



ENQUIRY

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Free thought and discourse

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Oil Crisis or OPEC Crisis?

By **ELIZABETH BARRY**
STAFF WRITER

Over the past year and a half, a steady decline in world oil prices has led to the largest international oil market slump in more than a decade.

At market close this past week, Brent Crude, a global benchmark, traded at about \$33 per barrel, down 45 percent from last year. The crude oil price per barrel of a U.S. benchmark company was \$29.64, nearly half the \$50 per barrel price tag that both exporters and consumers find acceptable in the long run.

The OPEC countries that are most opposed to a production freeze are Iraq and Iran.

The underlying cause of the oil slump is an imbalance of market forces, which resulted from a boom in U.S. shale production. The U.S. shale boom drastically increased world oil supplies in a short period of time, driving prices down to twelve-year lows.

Despite this, many of the top oil producing nations have refused to curb their own oil production. Some countries, including Iraq and Iran, have even increased production, further driving down the price.

As a result of these low oil prices, consumers now pay an average of \$1.70 per gallon at the pumps, down from \$3.44 in August 2014. Similarly, the decrease in oil prices has made it less expensive for people to heat their homes.

These consumer benefits, however, could be erased by threats to the stability of the oil sector if the low prices persist. Since the oil slump began, several large oil producing firms, particularly those in the United States, have been forced to suspend operations. If prices continue to fall, more firms will be forced out of the market, allowing larger, more successful firms to garner larger market shares and indulge in monopolistic behaviors.

According to their mission statement, OPEC, or the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, is an international body that works to “coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of its member countries to ensure the stabilization of oil markets in order to secure an efficient,

economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers, a steady income to producers and a fair return on capital for those investing in the petroleum industry.”

At a recent meeting in Doha, the largest OPEC producer, Saudi Arabia, came to an agreement with Russia, the largest non-OPEC producer, to freeze petroleum production at January levels. In theory, capping production would most likely not have much of an effect on either of the top two producers, and it could help stabilize prices.

There are, however, several caveats and potential pitfalls pertaining to this agreement. First, Saudi Arabia and Russia refuse to freeze their output unless other OPEC countries join them. These two large producers fear losing their market shares to countries that are not willing to sign the agreement.

The OPEC countries that are most opposed to a production freeze are Iraq and Iran. Iraq needs money

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Complications in Closing Guantanamo

By **WILL UTZSCHNEIDER**
STAFF WRITER

On Tuesday, President Obama announced a plan to close down the U.S. detention facility for the world’s most dangerous terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, echoing a campaign promise made in 2008.

That same day, Spanish and Moroccan police arrested four members of a jihadi cell trying to recruit members to join ISIS, one of whom is a Guantanamo alumnus. This raises questions about how current prisoners will be handled if Gitmo is shut down.

If Gitmo prisoners are to be transferred to the U.S., Congress would need to change the law to make it legal to transfer Gitmo detainees onto American soil, given that it is currently illegal. This would be difficult politically, not just because of the control of Congress, but also given the opposition of many Democrats.

In 2015, the Senate voted 91-3 against the transfer of Gitmo detainees. While prisoners have not been transferred to the mainland, since 2008, the number of prisoners has been reduced from 250 to 91 through releases. (The prison held 800 at its peak.) It is important to note that most of those released during this time were less serious threats.

This Week's News in 140 Characters

EDITORIAL REPORT

Noah Pollak @NoahPollak · Feb 23
So Gitmo is a recruitment tool for terrorists, but US maximum security prisons will not be? This is Obama's actual argument.

Bernie Thoughts @berniethoughts · Feb 23
I CANNOT PROVE IT—BUT WHEN YOU BITE INTO A MUSHROOM I THINK IT KNOWS

Dan McLaughlin @baseballcrank · Feb 26
I bet Donald Trump would spell "leitmotif" correctly, but only accidentally.

