10].

A number of studies have concentrated on the life cycles of norms, including their emergence, codification, diffusion, maturation, but also their possible contestation and death. Some of the most popular models are the evolutionary pattern developed by (1990), the norm life cycle described by Sikkink and Finnemore (1998) and the spiral model by Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1999) [21; 23]. New norms either gain international acceptance carried by international actors involved in their promotion and get grafted onto existing norms [12] or are subject to popular contestation [29], which leads in extreme cases to norm reversibility or death [26]. The effectiveness of mature norms in bringing about social change has also been a subject for academic discussion. Even though Young pointed out that the best way to determine if a norm performs well is to assess whether it has resolved the issues it set out to correct [32] the dynamics of time and changes of context mean two situations are never perfectly comparable, leading to disagreements regarding how effective norms are. Research on international norms is closely linked to the notion of norm entrepreneurship, as transnational actors have been found to have a significant impact of normative outcomes.

While transnational actors have been operating since the 19th century, globalization has given them a new impetus, turning them into highly influential political agents. The empowerment of different types of actors alongside states has contributed to the emergence of multiple decision-making levels, spanning from the local to the international level. Constructivist research on transnational networks highlights an exponential increase in their number, size, professionalism and the speed at which they have been operating since the 1960s [12].

Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) as one example of such actors are aimed at defending a cause and have been associated with the promotion of international norms. They may comprise actors “such as but not limited to NGOs, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals, parts of intergovernmental organizations, parts of governments” [12, p. 68]. Networks draw their strength from their flexible, non-hierarchical structure and typically deal with issues neglected or deliberately set aside by national governments. TANs raise awareness regarding these issues, rally support, disseminate information, set agendas for international discussions, frame problems to increase their visibility as well as encourage governments to take a stance. Thus, by providing information about issues to governments and the general public, by pushing topics to the top of the international agenda, by making governments commit to change, they can incite states to develop a legal framework that meets the interests of a given cause.

Framing plays a key part in the strategies adopted by Transnational Advocacy Networks, and can be defined as an attempt made by a group to diffuse a particular vision of a situation [17]. TANs may pressure governments to modify their stances on key problems and even act against their own interest by threatening to have them ostracized by the international community, according to the boomerang effect [12]. Nevertheless, TANs may act in a non-confrontational manner, making use of public and network diplomacy [20], to promote in cooperation with national governments new legislation as illustrated by the findings of this article.

The case-study explored in this paper considers the environmental problem of flaring, defined as “the process by which natural gas is burned off in a controlled manner when extracting oil” [5]. Upon extracting oil, gas naturally comes out and it is burnt if there is no opportunity or infrastructure to productively use it. While several decades ago, flaring was measured based on vague estimates, satellite data is not widely available on the international arena. As the interest in flaring increased globally, the Global Gas Flaring Reduction Partnership (a World Bank initiative dedicated to raising awareness) was created and it focused among other things on producing flaring estimates as part of a partnership with the Colorado School of Mines. A major leap forward took place from 2012 onwards, as the international community gained access to objective information on the volumes flared by region and country.

Flaring became the object of international attention as awareness grew concerning the risks and lost opportunities associated with this practice. “Flaring has an underestimated economic cost, as it is a waste of natural gas, a non-renewable natural resource which could otherwise be used in positive economic activities to increase the well-being of society. Flaring is a negative externality resulting from the extraction and production of petroleum. As stocks of petroleum become depleted, the preservation of this gas (which can be re-injected, for example) may become essential” [5, p. 141].

The impact of flaring is also considerable, although it depends for a large part on how efficient the combustion is, the properties of the gas and the location of the flaring. Fuel components which are ejected into the atmosphere without being processed have dire consequences and can be associated with thermal pollution [19; 25]. CO₂ and methane when released into the atmosphere have serious effects on the global atmosphere. These greenhouse gases have been associated with rapid global warming and concerns regarding this problem have grown over the last few decades, prompting binding commitments by states to reduce emissions in the framework of the United Nations (Kyoto Protocol) as part of an international initiative to combat climate change. The consequences of gas flaring are the most obvious around sites where the flaring takes place. Acid rain can result from the evaporation of

dangerous substances, particularly in humid areas such as offshore platforms [25].

The risks of flaring for human health are still being investigated, but a number of negative effects have been identified, including breathing problems that result from toxins released in the atmosphere. The US Environmental Protection Agency has established firm links between flaring and leukemia, thyroid cancer, intestinal and stomach illnesses due to inhalation of harmful substances or drinking contaminated water [11].

