



## The Swift-Boating of Peak Oil

Posted by [Stuart Staniford](#) on November 15, 2005 - 7:32am

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Tags: [aspo-usa](#), [gas prices](#), [hubbert peak](#), [matthew simmons](#), [oil prices](#), [peak oil](#) [[list all tags](#)]

**Update [2005-11-15 14:29:31 by Stuart Staniford]:** Rigzone has deleted Dr Corsi's article. A copy of a very similar piece [can be found here](#) for historical interest.

Browsing [peakoil.com](#) late at night, I came across the following [interesting specimen at Rigzone](#), of all places. Dr Jerome Corsi writes:

A key argument of "Peak-Oil" and "Fossil-Fuel" theorists is no new giant oilfield discoveries have been made in recent years. Oil "experts" such as Matt Simmons and Ken Deffeyes are locked into the belief that oil is a fossil fuel, and pretty soon we are bound to have found and drilled all the oil that ever was. **What about Brazil?**

**The experience of Brazil's offshore drilling is proving that giant new oil fields are out there, waiting to be discovered, just off shore along the continental shelf.** Petrobras, Brazil's largest oil company is moving Brazil from being nearly 100 percent dependent on foreign oil imports only some 50 years ago, toward becoming a net oil exporter in the next few years. How? Brazil has realized spectacular results by developing the technology to drill ultra-deep offshore wells in Brazil's Barracuda and Caratinga oil fields, in the Campos Basin some 50 miles into the Atlantic Ocean east of Rio de Janeiro.

Dr Corsi is a fan of the [abiotic theory of oil](#):

While the geology suggests the Campos Basin oil-rich deposits formed when the sea level was lower than today, the deposits suggest that the area was most probably still underwater when the sand and mud deposits flowed into the area.

With the geological description of the rock, "Fossil-Fuel" theorists are going to have a hard time positing that ancient dinosaurs and decaying prehistoric flora were the cause of the oil. The geological description sounds like the area was already well underwater when mud and sand run-off from the shore deposited sediment. The abiotic theory of oil seems more consistent with the geology, arguing that this type of deposit was sufficiently porous for upward-seeping hydrocarbons naturally formed in the Earth's mantle to pool in reservoirs.

Of course he's wildly misrepresenting the fossil-fuel theory. Oil comes from marine or lake algae, (or river algae in the case of deepwater oil) not dinosaurs, and there need not be any close relationship between the age of the source rock and the age of the reservoir rock.

Dr Corsi concludes his thesis with this barb:

Looking at the experience of Petrobras in Brazil, we are led to wonder why the United States is leading in ultra-deep oil operations. Few countries in the world have the extensive offshore territory enjoyed by the United States. Why aren't we resolved to become oil independent by exploring offshore oil with the aggressive resolve demonstrated by Petrobras?

Our problem seems to be that the current coalition of radical environmentalists, "Peak-Oil" and "Fossil-Fuel" pessimists, and the political Left are unwilling to step down their rhetoric long enough to look rationally at some real world empirical results.

If you were wondering which esteemed engineering school Dr Corsi graduated from:

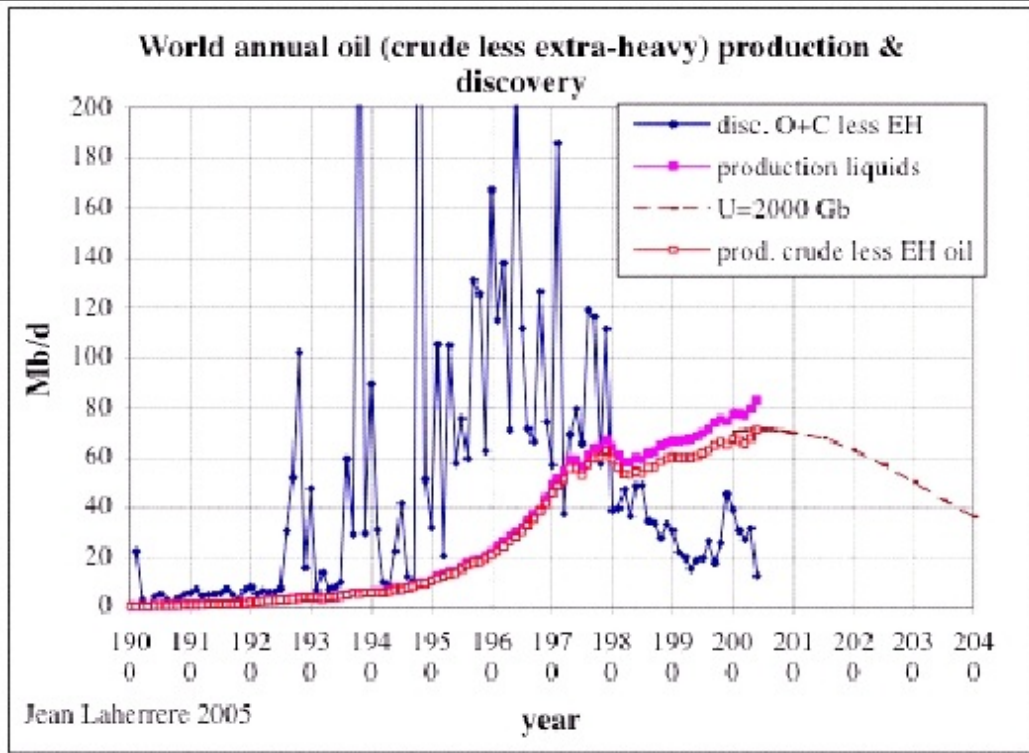
*Jerome R. Corsi received a Ph.D. from Harvard University in political science in 1972 and has written many books and articles, including co-authoring with John O'Neill the No. 1 New York Times best-seller, "Unfit for Command - Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry." Dr. Corsi is an expert on political violence and terrorism and founder of the Iran Freedom Foundation.*