David Burge @Iowahawkblog · Feb 26
I bet Donald Trump would spell "leitmotif" correctly, but only accidentally.

Matt Walsh @MattWalshBlog · Feb 25
"Yes I'm being investigated for fraud, but it was the most beautiful fraud. Fantastic. Just wonderful. Really a beautiful felony conspiracy"

Betsy Woodruff @woodruffbets · Feb 25
What % of things Carson says in these debates are lines from the Constitution and Pledge of Allegiance?

David Kochel @ddkochel · Feb 26
New lesson kids: sometimes, the best option for the fat kid is to just hand his lunch money over to the bully! #TrumpChristie2016

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COMPLICATIONS IN CLOSING GUANTANAMO cont.

If Gitmo closes, will any prisoners will be released? According to Stephen Hayes of *The Weekly Standard*, about 30 percent of those released from Gitmo engage in recidivism. Where will the prisoners who are not released go? Surely, no other country would want them.

Transferring Guantanamo prisoners to civilian prisons presents a grave threat of radicalization of hundreds of non-jihadi prisoners.

That leaves transferring them to a mainland U.S. facility as the only remaining option. The Pentagon has proposed the maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado as a relocation site, although both of that state’s senators remain strongly opposed.

The case of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, during the pre-Guantanamo era, presents an example

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Facebook and Twitter Lead Online Charge Against ISIS

By **AMY ELINSKI**
STAFF WRITER

The user agreements of both Facebook and Twitter state that they do not tolerate speech promoting violence or terrorism, and vow to shut down accounts that promote terrorist groups like ISIS. Yet despite the continual efforts of social media platforms to remove the accounts, the platforms continue to serve as primary tools for ISIS.

In an effort to counteract the termination of accounts, an ISIS cell calling itself the “Sons of the Caliphate Army” released a 25-minute video threatening the lives of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey if the accounts continue to close.

The video shows hackers accessing accounts and posting propaganda in support of ISIS, and alleges that the group has gained control of 10,000 Facebook accounts

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from oil exports to fight ISIS while Iran has vowed to raise production by one million barrels a day in an effort to regain the market share they lost after being slammed by heavy sanctions.

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Russia, the main proponents of this contract, are rising, as the two nations are on opposite sides of the Syrian conflict. Tension between longtime rivals Saudi Arabia, a predominantly Sunni nation, and Iran, a predominantly Shiite nation, may also make implementing such an agreement difficult.

Finally, using a production freeze as the basis of cooperation means that none of the parties involved have to make any effort to comply. This agreement is a classic example of a prisoner's dilemma in which it is in the collective interest to cooperate by limiting oil production, but each country also has a strong incentive to deviate from the agreement to turn a larger profit and increase its market share.

While there are some signs of agreement, OPEC has a long way to go before it will be able to stabilize oil prices, if it still can. Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak remains optimistic about the oil cartel, saying it "would be a positive signal" for the market if an agreement is indeed reached. Negotiations are to be completed by March 1.

COMPLICATIONS IN CLOSING GUANTANAMO cont.

of the dangers posed by the use of civilian prisons for jihadis. Sayyid Nosair planned the 1993 World Trade Center bombing while he was an inmate at Attica prison in upstate New York. Being in a maximum security prison did not stop Nosair from communicating with al-Qaeda operatives to plan this attack.

Once the WTC terrorists were arrested, they confessed a plot to break Nosair out of prison. They were going to do this by bombing several additional locations in New York until authorities gave in to their demands. This kind of situation could create a security nightmare for any of the cities or states in which these prisons holding Guantanamo detainees are located.

Bringing Gitmo detainees onto the mainland would also pose legal challenges. Currently, Guantanamo prisoners have no right to due process. This would increase the chances that the terrorists would be released from custody, because they would be in the jurisdiction of federal courts. Many of the judges whom the president has appointed that currently sit on the federal courts oppose indefinite detention. It is possible that once these terrorists are on the mainland, judges could end up releasing them.

