

# Peak Oil Issues

## Conflict

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Throughout the economic and social crises that will be created by the decline of oil and then gas supplies, there will be large pressures placed on our current ways of life. These pressures will either dictate a voluntary change in our society, or should we choose to reject that course, a series of international contests over the scraps of resources. This latter route, at best, will be a more painful means of reaching the same low-energy society. At worst, depending how far things escalate, we may not get there at all.

From time immemorial, wars have been fought over resources: from the expansion of the Roman Empire to French, Spanish, Portuguese and British Imperialism; from the Japanese conquest of Manchuria to Soviet expansionism; from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to the British and US-led invasion of Iraq. The populace are coerced into supporting the war. Arguments for the wars subtly prey on people's fears, their race and religions (or those of their enemies), conjuring up scapegoats for their sufferings, often economic. The real issues, the mixture of need and greed for resources, are withheld from the people.

Why are the reasons for these conflicts disguised, hidden or lied about? In part it is to keep support for the war. They may instead seek to change their way of life, their society, how the system works. Maybe people don't want to change their convenient lifestyle, and would rather be lied to and believe those lies than to live with the guilt of the murders carried out in their name.

With virtually every aspect of our lives heavily dependent on oil and gas, control of these resources becomes a question of power. The political system will come under extreme pressure. The arguments will get more subtle ("Our way of life is not negotiable"), the bogeymen more terrifying ("The Hitler of our time") and the claimed consequences of military inaction more disastrous ("WMD in 40 minutes").

The last Great Depression in the 1930s was firmly felt in Germany and the United States. The Nazis played the scapegoat card to support their expansionist policies. The resultant war dragged the United States out of its Depression, but at a cost of some 55 million lives.

We can go down this potentially catastrophic route of conflict, or we can dedicate the energy, money, resources and time we have left to build for a low-energy, low-carbon future. No matter how hard the future is going to be, it will only be made worse by fighting our way there.

The choice will not be easy for many: it will be between voluntarily taking on a simpler way of life, less travelling, less consumerism, less waste and less money, or sending our people to fight other people for the fossil fuels that keep us comfortable and rich. The choice will be difficult to see for all: the advertising will drive consumerism, the arguments will be more subtle and convincing, the media will be complicit, and many of us will be looking for someone to blame for our economic difficulties.

It has become more widely accepted that the US and UK went into Iraq for oil, and did so during times of relative affluence. What will happen as the nations of the world find themselves increasingly in competition for access to dwindling supplies of fossil fuels to prop up their failing economies?

Further Reading:

Resource Wars by Michael T. Klare

Who Won The Oil Wars by Andy Stern