



## DrumBeat: May 17, 2009

Posted by [Leanan](#) on May 17, 2009 - 10:22am

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### [A giant leap toward space-based solar power](#)

Reporting from Sacramento -- Pacific Gas & Electric Co. for decades has generated power for its customers by splitting atoms, burning natural gas and capturing the force of falling water. More recently, the San Francisco utility began turning to the sun, wind, boiling geysers and even fermented cow manure to produce electricity.

Now, PG&E wants to turn to outer space.

A Manhattan Beach start-up called Solaren Corp. seeks to launch an array of giant solar power collectors into orbit 23,000 miles above Fresno and beam the energy to Earth. PG&E has signed a contract to buy the power -- if Solaren can make the technology work.

The proposal is a potential energy game-changer, supporters say. But, critics dismiss it as pie in the sky.

### [US commander: Iraqi navy to run offshore oil platform by year's end](#)

Manama, Bahrain - Iraq's navy could be fully responsible for the defence of one of two key offshore oil platforms by December, according to the senior US and coalition commander in the Persian Gulf. "We have just turned over the point defense responsibility of the northern Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) to the Iraqi Navy and our intention is turn over the security responsibility for the entire area around the platform by the end of December," said Vice Admiral William Gortney on Sunday.

### [OPEC appetite for cuts diminishes](#)

Despite the short-lived rally above \$60 last week, there are strong signs that OPEC members have limited appetite for further quota cuts or revisions, come the organisation's May 28 meeting, according to IHS Global Insight analyst, Catherine Hunter.

### [Putin: Russia, Turkey to extend natural gas deal](#)

Russia and Turkey have agreed to extend a contract on natural gas supplies, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Saturday.

The current agreement to supply Turkey annually with about 6 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia is scheduled to end in 2012, Putin said. He spoke at a televised joint news conference with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

### [Saudi to mount three-year oil clean-up operation](#)

Nearly two decades after the end of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia is planning to launch a three-year operation to clean up its shores from the world's largest oil slick that hit most of the region's coastlines and caused considerable ecological damage.

### [Brazil's Lula begins Saudi visit](#)

The first Brazilian president ever to visit the Middle Eastern oil powerhouse, Lula was to sign a number of bilateral agreements on political, commercial and cultural relations, according to a Brazilian press official.

He could also discuss Brazil's desire to gain a permanent seat on a revamped UN Security Council, he said. The Saudis will have talks with their Brazilian counterparts on proposals to invest in farming in Brazil.

### [Uranium provides Jordan with spark for much-needed economic bonanza](#)

Jordan, one of the few Middle East countries with no oil and long one of the poorest in the region, now finds itself on the brink of a potential economic bonanza. It has discovered uranium in huge quantities. Multinational companies are queueing up to start mining operations. Jordan is proposing to build a nuclear reactor and save almost 20 per cent of its gross domestic product now spent on importing fossil fuels. The small desert kingdom is set to lead the way in nuclear power production, opening its first nuclear plant in six years' time and eventually exporting energy to all its neighbours.

This new source of energy will be used to supply the one critical resource that Jordan lacks: water. With one of the fastest-growing populations in the world – currently some six million people, four times the number a generation ago – and a vast influx of refugees from Iraq, the country is rapidly running out of water. Nuclear energy will allow it to undertake new desalination schemes and reduce dependence on meagre winter rainfall.

### [Australia to build world's largest solar energy plant: PM](#)

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Australia plans to build the world's largest solar power station with an output of 1000 megawatts in a A\$1.4 billion (US\$1.05 billion) investment, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said on Sunday.

The plant would have three times the generating capacity of the current biggest solar-powered electricity plant, which is in California, Rudd said during a tour of a power station.

### [Fuel prices have undercut hybrid sales](#)

Going green may be all the rage these days.

Unfortunately for struggling automakers, hybrid cars are a tough sell.

"Anytime gas prices go up, hybrid sales go up," said Crystal Rowe, sales manager at Jones Honda in Lancaster. Sales of "any economical car goes up."

Indeed, as gas prices have fallen, so have sales of hybrid vehicles.

### [Oil, Gas Still Main Global Energy Resource, Says Expert](#)

Oil and gas will remain as an indispensable core resource towards fulfilling global energy needs and consumption of these resources is expected to increase drastically by the year 2030.

This was said by Dr Tilak Doshi, an expert from the Saudi Aramco, during a public lecture at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD).

...He said to meet the energy demand, oil producing countries would need to come up with reserves nearly six times the size of Saudi Arabia to meet the demand. The other non-renewable and renewable sources of energy are simply too expensive or not productive to meet the demands, he said.