As the environmental and health consequences of flaring became public knowledge, different actors mobilised to increase awareness regarding dirty emissions and flaring, with significant changes starting in the 1990s. Transnational actors and international organizations (United Nations, World Bank) started to raise public knowledge about global warming and explored the causal relation between flaring and changes in the climate [6, p. 198]. New measures to address environmental protection emerged at all levels of cooperation, from local and national legislating to bilateral and international agreements [3]. The UN and the WB joined efforts with motivated states and norm promoters to launch the first international project designed to address the problems presented by flaring: the World Bank’s Global Initiative on Gas Flaring Reduction [30].

The United Nations’ Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted in 1992 clearly states the anthropological causes of climate change and presents a strategy to curb greenhouse gas emissions in an attempt to stabilize atmospheric temperatures before humanity reaches the point of non-return. Although the Convention on Climate Change offered no enforceable commitments to reduce greenhouse gases, the 1997 Kyoto protocol changed strategy by seeking binding objectives and ensuring states follow up on their progress. The 2010 United Nations Climate Change conference added to the Kyoto Protocol by creating several policing mechanisms to ensure states met their commitments. These different initiatives embraced by the UN guided the international community in starting the fight against climate change and led to the general acceptance of the idea that combatting global warming and inequality should be done simultaneously as part of a united plan

financially supported by the wealthier countries of the world.

The Prototype Carbon Fund was created by the World Bank in 1999 and “aimed at catalyzing the market for project-based greenhouse gas emission reductions within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, while contributing to sustainable development” [30]. The project was aimed at incentivising states to create an international market to trade carbon emissions by using pricing and exchanges to ultimately curb global emissions. This program was not designed to deal with flaring, but, as states were considering the ways in which to reduce emissions, they quickly turned to flaring as a means of cheaply improving their environmental performance. Indeed, countries producing fossil fuels become conscious of the fact that reducing flaring could help them meet their targets to decrease carbon dioxide emissions. A number of states, in particular Norway, banned routine flaring as early as in 1971. Norway also introduced a CO₂ tax in 1991, which further discouraged flaring [7].

Another state with forward thinking on flaring issues was Canada. The Alberta Energy Regulator in Canada started early on to regulate flaring and by the 1980s was ready to share its experience. A number of directives adopted by the government were successful in making gas producers stop routine flaring by requiring that they define their flaring reduction goals in function of their capacities, thus launching a competition between companies to be the best performer. The regulator then only intervenes in cases where companies are not fulfilling their commitments or are experiencing other types of difficulties [2].

These highly motivated states moved in the 1990s from an uncoordinated reduction of flaring to a more organised and collective approach. The World Bank became a platform to coordinate efforts to fight flaring and bring new actors aboard. Two dedicated programs were designed: the Global Initiative on Gas Flaring Reduction (2000) and the Global Gas Flaring Reduction Public-Private Partnership (2002). The government of Norway and the WB created a public forum to review the issue of flaring and discovered that a number of countries and organizations had been working on the problem. They decided to set up a workshop and the government of Norway later

created a trust fund to finance environmental initiatives in this direction. A meeting on flaring ensued with a large number of governments and firms invited, including international representatives of the fossil fuel industry. The project was created to last for 3 years, at the end of which the major players were expected to meet their goals of stopping flaring. The optimistic deadline has since then been pushed back multiple times. The Global Initiative on Gas Flaring Reduction became operational in 2000, with 17 companies and 6 governments as members. The main tasks of the program were awareness raising, capacity building and knowledge transfer.

The Voluntary Standard for Global Gas Flaring and Venting Reduction, a guide for states looking to significantly reduce their gas flaring and improve their environmental performance was created by the partners of the organisation. The target of the program became progressively more defined and as the notion of sustainable development was being globally diffused, the carbon reduction program was put together. Putting a price on flaring was a way to make all actors conscious of the environmental impact of their activities and it rapidly became a key instrument to limit flaring. The participants were also committed to extending and deepening their partnership by bringing new members aboard and setting up high-level events to highlight the risks and solutions to APG flaring.

The Global Gas Flaring Reduction Public-Private Partnership (GGFR) was officially created in 2002 as a Public-Private partnership that has different levels and types of local, regional and international actors as members. Different players reacted to the suggestion to join the initiative at various times, with the government of Nigeria and some global companies from the fossil industry coming aboard immediately such as BP, Chevron and Shell.

