

The Vanguard of Global Leadership:
The Case for American Energy Independence in the 21st Century

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“We become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions,” said Aristotle over 2,300 hundred years ago. Today, the United States faces a series of challenges that threaten its continued global leadership and more dangerously, transnational stability. While politicians debate semantics and place ideology over ideas and politics over principle, the world drifts ever closer to precipice that overlooks the abyss. The United States can no longer label halfhearted attempts to tackle adversity as true leadership. In deference to Aristotle’s wisdom, the United States must secure the mantle of global leadership by surmounting world impediments with domestic solutions that can be exported to the international community. United States dependence on imported energy provides just such an opportunity to rise to the occasion. By scaling the mountain of long-term *energy independence* the United States can achieve multiple *peace through strength* objectives, including: *economic security*, *technological superiority*, and reaffirm its position of *global leadership*.

United States dependence on foreign sources of energy undermines its entire hard and soft power projection capabilities, while contributing to an economy that is susceptible to externalities outside of domestic control. Harvard Professor, Joseph Nye, describes *hard power* as “inducements (carrots) and threats (sticks),” while *soft power* is “getting others to want the outcomes that you want,” co-opting them rather than coercing.¹ Presently, the U.S.’s ravenous appetite for imported oil and natural gas has led to military engagements in the Middle East where hard power assets have been quagmired and international goodwill, a critical perquisite for soft power, has been severely tarnished. *The Economist* reported this past February that U.S. consumption of foreign petroleum is so great that it single-handedly accounts for over half of the current trade deficit.² With the price of oil subject to the whimsy of leaders that are often ideologically opposed to American interests, the danger is apparent, as U.S. ability to lead the world is subsumed by the common global need for energy resources that are the lifeblood of modern economies. The U.S. can only

¹ Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power*. Public Affairs: New York, 2004, 5.

² *The Economist*. February 10, 2010. [Link](#)

expect diminishing capabilities to project ideas and values as lack of energy independence forces the U.S. to overextend hard power assets and detracts from economic security. Without true energy independence our ability to attract the world to shared-goals and endeavors become critically handicapped.

Yet, inasmuch as the road to energy dependence is long and arduous it is also the type of aspirational undertaking that holds the potential to completely retool the domestic economy and bring about international cooperation. In order to reach domestic energy independence, the U.S. must work towards the goal as something comparable to President Kennedy's call to place a man on the moon and then subsequently export the technologies abroad in an effort similar to the Marshall Plan. The U.S. was once the global leader in renewables, but is quickly falling behind nations like Germany and China.³ The path to energy independence is technological superiority where the innovative potential held by Americans can develop green-technologies that make renewables cost-competitive with fossil fuels and where next generation biofuels and nuclear generators allows the U.S. to control its own energy destiny.

This is not a goal that can be accomplished by the government alone. American business is critical to developing the technologies and then selling them abroad. The government needs to provide the incentive structure and impetus for growth in this direction. As Yale Professor Daniel Esty notes, "Smart companies seize competitive advantage through strategic management of environmental challenges."⁴ Fossil fuels are finite resources in a world with an incessantly increasing global demand. By investing in new technologies designed to reach domestic energy independence, America can develop a competitive advantage in an industry that will be worth trillions, eliminate most of its trade deficit, and demonstrate to the world that our goals are their goals—that energy independence through technology is the right course and that America's model of innovation is the best approach to tackling global challenges.

A world with stable energy reserves is a world that is more secure, more focused on developing economies and commerce rather than jockeying for access to strategic resources. The United States can more easily and less expensively attract other nations to

³ The Los Angeles Times. Jim Tankersley and Don Lee. March 25, 2010. [Link](#)

⁴ Esty, Daniel C. and Andrew Winston. [Green To Gold](#). Wiley: New Jersey, 2006. 3

its causes through endeavors like a real attempt for energy independence than by deploying the 101st Airborne abroad. America is strongest when its economy inspires the dreams and desires of others, solving the energy dilemma of the 21st century is America's best shot at remaining at the vanguard of global leadership.