

# Mathew Thomason – 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## National Security and the War on Terror: A New Strategy

The oil crisis of the 1970's thrust the Middle East to the forefront of world affairs. Since that time the United States has faced an increased terrorism threat from the Middle East. The first indication of this increased threat manifested itself abroad when in 1967 the PLO began hijacking Israeli planes. During the that same time period the United States was fighting an increasingly costly war in Vietnam. The 1973 oil embargo imposed on the U.S. and its allies by OPEC nations left the United States with an oil shortage which threatened the conduct of the ongoing operations by the United States and South Vietnam. The United States faced a unique problem: How to deal with the threat from an increasing number of Islamic Extremist groups based in the Middle East , while ensuring good relations with Middle Eastern OPEC nations? Fast-forwarding to the present, the United States is still facing that same problem. After the attacks of September 11, 2001 the question of national security and oil prices are the most important challenges facing America

today. Despite the complicated reality of this problem, the answer is a simple one. The United States can not fight a war against Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorist groups while being so dependent on oil from Islamic countries who harbor, and directly or indirectly, sponsor these same terrorist groups. National security is the most important responsibility of the United States Government. In order to successfully protect America from terrorist attacks, and successfully conduct the war on Terror, the new Administration must eliminate America's dependency on Middle Eastern oil, and therefore reduce the influence and power of that world region.

Protecting American citizens will be the most important job for the new Administration elected in 2008. In fact, after September 11 2001, it was the most important issue for the Bush Administration as well. The new Administration will have to keep National Security as a priority in their budget plan. Thats easier said than done though. According to an article published by USA Today in January 2007, the National Security Budget for that year was an estimated \$140 billion. In an unsure economy, the new administration may need to make wise cuts in other areas to make up for this large area of spending. While difficult, the task of securing American

homeland against terrorism, pales in comparison to the task of eliminating the threat abroad. Since 2001, Americans have been fighting to eliminate terrorist cells in Afghanistan and Iraq with little or no help from the local governments. In oil rich countries like Saudi Arabia, where U.S. troops are not present, that task is near impossible. Even in countries like Pakistan, who is not a large oil exporter, the U.S. must be careful of offending its Islamic neighbors. In short, the Islamic OPEC nations hold the trump card, and as long as they hold it, they have no incentive to cooperate with the United States when it comes to eliminating terrorist cells in their given country.

Getting the other nations to cooperate with the United States in eliminating terrorist activity is the key to American National Security. On several occasions the current Administration has used force as an incentive for cooperation. While this strategy was moderately effective in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is highly localized to certain countries or areas. The problem with these localized solutions is, terrorist cells can simply move to another region of the Middle East, or more alarmingly to places like Europe. America does not have the military capability to occupy or conduct operations

over the entire Middle East. Another problem with the military solution involves oil. The United States military is a huge consumer of fossil fuels. So while conducting military operations, they are indirectly funding terrorist activities. An article published by the New York Times entitled, "The Saudi Syndrome", highlights this issue.

Part of the price of every extra gallon helps, albeit indirectly, to finance mosques and religious schools all over the world that spread a fanatical variant of Islam that sees legitimacy in terrorist attacks. This financing, amounting to billions of dollars a year, comes from the government and private charities of Saudi Arabia, a country that is now taking in roughly \$80 billion a year from oil exports.

It can be assumed that this practice is going on in other Middle Eastern countries as well. This evidence points out one of the major flaws with America's oil dependency as related to the War on Terror.

A diplomatic strategy by the new Administration would also face its share of problems. The Bush Administration adopted this strategy at certain times as well. The summer of 2006 saw the Bush administration facing growing challenges when trying to solve Middle Eastern problems diplomatically. Steven R. Weisman's July 25, 2006 New York Times article headlined, "As the Price of Oil

Soars, So Does it's Power to Shape Politics from New York to Beijing”, highlights the issues facing any government planning on dealing diplomatically in the Middle East. At one point Weisman states, “While the Administration seeks to confront, Iran, give Israel more time to defeat Hezbollah, and secure stability in Iraq, higher oil prices reduce its maneuvering room overseas”. The need for oil has severely limited the diplomatic options for past U.S administrations, and the new administration can expect little difference.

Based on the evidence it is clear that the new Administration must adopt broader concept when it comes to the war on terror. Looking at the wider picture means facing the fact this war will not be won at our airports or in the streets of Iraq. The War on Terror will be won through achieving economic independence from oil. In January 2007, President Bush called for a government plan to produce 35 billion gallons of renewable fuel a year by 2017, which equates to 15 percent of United States fuel consumption. (Andrews, Berringer, 2007) The new Administration must make vast improvements to this number. The search for alternative fuels must be the budget priority for the next 4 years. Giving tax breaks to companies who produce alternative fuels, and producing alternative

fuel powered military vehicles are two ways in which the new Administration can help achieve economic independence.

Achieving economic independence from Middle Eastern OPEC nations will help America to fight and win the War on Terror in several important ways. By eliminating oil revenues for the Middle East, you in turn eliminate capital for funding terrorist cells.

Achieving U.S. independence from oil would spell an economic disaster for OPEC nations. Therefore, the United States may start to see more cooperation forthcoming from OPEC nations well before full oil independence is achieved. Reducing oil consumption in the United States will also reduce the influence of Middle Eastern nations in the area of world affairs. It is well known that America's involvement in the first Gulf War, was resented by terrorists like Oussama Bin Laden. Realistically, America's only military concern in the region is enforcing stability, therefore creating a stable market to satisfy its oil needs. Independence from oil would eliminate the need for any United States military involvement in Middle Eastern Islamic Nations, which may in turn, reduce some of the resentment towards the United States felt by Middle Eastern Islamic Nations. Eliminating our military's need for oil is also extremely important. A

2008 article by Sohbet Karbuz featured on the online website Energy Bulletin, quotes the U.S. military as the single largest consumer of oil in the United States. This means the entire capability to fight the War on Terror could be halted by an embargo by OPEC nations against the U.S. The fact that these same nations are funding terrorists leaves the United States at the mercy of our enemy's sympathizers. Obviously this is completely unacceptable, and solving this issue should be a top priority for the new Administration.

For all Americans, National Security and oil dependency have become important issues. On the surface these two issues seem to be unrelated. However, examining these issues in broader terms illuminates the fact that they are one in the same. Eliminating America's dependency on oil is the first and most important step the new Administration must take to ensure National Security and winning the War on Terror.

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