Several questions remain. Are these mainland prisons best equipped to handle these violent and dangerous

criminals? Guantanamo is notorious for both brutal and disgusting attacks on prison guards. According to an article in *USA Today*, these range from the use of broken toilet parts and bloody lizard tails as weapons to urination, deliberate vomiting, and other attacks. One attempted jihadi prison murder during the pre-Guantanamo era involved an inmate stabbing a piece of glass through a guard's eye and into his brain.

Finally, transferring Guantanamo prisoners to civilian prisons presents a grave threat of radicalization of hundreds of non-jihadi prisoners. This could end up an unmitigated disaster.

President Obama may have several reasons to close down the facility. He may believe that Gitmo is a recruiting tool, he may want to secure another item on his legacy checklist, or he might be trying to raise money for upcoming elections.

Regardless of his reasons, it is appalling that he does not look at historical precedent while making this decision. Many of these prisoners are al-Qaeda members, terrorist financiers, and the like. Or to put it simply, these are not people you want living near residential areas, schools, and churches, as some of the proposed facilities are.

FACEBOOK AND TWITTER cont.

and 5,000 Twitter accounts and turned control over to ISIS supporters.

ISIS maintains a broad presence on social media, with several levels of participants. There are propagandists, who promote the regime and rally supporters; there are recruiters, who identify vulnerable individuals and turn them on to the regime; there are curious individuals, who aren't fully sold on the cause but are interested in learning more through interactions with other accounts; and there are the operator accounts, for lack of a better term, who serve to connect the web accounts together and monitor who is actually involved.

The effort to shut down accounts on social media has had a substantial effect on ISIS's ability to successfully recruit.

These operator accounts function like the body of a hydra. When one account is deactivated, the operator locates a replacement account and informs its followers that the individual has returned. This practice enables ISIS accounts to retain their following and maintain an active presence in the community even when the accounts are terminated.

Nevertheless, a study by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism found that the effort to shut down accounts on social media has had a substantial

effect on ISIS's ability to successfully recruit. Twitter, which is usually mum on the topic, recently stated that in the past six months, 125,000 accounts of ISIS members have been shut down.

It is, however, impossible to completely eliminate the social media presence of terror groups such as ISIS. In such cases, it is imperative that the government make use of the resources available to monitor the activity of terror groups.

This process, however, exists in a legal gray area. Many consider it to be a gross violation of privacy to have government officials policing social media, monitoring accounts, and searching for a proverbial needle in a haystack.

In the case of Twitter, the legality of the process is especially ambiguous. Unless the Twitter account is set to private, the tweets are visible to anyone. It is unclear, however, whether or not the government has the right to search for these tweets.

Nevertheless, if a post has been shared publicly with no restriction placed by the poster on who may view it, government officials should be able to use the information in the post to prevent terrorist activities.

In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security launched three pilot programs to determine the legality of social media monitoring. As of the end of 2015, it still has yet to draw any conclusions on the matter.

Nevertheless, a number of NGOs and research facilities exist that do

monitor the social media webs of terrorist organizations. They track the behaviors of the individuals already involved, particularly those involved with recruitment.

Fellows of the George Washington University's Program on Extremism published in December an extensive study titled *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa*, which analyzed the social media recruitment tactics ISIS uses to recruit Americans. The study also delved into tactics for countering violent extremism (CVE) used by a number of local police departments with relatively advanced CVE task forces.

While these departments' efforts proved effective, they would be even more effective if they were allowed to monitor the publicly shared posts of individuals on social media to prevent crimes.

Until the DHS arrives at its conclusion on the legality of those practices, it is imperative that Facebook and Twitter continue terminating accounts that promote terrorist activities. While the individuals may quickly return to social media, the process breaks the chain of information, slowing down the spread of the radical terrorist ideology of ISIS, even if for only a moment. Despite the threat of death, Zuckerberg and Dorsey must continue to abide by their companies policies and assist in the prevention of terrorism.

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