

15-1-06

ENERGY MATTERS

Opening Arctic Critical First Step Toward Energy Security

by Gerald E. Marsh

(NAPS)—Opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration is more than a first step toward a sound energy policy; it is vital to our national security.

Americans will depend on liquid fossil fuels for transportation for many decades to come. Because of this, the Middle East has a stranglehold on the U.S. that cannot be allowed to continue.

Unfortunately, for now, the U.S. has little choice about being involved in the region—a large fraction of the world's easily accessible oil is found there. And international economic realities mandate that cheaper oil will be used before investments are made to bring more expensive reserves to market.

U.S. security interests in the Middle East revolve around two issues: the free flow of oil from the region at a reasonable price; and the curtailment of funds supporting terrorism as well as the export of Wahhabism, the intolerant form of Islam that had its birth in Saudi Arabia.

A continuing dependence on this region is not in our best interests and is becoming very costly in terms of dollars and blood. Therefore, developing new sources of oil is about national security. Indeed, the Iraq war is about oil in the sense that it is about dealing with Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi regime is facing an increasingly radicalized Sunni majority and a marginalized and restive Shi'ite minority. With the



Many consider opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration a first step toward a sound energy policy.

Shi'ites likely to dominate Iraq, the war has served to bring pressure on the Saudi regime to crack down on Islamic radicals and preachers and become serious about curtailing the funding of terrorists.

As oil reserves are depleted in the Middle East, the cost of extracting oil will rise. When this cost roughly equals the cost of extraction elsewhere, the importance of the Gulf as a source of oil to the rest of the world will decline.

There is plenty of oil, but not at today's relatively cheap production costs.

Shale oil, for example exists in huge quantities in four western states. But development of techniques for recovery of such oil is years away and likely to be very costly.

Current world oil prices, however, can be moderated by the availability of relatively small amounts of oil. And that is where ANWR comes in.

ANWR is estimated by the Department of Energy to equal as much as 30 years of imports from Saudi Arabia. More importantly, it is oil that can be brought into production quickly using conventional techniques, thereby being able to moderate prices in the near term.

With modern directional drilling techniques, the oil can be extracted from as little as 2,000 of ANWR's 19,500,000 acres—all of which is contained within land originally set aside for possible future oil and gas production when the refuge was established. Combined with other techniques, hazards to the environment can be virtually eliminated.

In the past, both the U.S. House and Senate have approved opening ANWR to oil and gas production, but have failed to agree on the exact form of the legislation. It would seem that now, with dependency on middle eastern oil threatening our safety and our economy, those bodies should find a way to come together on a plan to develop our own natural resources and lessen money flowing into hostile hands.

Gerald E. Marsh is a physicist, retired from Argonne National Laboratory, who has worked and published widely in the areas of science, nuclear power and foreign affairs. He was a consultant to the Department of Defense on strategic nuclear technology and policy in the Reagan, Bush and Clinton administrations, and served with the U.S. START delegation in Geneva.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10