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Posted By Kevin Baron ■ Friday, May 3, 2013 - 3:02 PM ■ Share

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Just because the United States is gaining energy independence from foreign oil doesn't mean the Pentagon shouldn't remain on mission to secure energy supplies.

That's the argument made in a new book by **Michael Levi**, senior fellow for energy and the environment at the Council on Foreign Relations and director of its program on energy security and climate change. The book, *Power Surge: Energy, Opportunity, and the Battle for America's Future*, was released Thursday.

"Achieving American energy self-sufficiency wouldn't make us independent in the way that people would like to think it would," Levi told the E-Ring, in an interview Friday. And, he added, it won't decrease U.S. vulnerability in energy or other areas.

Since most national security wonks are not energy wonks, and vice versa, we'll allow Levi (who might be a triple wonk: he studied string theory at Princeton and his last book was on nuclear terrorism) to explain. He argues that the United States still remains so tied to the decades-old global oil-supply market that only a significant drop in total U.S. energy consumption would do anything real to free the United States from foreign security concerns.

"We've accepted the reality of an interdependent global oil market. We've encouraged the development of a flexible markets so that if supplies in one place go away, we can get supplies from someone else. We still stock strategic petroleum reserves, large stocks of oil that we can put on the market to make up for losses if they happen -- and that's all made us more secure. But what it also means is that we are much more integrated."

"If we somehow became self-sufficient in oil and things went haywire in Saudi Arabia, the price of oil would spike here too," Levi said, "and we would suffer economically and we would still be entangled in those events."

Consider the Libyan crisis, Levi noted, when the price of oil rose in the United States as much as it did in the Middle East.

Several **studies by RAND Corporation** and others have tried to quantify how much the U.S. military spends on protecting energy supplies and traffic, such as sea lanes. Those studies end up informing arguments that energy independence can be a quick money saver for the Pentagon. Levi says that's wrong.

As the United States weans itself from foreign oil, he said, the Pentagon may want to changes its mission or focus in relation to energy, but "it shouldn't be driven by a mistaken belief that we no longer need to worry about the security of energy supplies."

It may come as no surprise, then, that Levi supports the Obama administration's use of the Defense Department to fund the development of an alternative energy market.

"I think it would be mistake for the U.S. to spend less in those areas," he said.

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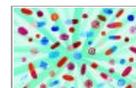
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Don Bacon

The US Navy really, really wants to protect the shipping of China's oils supplies all the way from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian and Indian Seas through the Malacca Strait -- got the mighty Freedom LCS there -- through the South China Sea -- vital US interest -- to China, which gives Uncle Sam a big "Hsieh-hsieh". Let's call it: Protecting The World Commons.

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