

Set America free

By Frank J. Gaffney Jr.

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Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Ali al-Nuaimi recently said he expected the price of oil to remain at unconscionably high levels of between \$40 and \$50 per barrel through 2005. Ironically, every American should be grateful.

Such gratitude is not, of course, due the Saudis -- who, we are endlessly told, are among our most reliable "friends" in the Middle East -- for working to drive down the price set by the OPEC oil racketeers. The Saudis seem content to keep prices exorbitantly high, though they are well aware of the adverse effect of such artificially inflated costs on the financial well-being of their principal protector, the United States.

Rather, we should appreciate what should be the proverbial camel's back-breaking straw: A final wake-up call, one that establishes unmistakably it is neither in the United States' strategic, national security nor economic interests for this country and other industrialized nations to continue relying on imported oil from those who wish to do us harm.

Fortunately, as Fareed Zakaria noted in the March 7 Newsweek, we can respond immediately to this call: "Tomorrow, President Bush could make the following speech: 'It is now possible to build cars that are powered by a combination of electricity and alcohol-based fuels, with petroleum as only one element among many. My administration is going to put in place a series of policies that will ensure that in four years, the average new American car will get 300 miles per gallon of petroleum. And I fully expect in this period to see cars in the United States that get 500 miles per gallon.' " Needless to say, the widespread availability of such cars -- and the alternative fuels they would utilize -- would change the world.

Our enemies would be denied the geostrategic leverage they currently enjoy, as indigenously produced energy sources derived from coal, biomass and garbage knock the pegs out from under the cartel's control of the commodity upon which our transportation sector heavily depends.

We would particularly no longer need export tens of billions in petrodollars used, in part, to promote the Islamofascist ideology that animates many who are determined to kill us.

We can also greatly reduce our vulnerability to disruptions of critical energy infrastructures, at home and abroad. Our foes have learned how easy it is to cost us dearly by blowing up a pipeline or sinking a tanker. Creating diverse alternative fuel sources here at home is, simply, a national security imperative.

Not least, this is true because we are likely to find increasing competition from China

for limited oil will become a flash point for future conflict, if not an actual casus belli. Already, China is frantically making strategic alliances with oil-exporting terrorist-sponsoring states like Iran, Sudan and Venezuela. It also is moving to buy up Canadian, Brazilian and Indonesian energy sources, transparently with a view to denying them to us as well as meeting their own burgeoning demands.

As Mr. Zakaria reports, there is now a blueprint for energy security (www.SetAmericaFree.org) that can translate available technologies into widely available fuel and automotive products and catalyze the sorts of outcomes described above.

Specifically, this blueprint envisions a new Manhattan Project on energy independence that will, for a federal investment of \$12 billion over the next four years, reduce projected oil imports in 2025 by at least 50 percent.

This blueprint envisions allocating such expenditures in the following, practical ways:

" \$2 billion for automotive manufacturers to cover one-half the costs of building flexible fuel vehicle-capability [[EnLeader] autos that can use ethanol or methanol based fuels] into their new production cars (i.e., roughly 40 million cars at \$50 per unit).

" \$1 billion to pay for at least 1 out of every 4 existing gas stations to add at least one pump to supply alcohol fuels (an estimated incentive of \$20,000 per pump, new pumps costing approximately \$60,000 per unit).

" \$2 billion in consumer tax incentives to procure hybrid cars.

" \$2 billion for automotive manufacturers to commercialize plug-in hybrid electric vehicles [that is, cars that can be plugged into the electrical grid to recharge their batteries].

" \$3 billion to construct commercial-scale demonstration plants to produce nonpetroleum-based liquid fuels (utilizing public-private cost-sharing partnerships to build roughly 25 plants to demonstrate the feasibility of various approaches to perform efficiently at full-scale production).

" And \$2 billion to continue work on commercializing fuel cell technology."

In the course of the 1988 presidential campaign, George H.W. Bush declared: "Detroit is ready now to make cars that would run on any combination of gasoline and alcohol -- either ethanol, made from corn or methanol, made from natural gas or coal or even wood. ... Let us turn away from our dependence on imported oil to domestic products -- corn, natural gas and coal -- and look for energy not just from the Middle East but from the Middle West."

This was a sensible strategy before September 11, 2001. Today, it is absolutely mandatory. Like Nixon going to China, a president from Texas oil country is just the man to launch the Manhattan Project that Sets America Free.

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