Initially funded by a handful of determined states, the GGFR slowly developed a network of partners in the private sector willing to help pay for its activities. Corporations typically gave 150,000 dollars a year, but Norway remained for a long time the main actor supporting the GGFR. The fossil fuel industry also contributed the work of their employees by sending them on fully-paid secondments to the GGFR and governments sent civil servants according to a similar scheme. Some

countries joined the initiative later and never financially contributed to the program, however as major flarers, their participation was essential for the program to reach its announced goals.

The GGFR initiative began its activities in the WB with half a dozen of employees forming a stand-alone team dedicated to the initiative. The GGFR has for stated goal “to increase the use of natural gas associated with oil production by helping remove technical and regulatory barriers to flaring reduction, conducting research, disseminating best practices, and developing country-specific gas flaring reduction programs” [31]. The GGFR offers help to governments and local authorities by diffusing information on the best ways to develop legislation targeting flaring and set up infrastructure to utilise associated petroleum gas. The GGFR is also a place where private and public actors can share their ideas and technical solutions, keep track of their progress and seek assistance with challenges they encounter along the way. The WB also allocates funding to the GGFR as its goal to reduce flaring is in line with the targets of the international organization that aims to reduce poverty globally and support the development of underprivileged populations. Flaring has been associated with poverty as local populations not only suffer from the damaging health effects of the flares but are frequently deprived of energy. Utilizing APG can allow for a double win as these communities can gain access to electricity. “Natural gas is an instrument, which helps put countries on the path of sustainable development as it has low carbon emissions” [9]. Gas that is not flared can be used to create electricity for flexible grids.

The creation of the GGFR is a watershed moment for the global norm against flaring as it significantly increased its visibility. Transnational networks were successful in framing the issue of flaring in different ways in order to appeal to different audiences. Flaring was deliberately portrayed as an economic issue when conducting discussion with businesses, as a development and human rights issue when dealing with civil society and an environmental issue when in talks with actors sensitised to climate change issues [6, p. 199].

From an economic standpoint, the argument against flaring underlines the lost opportunity costs of wasting a valuable and non-renewable natural resource. Fossil fuel producers can appreciate the

bottom line argument that consists in saying that utilising associated petroleum gas could lead to an increase in income and possibly in profits if reliable and effective utilisation methods are adopted. Corporations can also make it their business to design and help the oil and gas industry implement APG utilization projects which can be extremely lucrative [11]. National governments with large fossil fuel reserves may also be sensitive to this type of framing, particularly if local communities do not have access to readily-available energy. The example of Nigeria that released in 2013 17.2 billion cubic meters of flared natural gas in the Niger Delta, shows that the country’s APG that year, had it been utilized, could have covered 25% of the energy demand of the whole of Africa [1]. Governments are also becoming aware of the waste that flaring represents and the real possibility that the world may experience a shortage of gas in upcoming decades. The idea of burning precious non-renewable resources is becoming increasingly unacceptable. The GGFR and its members use the economic argument to conduct talks with the oil industry and national governments and encourage them to reduce flaring. Other arguments may however be more powerful, such as the ones presented beneath.

Flaring can also be successfully framed as a human rights problem, as the communities affected by flaring tend to be living on the brink of poverty and often do not have access to energy themselves. Flaring in the developed world is usually restricted to remote and unpopulated areas. In developing countries, however, people often live near flaring sites and, while they are inconvenienced by the flares, they are unaware of the damage it causes to their health and readily use the areas around the flames to dry their washing, their fish etc. The GGFR, in the message it conveys to the global public, deliberately entwines the problem of flaring with developmental challenges and the need to support vulnerable communities. Reducing flaring globally becomes a way of promoting development. The key message of this framing strategy is to show that putting an end to flaring allows counties to improve the wellness and quality of life of their population. A review of the projects launched by the GGFR in Africa reveals that while the goal is unquestionably to reduce the flaring, there is another objective which is to ensure that local people have access to energy. While the developmental

approach can be highly attractive, the most prominent message currently put out by the World Bank is that flaring is primarily an environmental catastrophe which needs to be dealt with urgently.

Flaring is indeed most efficiently portrayed as an environmental issue as the problem of climate change is becoming increasingly accepted as the main challenge of the 21st century. When entering into discussions with governments of Western countries, the GGFR puts an emphasis in the unnecessary pollution generated by flares. The oil and gas representatives are pressured to make their energy production greener and combatting flaring is an efficient way of improving the environmental performance of their businesses. The population of developed countries is highly aware of environmental concerns and this has a direct impact on their electoral choices (rise of green parties in European politics) and their energy consumption (with citizens taking an interest in the environmental performance of their providers and the amount of renewable energy in their energy mix). The choice made by the GGFR to keep all players involved and not stigmatise the oil and gas producers for the environmental impact of their activities had the benefit of keeping a direct line of communication with the main sources of flaring but created some opposition among non-governmental organisations eager to hear the GGFR adopt a stricter stance. The cooperative nature of the organisation and the lack of constraining mechanisms largely explain the nature of the choice. Accountability is however growing as voluntary commitments taken by states and oil companies are leading to incremental changes in practices. The norm on flaring has successfully attached to the norm on climate change, which helped both with its global diffusion and its acceptance (Table 2).