### [T. Boone Pickens: Stop Worrying About World Crude Supplies](#)

Domestic natural gas supplies will replace our need for foreign oil. Independent studies continue to show that America's natural gas reserves are sufficient to meet all of our needs for well over 100 years.

We should protect America's interests by making a national commitment to replacing our need for foreign oil by using our enormous natural gas supplies for every possible

use - power, transportation, chemicals, pharma, etc.

### [Surplus Oil Production Capacity & World Oil Prices](#)

The future trend in surplus capacity will depend on oil demand trends, gains in non-OPEC production and OPEC capacity additions. As in some non-OPEC countries, some planned additions in OPEC countries will likely be delayed in response to weak oil market conditions. Most of the planned additions in OPEC are located in Saudi Arabia, which has plans to add over 2.5 million barrels per day of new capacity by 2012, led by the Khurais, Nuayyim, and Shaybah projects. And future prices will depend, in part, on the level of surplus capacity, which can serve to dampen any increase in prices that follows an economic recovery and the expectation of oil demand growth.

### [Iraq's Kurds Blamed For Squandering Oil Resources](#)

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's Oil Ministry says authorities in the self-ruled Kurdish region are squandering the country's oil wealth by giving Western companies a higher than necessary share of crude production.

### [Mexico: Nation's future hinges on near-empty science classrooms](#)

MEXICO CITY—Many solutions for sustainable development in Mexico lie in the scientific and technological training of its younger generations, say academics.

But students in this country, where everyone wants to be a doctor or accountant, are ignoring those fields.

### [Despite downturn, these cars are still selling: The models — including more than a few SUVs — still leave showrooms](#)

The Audi S5 coupe packs a 354-horsepower V8 engine, a taut sport suspension and three customized drive modes into one sleek ride. At a time when the auto industry is in the pits, the S5's boldly refined body, complete with adaptive halogen headlights, a panoramic sunroof and a rear spoiler, is seducing reluctant buyers to open their wallets.

### [Hot in recession: Chocolate, sneakers, Spam](#)

Sales of chocolate and running shoes are up. Wine drinkers haven't stopped sipping; they just seem to be choosing cheaper vintages.

Gold coins are selling like hot cakes. So are gardening seeds. Tanning products are piling up in shopping carts; maybe more people are finding color in a bottle than from sun-

worshipping on a faraway beach.

Strong sales of Spam, Dinty Moore stew and chili helped Hormel Foods Corp. post a 6 percent increase in first quarter sales in its grocery products unit.

### [Federal authorities crack down on sea-borne oil polluters](#)

Federal prosecutors are stepping up their pursuit of sea-borne oil polluters, and they say they already have found enough offenders to put together a fleet of ships like the Snow Flower -- vessels that flout international law by using the ocean as an open sewer to dump millions of gallons of waste oil when no one is looking. And the prosecutors say they are finding the pollution may be far more widespread than they ever suspected.

"There's no shortage of cases," said Joseph A. Poux Jr., assistant chief of the environmental crimes section for the U.S. Department of Justice. "From large cruise lines to the smallest operator, there's not a segment of the industry we have not come across."

The prime incentive is money. Illegal dumping can save tens of thousands of dollars.

### [Offshore gas rig in Gulf: Will it silence skeptics of drilling?](#)

ON BOARD INDEPENDENCE HUB, Gulf of Mexico - One huge symbol of the nation's struggle with global warming is a roaring cube of steel that floats in the Gulf of Mexico south of Florida's Panhandle.

As big as a 30-story building, it's an offshore rig that plunges an array of pipe and tubes a mile and a half to the frigid bottom of the Gulf. From there, the metallic tentacles spread across a patch of seafloor larger than Rhode Island. Then they bore more than a mile into sand, rock and incredibly rich pockets of natural gas.

"We have some wells that are just unbelievable," said senior engineer Bob Buck of Anadarko Petroleum Corp., the rig operator.

### [Rethinking the Future: Fossil fuels can't last forever. A new book plans for a world without them.](#)

The human mind almost seems hard-wired to expect the future to resemble the past. While this may be an artifact of our evolutionary history that served our ancestors well, in the complex and rapidly changing world we have created, it could prove a fatal blind spot.

David Holmgren has been considering the possibility of our civilization falling victim to our own growth for the better part of four decades. With fellow Australian Bill Mollison,

he originated the permaculture movement in the 1970s, aimed at bringing the design of human societies in line with natural systems. In his new book, *Future Scenarios: How Communities Can Adapt to Peak Oil and Climate Change* (Chelsea Green Publishing, March), he suggests that the fast converging crises of peak oil and climate change may lead to a future far different from our past—a future of less energy, less complexity and more locally focused lives.

