

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Risks of Oil Independence

THE SOURCE: “The Security Costs of Energy Independence” by Gregory D. Miller, in *The Washington Quarterly*, April 2010.

AMERICA MUST WEAN ITSELF from foreign oil—that’s the common wisdom on both sides of the political aisle. Entanglement with Middle Eastern oil kingdoms is a “source of strategic vulnerability,” and policymakers have spent “lives and treasure” defending America’s access to foreign reserves. But here’s a thought experiment: If the United States and the rest of the developed world no longer needed foreign oil, what would become of oil-exporting countries? Gregory D. Miller, a political scientist at the University of Oklahoma, says it would not be a pretty picture, nor would the ramifications for the United States be pleasant. Many

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of the oil powers are unstable, and may spiral into crisis if revenues from oil disappear.

As the only current nuclear state with a significant oil sector (eight to 20 percent of its economy), Russia is one potential trouble spot. “Neither the United States nor Russia’s neighbors can afford the risk of a nuclear Russia suffering economic instability,” Miller writes. And, of course, oil-rich Iran is likely to join the nuclear club soon. For five countries—Angola, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, and Saudi Arabia—oil exports make up more than one-

half of gross domestic product. All five already suffer from internal tensions and border conflicts.

Some oil-producing states could try to make up for lost income by trafficking in narcotics and arms, with massive implications for global security if countries with ties to groups such as Al Qaeda and Hezbollah got involved. In Venezuela, Miller says, many poor people may try to make some money by trading in drugs, even if the government stays clean.

None of this is to suggest that the United States ought to remain hooked on oil for the sake of stability. Instead, it should encourage oil-exporting countries to diversify by promoting greater foreign direct investment in non-oil industries. The United States isn’t going to reduce its consumption of foreign oil overnight. Policymakers should use their time wisely, and make sure the process is smooth both here and abroad.

SO CI ET Y

Closing the Achievement Gap

THE SOURCE: “Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap? Evidence From a Social Experiment in Harlem” by Will Dobbie and Roland G. Fryer Jr., in *The NBER Digest*, March 2010.

THE AVERAGE AFRICAN-AMERICAN 17-year-old today reads at the level of the typical white

13-year-old. That is only one manifestation of the racial achievement gap, one of the deepest and most intractable American social problems. Unveiling the results of the first empirical test of school performance in the highly publicized

Harlem Children’s Zone, Harvard economist Roland G. Fryer Jr. and doctoral candidate Will Dobbie say that a successful strategy for closing the gap may be at hand.

The Harlem Children’s Zone is a 97-block area in Manhattan boasting a supercharged web of city- and foundation-backed community services “designed to ensure the social environment outside of school is positive and supportive for children from birth to college graduation.” Established in 1997, it offers upwards

of 20 programs serving more than 8,000 youths and 5,000 adults, including Promise Academy, a group of public charter schools with approximately 1,300 students.

Anecdotal evidence in recent years has provided cause for optimism. And now initial data are in: The average Promise Academy sixth grader arrives at the school outperforming just 20 percent of white New York City public school students in the same grade in math. After three years, the academy's students outperform 45 percent of white students. In other words, they achieve near parity. And when their math scores are adjusted for factors such as gender and eligibility for the school lunch program, the black students outperform their white peers in the city. (Reading scores ticked up but not as dramatically.)

What makes the difference? To begin with, Promise Academy has an extended school day and year, with coordinated afterschool

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tutoring and weekend remedial classes. The authors estimate that students who perform below grade level spend twice as many hours in school as traditional New York City public school students. Those who are at or above grade level spend 50 percent more time in the classroom.

Promise Academy also goes to incredible lengths to recruit and retain top-quality teachers, and it spares them many administrative tasks so they can spend more time with their pupils. In addition, its schools provide a host of supplementary services, such as free medical, dental, and mental

health care; nutritious meals; and support for parents. The authors say it's possible that student achievement gets an extra boost from the community services Harlem Children's Zone offers beyond Promise Academy.

Of course, such intensive efforts come at a cost, but to Dobbie and Fryer the \$19,272 per student price tag looks quite reasonable. Though higher than the median expenditure per student among school districts in New York State (\$16,171), it's far below what top-notch districts lay out. It's an investment that will pay off in the years to come.

SOCIETY

Toward a Post-Prison Society

THE SOURCE: "The Outpatient Prison" by Mark A. R. Kleiman, in *The American Interest*, March–April 2010.

THE UNITED STATES HAS A REMARKABLE total of 1.7 million criminals behind bars, but that's nothing compared with the number who are on probation (4.3 million) and parole (700,000). More people go to jail each year for violating such "community supervision" than for committing fresh crimes—and the same group also accounts for a large share of the new crimes.

In 2005, Steven Alm, a judge on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, concluded that there must be a better way. Tired of hearing probation revocation cases only after the offenders had repeatedly failed to show up for meetings and drug

EXCERPT

The Food Network

Daily life is full of anonymous encounters: the Internet, the airport, the subway, the supermarket. Crowds to jostle, forms to fill out. E-mails greet you with mass-produced individuality. Dining out is the antidote: the host, the waiter, the chef with his pat on your shoulder, the season's first acorn squash grown by farmers closer than your commute. You sit down to dinner and you have joined a community, a gastronomic Facebook.

—PHYLLIS RICHMAN, a former *Washington Post* restaurant critic, in *Gastronomica* (Winter 2010)