



Drumbeat: August 30, 2010

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Biofuels Firms Buy Up African Land, Cause Deforestation, Food Output Loss](#)

Biofuels companies from the U.K. to Brazil and China are buying up large swaths of Africa, causing deforestation and diverting land from food to fuel production, the environmental group Friends of the Earth said.

Across the continent almost 5 million hectares of land, an area bigger than the Netherlands, have been sold to cultivate crops for biofuels since 2006, Friends of the Earth's Brussels-based European division said today in a 36-page study.

oods and services? It's not really a stockpile of anything. So, its value depends entirely on the smooth flow of energy and resources through the economy.

And yet, there are people who believe that money will somehow make them immune to the breakdown of this flow. Yes, enough money might make it easier for someone to get scarce goods during such a breakdown. But, ultimately a community that fails to function won't be able to provide you with anything no matter how much money you have.

[Veils, Boomerangs, and Goldilocks](#)

I don't have an answer to this question. I'm not sure anyone does. What I can say, however, is three things:

1. Whether from the wall or the brakes, a lot of us are going to get whiplash. There's no scenario I see to avoid some measure of hardship. But I'll take whiplash over broken bones. How about you?
2. I know we're on a train here, but if you haven't already, you might want to think about putting on a seat belt. The seat belt in this case is personal resilience and community resilience.
3. We increase our odds of stopping the train in time (and reducing casualties) if we help more and more people understand there's a wall up ahead.

[A Hell of an Anniversary](#)

HCN's founder, Tom Bell, marks our 40th year with a prediction: We're all doomed

[How should progressives respond to the end of the Oil Age?](#)

This serves as a valuable reminder that like most modern people, self-described progressives are also accustomed to technological fixes for nearly every problem and challenge, and the very possibility that some breakthrough technology or solution isn't just around the corner is scarcely fathomable; that alternative energy might not be able to replace fossil fuels is so alien and so far removed from popular consciousness that this possibility need not even be discussed or rise to the level at which it is worthy of being dismissed in "The Progressive": apparently it "goes without saying"-- the presumed untapped riches of renewable energy is, after all, "the only way"

[U.S. Gulf Drilling Critical to U.S. Economy, Energy Security](#)

The current drilling moratorium in the deepwater Gulf of Mexico and proposed legislation that would add increased regulations, costs and taxes to offshore drilling pose a threat to U.S. energy and economic security, according to energy advisors with the Deloitte Center for Energy Solutions.

Adding layers of regulation will make it more difficult to drill for and develop U.S. resources, and rules that create a punitive tax and royalty regime likely will result in companies investing in projects overseas. For smaller companies with no overseas operations, the consequence of added regulation and associated costs may mean going out of business.

[Kazakh tax has Western oil firms over a barrel](#)

This month, Britain's BG Group and US oil giant Chevron faced a case of Hobson's choice – either start paying Kazakhstan more than \$1m (£650,000) a day in unwarranted export duties, or see their oil and gas exports stopped dead at the border. There are no prizes for guessing which option they took.

[Power Hungry: Iraqis Ask 'Where Is The Electricity?'](#)

The country is generating almost double the amount of electricity it did immediately before the 2003 invasion, but the amount is still woefully inadequate to meet ordinary Iraqis' needs.

"It comes for one hour although it is not for a whole hour. It goes on and off all the time. Technically we have the electricity for about 20 minutes only," says one Baghdad resident who wished to remain anonymous.

[Iran seeks nuclear fuel self-sufficiency'](#)

An Iranian political analyst says the inauguration of the country's first nuclear power plant has been a step in the direction of becoming self-sufficient in the field of nuclear energy.

[Iran offers Lebanon upgrading of defence capabilities and solution to energy crisis](#)

Beirut - The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon Ghazanfar Roknabadi declared, according to An Nahar, that his country is prepared to support the Lebanese armed forces with equipment according to their needs and Iranian capacity.

