

The Power of One

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Introduction

For 50 years, the United States has protected access to Persian Gulf oil with military interventions and war to support the energy intensive lifestyles of American individuals. Considering that we must someday abandon this unsustainable resource, we have a choice: abandon it now and prevent more war, or fight for fifty more years and abandon it then. This paper elaborates on these themes and provides a blueprint for anyone who would join the effort to prevent future wars by choosing a less energy intensive lifestyle today.

Is U.S. Energy Consumption Excessive?

Imagine a party with twenty people and eight large pizzas. One guy gobbles down two whole pizzas while nineteen people stare in disbelief. That guy is the U.S. The world's largest energy consumer, we account for 26 percent of global fossil fuel consumption.¹ We have less than five percent of the world's people.²

Over 85 percent of our energy comes from fossil fuels.³ The biggest chunk goes to produce the products we consume. The U.S. Energy Information Administration categorizes energy consumption as follows:

Residential - 21 percent,
Commercial - 18 percent,
Industrial - 33 percent,
Transportation - 28 percent.⁴

But we only need one category: The Consumer—100 percent. Individual consumption drives it all.

The U.S. relies most heavily on imported oil.^{5,6} The largest source is the Persian Gulf,⁷ of which Saudi Arabia is 66 percent. Even so, the Persian Gulf represents only 17 percent of total imports. That 17 percent has been costly.

Persian Gulf Oil: At What Cost?

The U.S. has been in Iraq for three years. We invaded to prevent U.S. enemy Saddam Hussein from providing

weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to the likes of U.S. enemy Osama bin Laden. There is no oil in that equation. But let's drill a little deeper.

Saddam: He became an enemy after invading Kuwait in 1990. True to the long-standing 1945 "oil for protection" deal U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made with the Saudi royal family,⁸ Bush senior responded by sending troops to Saudi Arabia to form a "Desert Shield."^{9,10} That and the "Desert Storm" that crushed Iraq were justified because "Access to Persian Gulf oil ... [is] vital to U.S. national security."¹¹

WMD's: We know Saddam had WMD's because we provided them,¹² along with other aid,¹³ to help him defeat Iran in the 1980s. We were mad because the Iranian people revolted and threw out the U.S. friendly leader, the Shah.¹⁴ We worked hard in 1953 to bring the Shah to power by overthrowing Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister,¹⁵ who made the mistake of nationalizing Iran's oil industry.¹⁶

Bin Laden: At the same time, to keep the Soviets away from Persian Gulf oil,¹⁷ the CIA armed, trained, and funded the mujahideen, including Saudi-born Osama bin Laden, in Afghanistan.¹⁸ Capitalizing on his resulting war hero status, bin Laden voiced popular opposition to the Saudi government's reliance on the U.S. for defense against Iraq in 1990.¹⁹ The continued presence of U.S. troops and military bases on Saudi holy land became the first point in his 1998 fatwa—urging jihad against Americans.²⁰

In 2001, terrorists flew commercial jets into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Fifteen of the nineteen suicide bombers were Saudi Arabian.²¹ The attacks were masterminded by Osama bin Laden.²² In 2003, President Bush concluded that Saddam Hussein would provide WMDs to the likes of Osama Bin Laden, which brings us back to the beginning of this story.

All for a resource we must abandon anyway.

Is Abandonment of Fossil Fuels Inevitable?

Fossil fuels start off as plants.²³ If we planted a fossil fuel garden today, we could expect fresh coal, oil, and natural gas in about 10 million years.²⁴ With annual replanting, we could use 1/10,000,000th of the output each year on a sustainable basis. Let's see if today's global fossil fuel consumption is sustainable.

There are 1.2 trillion barrels of proved oil reserves worldwide.²⁵ The world's population could sustainably use 1/10,000,000th of that, or 120,000 barrels of oil per year. How many barrels are we currently using per year? Nearly 30 billion.²⁶ Some oil in the ground has yet to be found or accessed, but it would have to be 246 thousand times more than current known reserves to support our consumption on a sustainable basis. The proved reserves will only last another 40 years at current global consumption rates.²⁷

It is the same story for coal (155 more years)²⁸ and natural gas (67 more years).²⁹ Remember, it took 10 million years to make this stuff. It doesn't make sense to waste one more life over this unsustainable resource.

