



Wikileaks Wish for Oil Data

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on October 13, 2010 - 10:30am

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This is a guest post by Mason Inman. Mason writes, "I'm writing an article for a magazine about calls for greater transparency in oil data, and I thought it would be interesting to get the viewpoints of Oil Drum readers." Mason is a freelance journalist, currently based in Karachi, Pakistan.

If you could get any data about OPEC oil, what data would you most like to get? I started wondering about this question when I was reading the new thriller [Garden of Betrayal](#) by Lee Vance, a retired former partner at Goldman Sachs who was head of their energy trading for a number of years.

In the book (don't worry—I won't spoil the plot), an energy analyst named Mark Wallace working at a financial firm called Cobra gets a mysterious phone call from a woman asking him to meet at a cafe. When he arrives at the meeting place, the caller turns out to be incredibly sexy—and even better, she has an iPod full of secret data:

"What am I going to find on this?" [the narrator says].

"Reprocessed seismic, daily and life-to-date production figures by well, bottom-hole and wellhead pressures from drill date to present, saltwater injection volumes, current and historical produced mixture percentages, well rotation schedules, onsite GOSP capabilities, and some other stuff."

"For Ghawar?" I asked, stunned.

"For every oil field in Saudi Arabia."

(It's hard to escape the idea that Vance wished, during his career at Goldman Sachs, that something like this would happen to him.)

The narrator plugs the field-by-field data into a depletion model, and his computer grinds away for hours, and then spits out an answer should be familiar to many Oil Drum readers: Saudi oil production will [likely take a nosedive](#) starting very soon.

But should he trust the numbers? Who was the sexy woman who leaked the information? And what will happen when the world passes peak oil? The narrator spends the rest of the book trying to get the answers to these questions (and more).

"I found myself wondering what the world would look like in fifty years," the narrator says, early in the book. "It's not just global warming—everyone in the energy business knows there isn't anywhere near enough oil and gas in the world to meet long-term demand under any realistic economic scenario. It's a strangely obvious issue that doesn't get much play."

It made me wonder: What would be the most useful data would be to get a hold of, if we wanted to get a better idea of what is happening with Saudi oil. Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame published a "[Wikileaks wish list](#)" in the Washington Post a couple of months ago. The Washington Post "asked Ellsberg for his wish list of documents to be leaked, declassified or otherwise made public, documents that could fundamentally alter public understanding of key national security issues and foreign policy debates."

So in the same vein, I'd like to hear Oil Drum readers' "Wikileaks wish lists"—for OPEC, or for any kind of oil-related data that would shed light into today's dim recesses. I'm writing a magazine article on arguments for greater transparency in the oil industry, particularly for OPEC countries, so I'm very interested in getting Oil Drum readers' input.

(Disclaimer: Making oil-related data public is a serious crime in many countries, so I'm not actually advocating anyone to break a law and leak something that might get them in trouble. I'd much rather see more information on oil become public through government and industry decisions that it's better for everyone if things are more transparent.)



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