### [Iraq Kurdistan gas may cut EU reliance on Russia](#)

SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates (Reuters) - A new bloc of European and Arab energy firms unveiled an \$8 billion plan on Sunday to pump enough gas from Iraq's Kurdistan to kickstart the Nabucco pipeline project and reduce Europe's reliance on Russia.

Until now, the \$10 billion Nabucco pipeline scheme had plenty of willing gas buyers in Europe, but little to sell. Europe imports a quarter of its gas from Russia and has backed Nabucco to help cut that dependence.

Gas from the semi-autonomous northern region of Iraq could help solve the Nabucco supply conundrum.

### [Nigerian militants claim to have destroyed 2 oil pipelines, latest oil industry violence](#)

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Nigeria's main militant group said Sunday it destroyed two oil pipelines in the southern Niger Delta, the latest attack amid the worst outbreak of violence to hit the region in months.

### [Saudi draws on foreign reserves](#)

Saudi Arabia's central bank governor said on Sunday the world's top oil exporter was drawing on some foreign reserves but not selling foreign assets to finance a growing budget designed to stimulate the economy.

Saudi Arabia, which pegs its currency to the dollar and is a major holder of US Treasuries, would still witness good growth this year in non-oil sectors even as oil production contracts, Muhammad Al-Jasser told reporters.

### [Australia: Campaign demands more rail, fewer trucks](#)

The strong opinion of the meeting was that, given safety issues, world heritage values, peak oil and the climate change emergency, the government must act now to shift as much freight transport as possible onto rail. The \$1 billion earmarked for the highway upgrade between Lithgow and Mt Victoria should instead be spent on an upgrade and



expansion of rail lines between Sydney and western NSW.

### [Community Solutions: Smart Jitney Transportation in the Coming Era of Peak Oil & Fuel Scarcity](#)

The Smart Jitney is a system of efficient and convenient ride sharing that addresses in the short-term the problem of transportation in a post-peak oil world. The system utilizes the existing infrastructure of private automobiles and roads due to the time, expense, and difficulty of building a new transportation infrastructure amongst such a dispersed population. The goal of the system is to insure that each private car always carries more than one person per car trip, optimally 4-6. This would cut auto gasoline usage by an estimated 80 percent and commute time by an average of 50 percent within two years.

### [In California, Desalination of Seawater as a Test Case](#)

SAN FRANCISCO — The vast \$320 million desalination plant approved this week by San Diego's regional water authorities is likely to serve as a test case for whether such a large project can meet its goals while safeguarding its Pacific environment.

### [Environmentalists happy with Obama; industry less so](#)

In the nearly four months since taking office, the Obama administration has moved quickly, relentlessly and without apology to roll back the natural resource and public lands policies of its predecessor. Though they have yet to lay out their own vision in detail, Salazar and other administration officials have left no doubt that they consider the Bush approach misguided and unfairly weighted toward timber, mining, oil and other interests.

### [Antarctic Voyage: Climate Change Upfront](#)

Virtually an icemaking machine that has locked up 70 percent of the planet's freshwater, Antarctica is undergoing rapid change.

According to one estimate, 550 cubic miles of Antarctic ice are calved into the sea each year, while about 407 cubic miles of compacted snow are added each year. The net loss seems slow, but the results along the water's edge can be dramatic.

### [UN: Growth of slums boosting natural disaster risk](#)

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The rampant growth of urban slums around the world and weather extremes linked to climate change have sharply increased the risks from "megadisasters" such as devastating floods and cyclones, a U.N. report said Sunday.

The study — which examines natural disaster trends and strategies to reduce potential catastrophes — also noted that millions of people in rural areas are at higher risk from disasters such as landslides where forests have been stripped away or crippling droughts blamed on shifting rainfall patterns.

### [Scientists: Warming may not doom Maldives](#)

Most experts agree the Maldives have plenty to worry about: In the worst-case scenario, if global sea levels rise higher and faster than expected, the islands may indeed be swallowed up.

But some recent data challenge the widespread belief that the islands are destined to disappear - and a few mainstream scientists are even cautiously optimistic about their chances for surviving relatively intact beyond the next century.

"The outlook for the Maldives is not all doom and gloom," said Paul Kench of the University of Auckland in New Zealand. "The islands won't be the same, but they will still be there."

### [From a Theory to a Consensus on Emissions](#)

not long ago, many of today's supporters dismissed the idea of tradable emissions permits as an industry-inspired Republican scheme to avoid the real costs of cutting air pollution. The right answer, they said, was strict government regulation, state-of-the-art technology and a federal tax on every ton of harmful emissions.

How did cap and trade, hatched as an academic theory in obscure economic journals half a century ago, become the policy of choice in the debate over how to slow the heating of the planet? And how did it come to eclipse the idea of simply slapping a tax on energy consumption that befouls the public square or leaves the nation hostage to foreign oil producers?



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