What Can We Do?

Since U.S. industry consumes more energy than any other sector, the first priority is to buy less stuff. Here's how:

Watch less TV. TV is the medium through which the world's top psychologists use cutting-edge knowledge and technology to get you to want things you don't need.

Buy used goods. Every time you purchase something new, the manufacturer makes another one. Buying used takes more planning, patience, and effort than buying new, but remember why we're doing it. Here are some resources to get started:

- *How To Survive Without A Salary*, by Charles Long. Practical tips from the king of buying used.
- www.ebay.com. Worldwide online auction site.
- www.craigslist.org. Online classifieds by state and town.

Eliminate disposables where possible. Nothing wastes resources like a product made to be thrown away. The U.S. generated 236 million tons of garbage in 2003,³⁰ nearly one ton per person. Thirt-five percent was paper. A rag is as good as a paper towel. Reusable cloth can

replace paper for napkins, diapers, menstrual pads, and grocery bags. Reusable containers can replace plastic wrap and tin foil. One straight razor replaces a lifetime of disposables. Use a permanent coffee filter. Carry your beverages in travel mugs or durable water bottles. One big disposable container is better than several smaller ones. Less packaging is better than more. Notice everything you throw away and try to reduce the waste. If we don't buy it, they won't make it.

Think about food. Seventeen percent of U.S. fossil fuel consumption goes to food production.³¹ Why? Large industrial farms have depleted their soil of nutrients and must rely on inorganic fertilizer made from natural gas and coal. Fertilizer is the largest component of agricultural energy consumption (31 percent).³² Also food constitutes 20 percent of total U.S. commodity transport.³³

What can we do? Grow our own food. A great way to start thinking about it is to learn about "permaculture." I recommend :

- *Permaculture One*, by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, and
- *Permaculture: A Designers Manual*, by Bill Mollison.

In New Hampshire, you can visit a sustainable farm in Dorchester called D Acres (www.dacres.org). If you live in a city, check out "Urban Agriculture": www.foodsecurity.org/PrimerCFSCUAC.pdf and www.cfap.org/afs_temp3.cfm?topicID=449. Another option is to buy food from local farms, directly or at farmers markets. Or you could join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm where members pre-buy shares in a local farm and share in the bounty and risks: www.sare.org/csa. Another option is to join a food co-operative with a focus on sustainable agriculture: www.localharvest.org/food-coops.

Generate your own electricity. There are several resources out there for anyone who wants to try. Here are some of the best:

- www.otherpower.com "The cutting edge of low technology." All kinds of DIY electricity projects, especially windmills.
- www.utterpower.com: good source for learning about using low-speed diesel engines that can be run on vegetable oil to generate electricity.

- http://journeytoforever.org/biodiesel_svo.html: how to use vegetable oil as fuel.
- www.stirlingengine.com: these engines are being used to capture waste heat and convert it to electricity.

Use passive solar to heat your home and water. Unlike solar panels, which can be energy-intensive to make, passive solar utilizes simple materials and intelligent design to capture the energy of the sun.

- *Water:* You can get free hot water from the sun in the northeast for nine months out of the year. Build it yourself: www.motherearthnews.com/top_articles/1984_January_February/Build_an_Integral_Passive_Solar_Water_Heater.
- *Home:* The idea behind a passive solar house is to face it south, use enough glass on the south side to let in the right amount of sun, and fill the house with high-thermal density materials to absorb the heat. You can build one from scratch, or convert an existing house. Passive solar can heat a house in the winter and cool it in the summer: www.illinoissolar.org/fact_sheets.

Conclusion

Like women's suffrage or the abolition of slavery, massive cultural change is needed to end a practice that is harmful and wrong. Our current lifestyles have consequences. Make the connection. Make a change. One individual at a time.

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