[Diminishing Returns From Middle East Projects](#)

As my fellow blogger Malini Hariharan wrote last week "the projects environment in the Middle East has irrevocably changed" and with it the rather glib and outdated assumption still being frequently made that building capacity in the region represents a licence to print money.

First of all, as Malini pointed out, further supplies of advantaged gas feedstock are no longer available with high sulphur content meaning that extra processing costs could push non-associated prices to \$4/mmBTU and above.

[Malaysia: Pro-coal group adds new twist to coal controversy](#)

KOTA KINABALU: The controversial proposal to build Sabah's first coal-fired power plant has taken a new twist with the arrival of a new pro-coal pressure group, the People's Assembly Action Committee (PAAC).

The newly formed pro-coal lobby has incurred the wrath of anti coal-fired power plant coalition, Green SURF (Sabah Unite to Re-Power the Future), for claiming that the people in the east coast of Sabah support the project.

[For green movement, a change in climate](#)

On Thursday, some of the country's most respected environmental groups - in the midst of their biggest political fight in two decades - sent a group of activists to Milwaukee with a message.

We're losing.

They put on what they called a "CarnivOil" - a fake carnival with a stilt-wearing barker, free "tar balls" (chocolate doughnuts), and a suit-wearing "oil executive" punching somebody dressed like a crab. It was supposed to be satire, but there was a bitter message underneath: When we fight the oil and gas industry, they win.

[Prefab home assembled in hours wins green honor](#)

In Newport Beach, Calif., a modern factory-built home assembled in hours and finished in days has recently earned a coveted green certification.

The two-story boxy model, ideal for narrow urban lots, won the top or platinum rating from the private U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program.

[Greenest wines? Vintners avoid heavy glass bottles](#)

Many vintners are striving to be organic and eco-minded in their farming, but only a handful have addressed the packaging issue, according to a 2010 ranking of 25 major wineries.

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[Crude Falls From Seven-Day High on Skepticism About U.S. Economic Recovery](#)

Oil fell from its highest price in more than a week on concern that last week's 2.3 percent gain was optimistic, given the outlook for fuel demand in the U.S., the world's biggest user of crude.

Futures erased earlier gains after the dollar strengthened against the euro, making dollar-priced commodities less attractive for investors in other currencies. The Commerce Department reported on Aug. 27 the U.S. economy grew at an annual rate of 1.6 percent in the second quarter, down from an estimate of 2.4 percent last month.

[U.S. Gasoline Falls to \\$2.6979 a Gallon as Crude Declines, Lundberg Says](#)

The average price for regular gasoline at U.S. filling stations fell to \$2.6979 a gallon as supplies of the motor fuel increased and crude prices dropped.

Gasoline declined 7.43 cents in the two weeks ended Aug. 27, according to a survey of 2,500 filling stations nationwide by Trilby Lundberg, an independent gasoline analyst in Camarillo, California.

[Risk-Taking Rises as Oil Rigs in Gulf Drill Deeper](#)

In a remote reach of the Gulf of Mexico, nearly 200 miles from shore, a floating oil platform thrusts its tentacles deep into the ocean like a giant steel octopus.

The \$3 billion rig, called Perdido, can pump oil from dozens of wells nearly two miles under the sea while simultaneously drilling new ones. It is part of a wave of ultra-deep platforms — all far more sophisticated than the rig that was used to drill the ill-fated BP well that blew up in April. These platforms have sprung up far from shore and have pushed the frontiers of technology in the gulf, a region that now accounts for a quarter of the nation's oil output.

Major offshore accidents are not common. But whether through equipment failure or human error, the risks increase as the rigs get larger and more complicated.

[BP's life on 'frontiers' of energy industry at risk](#)

LONDON — At a celebration of BP's centennial last October, CEO Tony Hayward boasted to guests that the oil company "lives on the frontiers of the energy industry."

But this week, in the first major sign that the Gulf of Mexico oil spill may have caused lasting damage to the company's long-term strategy of embracing projects with high risks, BP was frozen out of a potentially lucrative license to drill for oil off the coast of Greenland.

