

The Economics of Peace and Security Journal

© www.epsjournal.org.uk, ISSN 1749-852X

Book Review

Rutledge, Ian. 2006. *Addicted to Oil: America's Relentless Drive for Energy Security*. London: I.B.Taurus & Co. xxiii + 271 pp. ISBN: 978 1 84511 319 3 (pb). Price: \$22.50.

Reviewed by Thomas Scheetz [December 2007]

In this very readable text Ian Rutledge follows the historical thread from the 1920s to the present day, weaving together the economics and politics of oil and its ties with the automobile and the "American way of life." He skillfully provides the technical aspects of hydrocarbon production and consumption to enable the reader to understand the choices (including environmental) that are confronting oil suppliers and consumers in the next quarter century.

The author explains how the corporate/political decisions that have lead gradually to the identification of automobile ownership with American values. "America's relationship with cars typified the American spirit in the eyes of many: 'freedom, power, autonomy, mobility, importance, liberty and adventure' " (p. 11). Americans' move toward suburbia and the requisite search for energy security have to a large extent determined U.S. foreign policy over the past century. They are also critical to the understanding of the wars in Iraq and the birth of Islamic terrorism.

Energy security originally relied on self-sufficiency within the continental United States. But gradually corporate executives and politicians expanded their horizons, attempting to dominate the world's giant, super-giant, and mega-giant oilfields.¹ The corporate imperative which necessitated adding to known reserves at a faster rate than extraction of already controlled reserves lead them first to Mexico (in the 1910s), then Venezuela (in the 1920s), and on to the Persian Gulf (in the late 1920s and 1930s) (chapters 3 and 7). The neocolonialist treatment accorded local rulers and peoples were far from the Wilsonian preachment presenting America as a beacon for the rest of mankind. Deep resentment was created, most especially in the Islamic world.

Rutledge goes on to relate how with the fall of the Soviet Union, American corporations and diplomats set their eyes upon the area around the Caspian Sea (chapter 8), thinking that these new countries could possibly represent an alternative to dependence on oil from the Gulf. Although significant oil is there, it appears insufficient to stave off a looming supply crisis. As a result and given the U.S. struggle with Iran since 1979, access to Iraqi and Saudi Arabian oil becomes central to American foreign policy. The balance of oil (power) shifted to suppliers since 1972. The search for secure sources implied that oil could, and would be, used as a weapon.

The American metropolis has been so constituted that it cannot live without the automobile. And this in turn points to a further confrontation over global warming (chapter 9), a large part of which is a product of carbon dioxide emissions, and of which the United States is responsible for 44 percent (p. 127).

Since the early 1990s a broad segment of defense specialists have been writing from an idealist perspective on aspects of human security and such variants as environmental security. In this book Ian Rutledge presents a Hobbesian realist vision in which the United States is fixated in its search for energy security. While this is not the author's intention, the book's arguments convincingly trump these idealists' human security vision.

And finally, the book shows historically how the war on terror is fundamentally a resource war (chapter 10). The book presents us with very timely reading and, although not intending to do so, reveals the check mate in which the United States finds itself in the Middle East.² It cannot afford

to leave, and it cannot stay. It has painted itself into a corner. Resolving this dilemma would imply a significant lifestyle change. But it is hard to see how America can cure its addiction to oil. This does not seem likely; it would change the entire demography, housing, work, and consumption patterns of suburban America.

Thomas Scheetz is Professor of Defense Economics at the Escuela de Defensa Nacional in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Notes

1. There are two mega-giants (over 50 billion barrels of reserves), one in Saudi Arabia, and one in Kuwait; 40 super-giants (5-50 billion barrels); and 417 giants (0.5-5 billion barrels). These 459 “fields account for three quarters of all the world’s recoverable oil ... 65 percent of the total proven world oil reserves are in countries bordering the Gulf” (pp. 22-23).

2. It is also driving the “race to control the Poles” and the resources they hold.