While the technical achievements of Petrobras are indeed considerable, it doesn't take long to refute the main point: proven reserves [in Barracuda](#) are 867 mb, while those in Caratinga are 362 mb. Given that annual global consumption is 30gb, total reserves in these fields represent 11 and 4 days of global consumption, respectively, suggesting we might not want to get too excited about the giant-ness of these fields. Compared to giants of the past, we could consider:

- Ghawar (60-131gb, depending on who you believe), 70-150 times larger than Barracuda
- Burgan (66-72gb), 81 times larger than Barracuda
- Samotlor (20gb), 23 times larger than Barracuda
- Kirkuk, Iraq (16gb), 18 times larger than Barracuda
- Prudhoe Bay (13gb), 15 times larger than Barracuda
- East Texas (6gb), 7 times larger.
- etc, etc

Barracuda, while certainly useful, is absolutely nowhere in a league-table of the world's largest fields. It wouldn't make the top 10 in the US, in Russia, or in Saudia Arabia. And Caratinga is of course less than half the size of Barracuda. It is striking that Dr Corsi is so quick to accuse others of ignoring empiricism and rationality, when his own connection with empirical reality is so tenuous.

For those wondering, here's the problem of declining field discoveries:



Source: [Jean Laherrere](#).

Several interesting questions arise. Firstly, as a political science major, Dr Corsi can perhaps be forgiven for his inability to judge relative sizes very well, and for his allegiance to the abiotic theory which has roughly zero support amongst working exploration geologists (who need to be good at identifying source rocks, etc, in order to find oil). But what on earth are the editors of Rigzone thinking?

Secondly, given Dr Corsi's recent history of involvement with well-funded extreme right-wing causes, are we seeing the start of a comparable campaign against peak oil? I wonder is he acting alone here? Besides the Swift-boat attacks on Senator Kerry, the Asia Times reports on [his work attempting to undermine the Iranian government](#) (not that I'm any fan of that regime), for which he was thanked by both President Bush and Vice President Cheney.

[Media Matters for America](#) documents some of Dr Corsi's past public opinions:

#### On Islam and Arabs

CORSI: Let's see exactly why it isn't the case that Islam is a worthless, dangerous Satanic religion? Where's the proof to the contrary? (04/24/2004)

CORSI: Islam is like a virus -- it affects the mind -- maybe even better as an analogy -- it is a cancer that destroys the body it infects... No doctor would hesitate to eliminate cancer cells from the body. (11/26/02)

#### On Senator John Kerry:

CORSI: After he married TerRAHsa, didn't John Kerry begin practicing Judiasm? He also has paternal gradparents that were Jewish. What religion is John Kerry? (03/04/2004)

CORSI: Kerry has a long history of Communist supporters. (03/12/2004)

CORSI: Kerry offers a clear choice. Anti-American hatred. (02/08/2004)

CORSI: John F\*ing Commie Kerry and Commie Ted [Kennedy] discuss their plan to hand America over to our nation's enemies. (02/04/2004)

On Senator Hillary Clinton

CORSI: HELL-ary loves the Arabs so much (kiss, kiss Mrs. Arab\*RAT) -- wonder how she would look in a Burkha? (05/21/2002)

CORSI: Mullah Ali'Gore-ah is very proud of his new Bin Laden beard and he hopes others in the Democratic Party will follow his lead. Hell-ary is disappointed she cannot grow a beard, but her press secretary reminds us she can still enroll in flight school. (01/07/02)

CORSI: Did the Journalist see Chubbie Chelsea among the wives. Little Katie Communist [Katie Couric] on the NBC Today show interviewed Hillary this morning and mom is worried sick about Chelsea. She was last seen in Kandahar at a Starbucks. But now, as Little Katie Communist sighed, "Who Knows?" Even British disinformation planted reports such as this grocery crap will be useful. Anyone with information about Chubbie Chelsea's whereabouts should post it now. Mom wants to know her daughter is out of harms way. Mom also wants to be at the center of the story. (11/29/2001)

(This is just a small selection - there's a lot more of the same flavor, and they extend over several years). Media Matters also has an interesting audio clip of Dr Corsi [apologizing for these comments](#), and claiming they were all jokes, which was covered in the [Washington Post](#), the [Associated Press](#), and elsewhere.

Part of Dr Corsi's agenda seems to be to suggest that Peak Oil is a left wing movement (a point he [expanded on last night](#)). This simply is not the case. While there certainly are left wing peak oilers such as Richard Heinberg, believers in peak oil include the conservative republican Roscoe Bartlett, good capitalist economists [such as James Hamilton](#), republican investment banker Matt Simmons, and that's not to even start on [the neofascists](#). Peak Oil totally crosses the political spectrum, and I don't think Dr Corsi is going to make that particular framing of the debate stick, though I think we can expect him and whoever his allies turn out to be to make a vigorous effort.

If indeed the Swiftboating of Peak Oil is beginning, it is striking that the arguments are so very weak, and the champion so lacking in credibility. Is this really the best they can do? If so, it suggests things might be about to get very ugly, as mud is thrown in all directions in a desperate attempt to disguise the paucity of their position.



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