[In Oil Inquiry, Panel Sees No Single Smoking Gun](#)

HOUSTON — More than four months after the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, there appears to be no single smoking gun that implicates one person or company in the disaster. Instead, several missteps and oversights by the crew are being explored by federal investigators as possible triggers of the emergency.

[Mr. Feinberg and the Gulf Settlement](#)

Mr. Feinberg's plans for distributing BP's money, announced last Monday, seem magnanimous and fair. They would provide swift, short-term relief for Gulf Coast residents, and a process for measuring — and appropriately compensating — long-term losses. Mr. Feinberg must be willing to make adjustments along the way. But everyone will get a hearing, and his fund is sure to be vastly better than the BP operation it replaces.

[RWE joins Kurdistan's gas effort](#)

Kurdish hopes of exporting natural gas from northern Iraq have been bolstered by a German company's offer of assistance.

On Friday, the big German gas and power company RWE signed a co-operation agreement with the regional government of the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan. The object is to create pipeline routes and other infrastructure for marketing Kurdish gas.

[Russia Will Boost Oil Exports to China With New Pipeline From East Siberia](#)

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin opened the Russian section of an oil pipeline that will boost oil exports to China from East Siberia.

"This is an important project because we are beginning to diversify the delivery of our energy resources," Putin said at today's opening of the pipeline in Skovorodino in Russia's Far Eastern Amur region, in comments posted on his official website. "Thus far, shipments were made to our European partners."

[Shell near finishing new Nigeria pipe](#)

Supermajor Shell said today its Nigerian joint venture, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), was close to completing a new \$1.1 billion pipeline to the Bonny export terminal which will have a capacity of 600,000 barrels per day.

[Chevron to explore for oil off Liberia](#)

Reuters) - Chevron Corp has signed a deal with Liberia to explore for oil and gas in three deepwater blocks off the West African country's coast, an official in the president's office said.

[Italian energy agency asks for ENI gas rule change](#)

(Reuters) - Italian energy authorities want the government to amend gas market rules approved earlier this month that would let ENI (ENI.MI) control up to 65 percent of the Italian market, the Authority for Electrical Energy and Gas said on Monday.

[Saudi and Kuwait make Khafji gas plans](#)

A joint venture between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait plans to build gas and natural gas liquids collection and distribution facilities at the Khafji oilfield, according to reports.

['Lukoil must stay public'](#)

Russia's Lukoil should not buy back its remaining shares from ConocoPhillips according to the company's chief executive Vagit Alekperov.

Alekperov, who had said the same before Lukoil decided to proceed with the first part of the buyback earlier this month, said that it would be hugely beneficial for Lukoil if the remaining stake were sold on an open market, the business daily Vedomosti reported.

[Norway's natural gas production down in July](#)

(Reuters) - Norway's natural gas production fell to a preliminary 7.5 billion cubic metres in July from actual production of 8.5 billion cubic metres in June, the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate said.

[With Neighbors Unaware, Toxic Spill at a BP Plant](#)

TEXAS CITY, Tex. — While the world was focused on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, a BP refinery here released huge amounts of toxic chemicals into the air that went unnoticed by residents until many saw their children come down with respiratory problems.

For 40 days after a piece of equipment critical to the refinery's operation broke down, a total of 538,000 pounds of toxic chemicals, including the carcinogen benzene, poured out of the refinery.

Rather than taking the costly step of shutting down the refinery to make repairs, the engineers at the plant diverted gases to a smokestack and tried to burn them off, but hundreds of thousands of pounds still escaped into the air, according to state environmental officials.

['Central banks, governments can't print barrels of oil and shale gas is no game changer'](#)

In our view, shale gas is not a game changer. First and foremost, shale gas suffers from very high depletion rates.

[The Republican Who Dared Tell the Truth About Oil](#)

Matt Simmons understood the wages of addiction and wasn't afraid to sound warnings, even to George W. Bush.

