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Environmental Diplomacy in U.S. - German Relations, 1965-1995.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, international diplomacy has largely concentrated on questions of political and economic relations among nation states, on matters of war and peace and on the stability of the international order, in short the traditional diplomatic subjects. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, a new set of problems entered the international diplomatic agenda that related to the health of the planet Earth at large. What started out as a growing sensitivity about environmental degradation in the United States in the 1960s soon sparked off an international movement and debate on the significance of a sustainable global environmental policy. Accordingly, it was the perceived threat of a global environmental crisis that started to challenge diplomacy from Washington to Berlin, which otherwise was largely occupied with the fundamentals of the Cold War international system.

In this dissertation I wish to analyze this clash of foreign environmental and security policies at the international stage and its impact on the transatlantic relations between the United States of America and its close Cold War ally the Federal Republic of Germany. These two states are of particular interest for scholars of international relations as well as environmental history because both have been key actors not only in shaping the international system of the Cold War but also throughout most of the international debates and agreements on environmental problems. Thus, a close historical examination of the period 1965 – 1995 seeks to analyze the different positions of both states in the international environmental discussion within the context of a changing international system from the Cold War of the 1960s to the early post-Cold War era.

Since diplomatic relations and the emergence of international environmental policies can not be limited to the meetings of heads-of-state, it is crucial to ask how ideas and knowledge about the environment and its destruction were produced, transferred and implemented in the different national and historical contexts of both countries. Thus, the aim of this study is to treat the rise of international environmental diplomacy as a truly transnational history. It will try to take into consideration the larger cross-national forces and movements, such as the activities of international organizations and activists, and how different ideas, knowledge and interests have shaped not just the nature of environmental diplomacy, but also German-American relations at large.

To address these questions, the dissertation will be based primarily on original research conducted in archives, governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations in both Germany and the United States. Sources will include official government papers, extensive documentation from international treaties and conferences, as well as contemporary publications, newspapers and interviews with leading figures in both countries.

In recent years, international environmental policy has gained much scholarly attention and studies in environmental and political science have analyzed recent international environmental treaties and regimes extensively. However, this dissertation project wants to add to this knowledge a comprehensive historical dimension that is still largely absent. By putting the different factors that shaped the distinctive policies of key actors such as the United States and Germany into a detailed historical context, this dissertation hopes to lead to a better understanding of the significance of environmental diplomacy in the history of international relations. Thus, this dissertation wants to be an interdisciplinary contribution to both the field of environmental and diplomatic history that aims for a more differentiated understanding of American and German foreign and environmental policies and their transatlantic relations.