

# NEW YORK POST

## WHAT LIES BENEATH

By KENNETH P. GREEN

March 9, 2008 -- **Gusher of Lies: The Dangerous Delusions of "Energy Independence"**

By Robert Bryce

PublicAffairs

**"Energy independence is hogwash," author Robert Bryce tells us. "From nearly any standpoint economic, military, political or environmental energy independence makes no sense." "Worse yet," he observes, "the inane obsession with the idea of energy independence is preventing the U.S. from having an honest and effective discussion about the energy challenges it now faces."**

These are strong words, but Bryce, an energy journalist, doesn't expect anyone to just take his word for it. In his well-written "Gusher of Lies," he takes on the arguments for energy independence with the delicacy of a sledgehammer, and his arguments are mostly direct hits.

Are you one of the people who think that the U.S. wouldn't be involved militarily in the Persian Gulf if we were not reliant on energy? Bryce has news for you - we'd have a military presence in the Middle East even if we didn't use oil ourselves. "The U.S., as well as every other country on the planet, cannot afford to see a sustained shutdown of the energy flows out of the Persian Gulf, and particularly from Saudi Arabia."

He points out that even an interruption of 4 percent of the oil flow out of the Gulf would cause massive economic harm to the U.S., Europe and every other country that uses petroleum. So even if the U.S. could displace all of our gasoline with ethanol (an impossibility Bryce exposes in a chapter all its own), we would still be involved in maintaining the free flow of oil in the Middle East to assure international stability. And of course, there's the matter of our ally Israel, which would not go away even if we stop importing oil.

Well, but surely, you point out, we should stop using foreign oil because we're funding terrorists. Well, setting aside the reality that the top three sellers of oil to the United States are Canada, Mexico and officially-friendly Saudi Arabia, it's probably true that some oil wealth finds its way to terrorists. But, as Bryce points out, oil revenue isn't the main source of wealth for terrorists.

Bryce quotes G.I. Wilson, a retired Marine Corps colonel and terrorism expert, who explains that "most insurgencies are low-tech in nature. For terrorists, the money flow doesn't come from oil; it comes from drugs, crime, human trafficking and the weapons trade." And, Bryce reminds us, "Osama Bin Laden, the world's most notorious terrorist did not get his money from oil. His family fortune came from the construction trade." Bryce might also have mentioned that trying to be independent of foreign oil would hurt our friends far more than our enemies.

Would we be more independent if we invested in renewables? This is the argument that Bryce completely destroys. Consider these mind-boggling facts: In 2006, the U.S. produced about 5 billion gallons of corn ethanol, and 250 million gallons of biodiesel, mostly from soybeans. That's almost 90 percent of the energy demands of American Airlines. In fact, using our entire existing crops of soybeans and corn to make ethanol and biodiesel would still only displace about 7.5 percent of our oil imports.

What about that cellulosic ethanol we've heard so much about? Bryce points out that even if the technology existed (it has been vaporware for over 30 years already), the low energy density of cellulose is an intractable obstacle. To produce 80 million gallons of cellulosic ethanol - which would replace only about 0.04 percent of our annual gasoline consumption - would require a million tons of crop stubble. Hauling that material to the cellulose plant would take 187 truckloads a day or one every eight minutes. And the distillery that used even 2,000 tons of corn stubble per day would need 100 acres stacked 25 feet high with corn stubble to run for a year. To displace even half the oil we use with cellulosic ethanol, we'd

need to plant an area 1.5 times the size of Texas under switchgrass.

Of course, no book is perfect. Bryce wanders off a bit into conspiracy theory when he lays all the blame for these deceptions at the feet of the dreaded neocons. But Bryce does a fantastic job of helping people understand the sheer magnitude of energy flows that would have to be replaced to attain energy independence, and conclusively makes his case that pursuing energy interdependence is a superior objective. "The world is growing smaller every day," Bryce reminds us. "Whether the issue is energy, global carbon dioxide levels, banking, communications or the free flow of goods, people and ideas, the world has become an interdependent organism, one that, to prosper, must accept interdependence as a fact of life."

Amen brother.

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