[Sign of the Times](#)

Cook argued that even if we could buy ourselves a few more decades or even a century, a crisis was inevitable--one that would threaten the lives of billions around the world. Although people today tend to think mainly of how a declining oil supply would affect the economy, Cook was more concerned that without abundant fossil fuel or a renewable replacement for it, the global population would be unsustainable.

[Losing our way on roads](#)

Everyone pays for public transport, first through taxes and then through fares, and it is time everyone had access to it, just as they do to roads. Instead, Melbourne's transport planning has for decades been focused on building more roads while applying pain-killing injections to a moribund public transport network.

[Transition movement eyes bleak future and sees opportunity to plan for change](#)

Climate change. Dwindling oil supplies. A precarious economy. Disruptions to the national food supply.

The future, some believe, is likely to throw a large wrench into life as we know it. The assumptions that we make - that there will be food at the grocery store, gas at the filling station, a regular job to go to on Monday morning - may be tested in a way that's hard to imagine. And there could be considerable hardship if we don't put those assumptions aside and begin planning for change.

[Environmental Sustainability, Peak Oil and World Hunger](#)

Last year, The United Nations reported that over one billion people in the world are starving. That's more than 16% of the world population that are in extreme want for food; meanwhile industrialized nations waste almost equal to their consumption. And considering the general girth of industrial waistlines, that's a lot of food.

[What's the value of home-grown food?](#)

While my garden has so far been unprofitable, at least in financial terms, there are apparently people out there -- even in space-scarce cities -- who grow lots and lots of food in their backyards. Like enough to feed their families, or to make a significant dent in their grocery bills.

Curious how they do it, I set out to find someone whose backyard vegetable garden was a substantial source of food and a real money-saving venture.

[European Commission Receives 19 National Renewable-Energy Plans, 8 Missing](#)

The European Union's regulatory body has received 19 national renewable-energy action plans and will prepare legal action against the remaining eight EU countries if their strategies aren't submitted "very soon."

[German Solar-Power Capacity May Exceed Wind by 2020, State Adviser Says](#)

Germany probably will have more production capacity at solar power plants than from wind-energy turbines within a decade, a government energy adviser said.

Europe's biggest electricity producer by the end of the decade will likely have about 42 gigawatts of installed capacity from photovoltaic panels that turn sunlight into power, compared with 41.9 gigawatts of wind power, both onshore and offshore, Stefan Kohler, chairman of the DENA agency, an energy adviser to the government, said today at a briefing in Berlin.

[Scale down industry call from climate change expert](#)

SCALE down industry, strengthen local resilience and "include nature" in all development models.

That is the call from retired industrial chemist Hugh Laue, now a green business consultant, chairman of the Zwartkops Trust and a leading campaigner in Nelson Mandela Bay against climate change.

[Japan plans to bind large firms to CO2 caps: draft](#)

Japan's compulsory emissions trading scheme is set to start in April 2013 and cover large CO2 emitting companies, a draft of the government's proposals showed on Monday, but several issues are still open to debate.

[UN climate change panel to face Himalaya error verdict](#)

An international committee reviewing the "processes and procedures" of the UN's climate science panel is set to report on Monday.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has faced mounting pressure over errors in its last major assessment of climate science in 2007.

The review was overseen by the Inter-Academy Council, which brings together bodies such as the UK's Royal Society.

The findings are to be unveiled at a news conference in New York.

[FACTBOX - Errors, findings by UN panel of climate scientists](#)

Following is an overview of errors and overall findings in a 2007 IPCC report:

[Greenhouse-Gas Regulation Backed by a Majority in Defense Council's Poll](#)

A majority of U.S. voters say the government should regulate greenhouse gases linked to global warming and that the Environmental Protection Agency is up to the job, a poll for the Natural Resources Defense Council found.

[The Urgent Islands](#)

If a country sinks beneath the sea, is it still a country? That is a question about which the Republic of the Marshall Islands — a Micronesian nation of 29 low-lying coral atolls — is now seeking expert legal advice. It is also a question the United States Senate might ask itself the next time it refuses to deal with climate change.



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