Once limited almost exclusively to concerns about military, diplomatic, and political/ideological threats to American national interests, national security now incorporates such topics as geopolitics of the energy sector. Energy equals security in the 21st century; moving towards energy self-reliance at home and stability abroad is the pathway to our peace, prosperity and security.

Currently, the US ranks third among the top ten energy producing countries of which at least three are totalitarian regimes: Russia, China and Iran with Venezuela coming in 13th (US Energy Department 2012, p. 1). These countries are no friends to the US and thus will utilize energy policy as a tool to triage cash to interest which counter US national security. The Department of Defense has long embraced the notion that a sudden removal or disruption of energy inputs from the Middle East would adversely impact not only the economic underpinnings of this country but moreover its national security (R. Stern 2010, p. 5). Domestic production and eventual exporting of energy by the US could become the closest thing to a real peace keeping mission the world has seen in over a century.

Background

Historically, countries such as Saudi Arabia have artificially manipulated oil prices to achieve foreign policy objectives. For example in 1973, at the beckoning of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, seeking to punish the US for supporting ally Israel against joint Arab enemies, Saudi King Faisal cut production, escalated prices and enacted an embargo against the US. The strategy worked: the oil price shock skyrocketed prices fourfold (Verrastro 2013, p. 22).

A second incidence of the use of energy supplies as a weapon occurred in 1990 when the Saudis sought to remove oil producing threat Russia from the production competition; this long term strategy succeeded when eight years later oil priced plummeted fifty percent and Russia defaulted on trillions of dollars of debt (Boughton 2012, p. 292).

More recently, Saudis-led OPEC has likewise colluded in order to take advantage of an oligopolistic position in the market by suppressing production in order to gouge buyers with high prices. For instance, on the eve of the US economic crisis in 2008 while flush with petrodollars, the cartel put the brakes on production and pressed oil to a peak at $147 a barrel (Kilian 2009, p. 9). Such vulnerability economically presents a real and credible threat to US national security.

Recommendations

One key to the successfully becoming energy self-reliant is to expand US production using new technology like hydraulic fracturing. “Fracking”, as the process is called, has enabled an oil and gas production explosion, radically increasing energy supply and creating downward pressure on prices. In 2011, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) released its initial estimate of global shale gas, which found that 32 countries had viable shale basins and put global recoverable shale gas at 6,600 trillion cubic feet—enough to supply the world for more than 50 years at current rates of consumption (US Energy Information Administration 2011, p. 13). Such supply increases would perhaps recalibrate the scales of geopolitical and economic power
shoring up, stabilizing and securing US national interests in both the short and long term horizons. Shale gas is an energy game changer and serves as a critical tool to maintaining geopolitical stasis, creating countrywide energy security, and lowering the economic war chests of US enemies. The stimulation of domestic production is critical to our domestic tranquility.

Congress must act to stimulate production domestically through pro-fracking initiatives including incentive pricing, tax credits and R&D programs aimed at ginning up unconventional natural gas production efforts (King 2012, p. 34). Additionally, Capitol Hill efforts to incentivize a restructuring of the industry need comprise a gradual deregulation of wellhead prices as well as open access to interstate pipelines. These are some of the positive policy moves Congress must invest in for the sake of national security.

As well, the State Department’s needs to respect the importance of energy to national security and move to establish foreign policy which promotes and protects US access to energy sources in an affordable manner. For example, this arm of the executive branch must seek to encourage more intensive competition in international energy markets by stimulating exports as means of enhancing accessibility and affordability of cheap energy to US friends and allies (Kalicki 2013, p. 18). As a matter of security strategy, we must generate consensus among energy allies as to policies ranging from the environment to production to price stabilization targets (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, p. 7).

**Conclusion**

The issue of energy as a national security concern has recently become increasingly more relevant due to the death last year of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al Saud. The modern state of Saudi Arabia was born in the year 1932 between the two world wars and it was founded by the father of the deceased but the dynasty extends back more than three centuries. In 1774, the House of Saud came into power by pledging to reign in tandem with the ascetic clerics of Wahhabi Islam. This sect of Islam boasts a puritanical theology executed through a most cruel interpretation of Islam and has financed radical extremist activity around the globe. Over time, billions of Saudi oil earnings have been spent on spreading Wahhabism around the world, the seedbed of current militant Islamic groups such as ISIS. The increasing threat of petrodollar funded radical Islamic nonstate actors capable of carrying out massive attacks on our soil and equally as capable of participating in the global theater as state actors, has made issues concerning energy even more critical to US national security. This ever present nemesis is an ever growing threat.

Although self-sufficiency would not translate in a linear fashion directly to energy security, movements in that direction would help protect national interests both political and economic. In addition to policies aimed at stimulating domestic production discussed herein, agencies may also weigh the merit of encouraging the citizenry to reduce demand as well. Over time, stimulating a more stable oil price table, implementing technological innovations and entrepreneurial creativity would continue to benefit from positive policy making in the energy sector, which would enhance the security of our country.
Bibliography