The international norm against flaring, established and codified by the GGFR, offers the international community a common belief and

commitment that APG flaring is environmentally damaging and must be curbed.

The GGFR continued its activities and the Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 initiative appeared in 2015. While previously, members of the organization made commitments based on their general assessment of their economic situation, in 2015 a number of partners decided to work towards banning flaring altogether. The Zero-flaring document committed countries to making provisions that any new oil development sites should have a solution to flaring before starting their activities and to ensure that all flaring stop on their territories by 2030. While the commitment appears as highly symbolic for a number of countries as their capacity to develop utilization technologies is limited at the present time, the initiative led to a wider promotion of the GGFR as it was launched by two prominent figures: the UN Secretary General and the President of the World Bank. 80 national governments and corporations have joined the initiative as of today, but the abstention of some major flarers is a thorn in the side of the program. The unwillingness or inability of some countries and companies to commit to a concrete end date to flaring is indeed a major challenge for the GGFR.

The campaign against flaring evolved from being a grassroots movement and the concern of a few forward-looking countries in the 1970s to being a widely accepted problem in the 2010s. Flaring became an international norm with an institutional actor, the GGFR, to promote it globally. The Zero Routine Flaring initiative reveals the desire of some actors for ongoing commitments to ban flaring altogether. As the norm was being widely diffused, a number of countries previously not involved in the program started to take an interest in the benefits of utilising APG. Russia, while it was not originally part of the global movement against flaring, started to reconsider its flaring practices in the 2010s, leading to the

Table 2. World Bank flaring framing strategies

Costs of flaring	Framing strategies	Targeted audience
Economic	Loss of income	O&G industry
Environmental	Climate change	Global society, national governments
Health	Social injustice	National population

Note. Compiled by the authors.

adoption of legislation. In this section we consider how Russia came to adopt, under the influence of the international norm, its own anti-flaring legal framework.

The policies of the Russian Federation can only be understood in the context of its history and geography. The type of industries developed in the Soviet Union and the organisational principles surrounding them still impact the perception of productivity and pollution today in Russia. Flaring was a natural part of the oil production process in the USSR, before there was any awareness of its environmental risks. According to official World Bank data based on satellite sources, Russia was in 2021 the first flaring country globally. Russia flared the largest volumes of APG between 2014 and 2020, with Iraq, the US, Iran and Venezuela coming in following. Russia experienced a yearly progression in its flared volumes from 2014 to 2019, going from 18.3 to 23.2 billion cubic meters over the five years [31]. Flaring increased over this period because of the rise in oil production which naturally led to higher flaring volumes.

Flaring was viewed for many years as a safety practice and as a cleaner way of dealing with gas than the natural alternative which is to vent APG (release it as-is in the atmosphere). APG was perceived in the USSR and all around the world as a waste product for decades. The split between the oil industry and the gas industry, which appeared in the USSR and is still maintained today, explains the trouble utilising APG: the oil producers do not naturally have access to infrastructure to utilise the gas resulting from their activities or to gas transportation facilities. Geographic factors are also important as the further the oil extraction sites are from inhabited areas or processing plants, the further the APG needs to be taken for its utilisation. The financial implications of the additional distance often make it not cost-effective to utilise APG.

Flaring has both global and local impacts, both of which are perceptible in Russia. As temperatures change rapidly all over the country, different prognosis point to an increased likelihood of dangerous and unpredictable weather patterns in upcoming years such as the 2010 wildfires. Oil producing sites, while usually located far from densely populated areas, are affected by severe changes linked to heat pollution entailing damage to vegetation and animal habitats [19]. Black

carbon is particularly damaging in cold areas where it accumulates on the snow, makes it dark and leads to accelerated melting [27].

When considering Russia's policies on flaring, it is to be noted that the country's government was not immediately involved in efforts to utilise APG. Global discussions on the toxicity of flaring in the 1990s were a secondary concern for Russia which was undergoing at that time a severe economic crisis and political turmoil. The diffusion of the global norm on combatting flaring did not extend to Russia where the population was not highly concerned about environmental issues in the midst of the turmoil. When the GGFR put together the programs against flaring, there was no involvement of the Russian government or the fossil fuel industry. There was however an understanding that flaring should be measured as illustrated by official documents dating back to the turn of the century including the Energy Strategy of Russia [4]. Towards the end of the 1990s the country adopted environmental legislation with references to efforts needed as regards flaring. Assessment of real flaring volumes were however regarded with a certain secrecy and not revealed publicly. International networks attempting to engage with Russia were largely unsuccessful at that time and little was done internally to combat flaring.

The situation turned around rapidly in the 2000s with the government soon making it a priority to improve APG utilisation. The reasons for this change are related to a change of economic context, to Russia's financial recovery, and to several external factors. The appearance of satellite data on flaring ended the secrecy about APG flaring and Russia was found out to be the first flarer globally in terms of volumes [6]. The pictures of flaring in Russia on websites such as Skytruth become widely available and awareness grew in Russia on this problem.

The development of the norm on combatting flaring abroad led to a change in the Russian attitude and oil producers struggled to meet the environmental standards requested by their customers from Western countries. The lost income linked to flaring also became a cause of concern to oil producers who sought ways to monetise their APG.

The incredible cooperation in the 2000s between the GGFR and one Russian region (Khanty-Mansiysk) acting autonomously from the

national government started to yield positive results a few years later and made other regions ponder the opportunities of utilising their APG. The region developed technological solutions to stop flaring, received international financing and showed the way to the rest of the Russian regions.

Another factor which influenced the government's choice to crack down on flaring in the country was its commitments in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol. In 2012 Russia took on the international obligation of keeping its CO₂ levels at the level of 1990. The obligation to cut out different emissions led to a thought-process of how to do it in the least painful way. Reducing flaring was found to be a productive way to become environmentally cleaner at a minimal cost for society.

In a nutshell, the decision to legislate on the problem of flaring was guided in Russia by several factors including the international norm of combatting flaring, one region's success in developing utilization projects with the international support of the GGFR, the new imagery that made it impossible to conceal flaring, the Kyoto protocol, the influence of customers abroad and the desire to financially benefit from APG. As flaring was becoming a topic of governmental interest at the start of the 21st century, a number of Russian politicians delivered key note speeches on combatting flaring including President Putin's 2007 Address to the Federal Assembly which revealed to the entire country that Russia had flared 20bcm the previous year. An address by President Medvedev in 2009 further focused public attention in flaring, as he emphasised the waste represented by this practice and called oil companies to take on the new challenge of combatting flaring [15].

In 2009 the decree number 7 of the government "On the measures stimulating reduction of atmospheric pollution by products of associated gas flaring", initially put together by 'Rostekhnadzor', was adopted [24]. The document requires oil companies to utilise ninety five percent of the APG they produce and introduces fines for pollution linked to flaring starting from 2012, thus giving the industry three years to get in line with the new requirements [14].

Decree 7 was followed by Decree 1148 in November 2012 that kept the main new rules introduced by the previous decree but made a number of modifications: while fines were

increased, allowances were made for the opening of new oil platforms. An incentivisation system allowing to deduct fines from amounts invested in developing utilisation solutions was also adopted.

Results. This paper shows how the international environmental norm on combatting the flaring of Association Petroleum Gas influenced Russia's adoption of decrees 7 and 1148 on the compulsory utilization of 95% of APG. Constructivist norm theory has been employed as a framework to analyze the impact of transnational networks on the creation of a new issue of concern on the international stage. By retracing the norm through its life cycle, the study reveals that the multi-faceted framing strategies employed by the Transnational Advocacy Network helped the issue of flaring to gain salience. The flexible, durable, technical and apolitical approach of the World Bank's Global Gas Flaring Reduction Private Public partnership may convincingly account for the Russian government's willingness to address the issue of flaring and to legislate on APG utilization. The GGFR's strategy to involve any willing country or region in the process, to make payments to the organization voluntary, to avoid judgment and shaming techniques and to highlight the benefits for countries of increasing their APG utilization rates proved highly productive as regards Russia. The country's federal and regional governments came to appreciate the benefits of reducing flaring, in terms both of economic opportunity-cost and in being able to meet their greenhouse gas reduction targets without having to crack down on oil and gas consumption. The authors **contribute** to the study of International Relations by founding the novel idea that Transnational Advocacy Networks need not be confrontational as they are frequently represented in Constructivist literature and in some cases may be more effective when they avoid over-politicizing the issues they aim to solve.

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