ARTICLE ALERT

American Center Colombo
44 Galle Road, Colombo 3
Tel. 249-8194
E-mail: amcentersl@state.gov

A compilation of abstracts of current and significant articles from leading American periodicals available at the American Center Library.

Full text of these articles can be obtained by contacting the American Center Library.
No. 44, Galle Road, Colombo 3 / Email: amcentersl@state.gov / Phone: 2498 169 / Fax: 2498101

September 2009

DEMOCRACY & GLOBAL ISSUES

1. Fahey, Jonathan **WIND POWER'S WEIRD EFFECT** (Forbes Magazine, September 7, 2009)

   The news about wind power is mixed, notes the author. The good news is that, thanks to cheap wind energy, in some parts of the country when there is too much power on the grid, wholesale power prices are now dropping to zero or below at certain times of the day. The bad news is that wind turbines spin the most at night when demand is low and least during afternoons when power is needed. Some power plants are hard pressed to power down when wind power is at its highest. In the long run, the wind power boom could push daytime prices higher. To balance out fickle wind turbines, utilities will need electricity during peak times from gas-fired plants; that intermittent power will be expensive. Currently available online at http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2009/0907/outfront-energy-exelon-wind-powers-weird-effect.html

2. Gugliotta, Guy **FOREST PRIMEVAL** (Smithsonian, vol. 40, no. 4, July 2009, pp. 14-16)

   Two abandoned coal mines in eastern Illinois contain the largest fossil forest ever discovered -- over four square miles of tropical wilderness preserved intact over 300 million years ago. This accident of nature occurred when an earthquake suddenly lowered the swamp, and sand and mud rushed in, covering everything. This site is so valuable to science because it provides a snapshot of life on Earth just prior to a period of great change, and most of the species found in the Riola and Vermilion Grove mines would later vanish. Researchers believe that the carbon-dioxide content of the atmosphere had suddenly

grown; studying the relationship between this primordial atmospheric change and changes in vegetation may offer clues on how today's ecosystem could respond to increases in carbon-dioxide levels caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Currently available online at http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Phenomena-Forest-Primeval.html

3. Jensen, Robert **THE DELUSION REVOLUTION** (AlterNet, posted August 15, 2008)

Jensen, journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, notes that "our current way of life is unsustainable -- we are the first species that will have to self-consciously impose limits on ourselves if we are to survive." The industrial revolution of the past two centuries has produced unparalleled prosperity and comfort for a portion of humanity, but at a great expense to the biosphere, threatening its ability to support life. Following the agricultural and industrial revolutions is what Jensen refers to as the "delusional revolution" -- sophisticated propaganda techniques, in particular advertising, that have lulled the public in Western societies into believing that "unsustainable systems can be sustained because we want them to be". The future may turn out very differently from what we want it to be, Jensen says; we will need to develop skills for a world of less energy and fewer material goods, which means "abandoning a sense of ourselves as consumption machines, which the contemporary culture promotes", and developing a sense of community which is missing in modern life. However, he believes that we humans "should go easy on ourselves, precisely because we are a species out of context, facing a unique challenge." Available online at http://www.alternet.org/story/95126/the_delusion_revolution:_we're_on_the_road_to_extinction_and_in_denial_/?page=entire

4. Mooney, Chris **VACCINATION NATION** (Discover, June 2009, pp. 58-65, 75)

Several recent court rulings that vaccines do not cause autism have done little to quiet the angry debate that began a decade ago, when a study first alleged that there was a connection between the use of a mercury compound, thimerosal, as a preservative in vaccines, and the growing incidence of autism among children. The anti-vaccine story has spread rapidly in the mass media and on the Internet, drawing many celebrity supporters. While there is still uncertainty on whether the reported increase in autism is merely due to increased attention to the condition or a range of environmental triggers, the vaccine-autism connection has been refuted by scientific research. The author notes that the scientific and medical community was slow to respond to the growing public reaction against vaccines, noting that "it's not hard to scare people, but it's extremely difficult to unscare

them." The greater threat, notes the author, is holding back vaccines. The great success of vaccines in eradicating diseases is a reason why the antivaccination sentiment has thrived; few people today remember the devastation caused by these scourges. The major challenge today, Mooney notes, is to maintain public support for vaccination programs and to "explore how science and so many citizens fell out of touch." Available online at http://discovermagazine.com/2009/jun/06-why-does-vaccine-autism-controversy-live-on

5. Oplinger, Doug JOURNALISM AS A CIVIC PRACTICE (Connections: The Kettering Foundation's annual newsletter, 2009, pp. 14-15)

   Even financially imperiled news organization can continue to be "chronicler and conscience" of their communities, says Oplinger. He uses the Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal as an example. Without compromising its journalistic integrity, he writes, the newspaper collaborated with its media competitors and the city's special interests on a civic journalism project that explored, starting in 2006, the hopes and fears of America's "disappearing middle class." The project blossomed into a long series of stories and several public events. "Collaborations such as the Beacon Journal's middle-class project may begin to rewrite the rules of engagement for civic journalism," Oplinger writes. The project worked because it not only reported on the problem, but helped drive the discussion, he says. Available online at http://www.kettering.org/media_room/periodicals/connections

6. Podger, Pamela **THE LIMITS OF CONTROL** (American Journalism Review, June/July 2009)

   For journalists today, social networking sites are increasingly blurring the line between the personal and professional. This creates a host of ethics and etiquette questions for news organizations, which are crafting guidelines for the growing number of staffers using social networks. Generally speaking, the advice to journalists is to identify themselves as journalists, tell recipients they are using social networks in a professional capacity, and remain mindful that people will regard them as representatives of their news organizations. Amy Webb, principal consultant at Webbmedia Group in Baltimore, says news organizations should be pondering the privacy and safety issues of a new crop of tools, including location-aware services. "When a New York Times reporter logs on to Facebook from his mobile phone, he's sharing a lot more information than his status updates. He's sharing the content he wrote and his location," Webb says. "There are safety and privacy issues around this." Currently available online at http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4798

7. Powell, Corey **THE BIG HEAT** (Discover, June 2009, pp. 38-43)

Global warming is at once the most alarming challenge and the most controversial. Despite the potential for catastrophic environmental outcomes, a large segment of the U.S. public still doubts that climate change will cause major harm, or that it is occurring at all. Discover Magazine editor-in-chief Powell moderates a discussion between four prominent climate scientists, who discuss the evidence that climate change is occurring. For them, the number of different events that are all happening simultaneously would be very hard to explain if not for global warming -- such as the loss of ice mass in both polar regions, the increasing acidification of the oceans, and the potential for widespread crop failures in many equatorial regions where crops are already being raised at temperatures close to their photosynthetic limits. They fear that it may be too late to make the needed changes if humanity waits until there is international cooperation; what is needed is leadership by the U.S. and Europe, and other nations will follow. Currently available online at http://discovermagazine.com/2009/jun/30-state-of-the-climate-and-science

8. Thompson, Nicholas **AND DATA FOR ALL** (Wired, vol. 17, no. 7, July 2009, pp. 68-71)

Barack Obama is the first president to appoint a chief information officer for the federal government. Vivek Kundra, who comes to the office having served in a similar position for the District of Columbia, is planning Data.gov, a Web site where all government-produced information will be easy to find, sort and download. When that is done, according to Kundra, the private sector will find ways to use the data which will create new services for the public and new sources of profit for entrepreneurs. He points to the example of the Global Positioning System, which was once the exclusive property of the Department of Defense; now, the system is publicly available and is used for a variety of commercial and public service purposes. “The key is recognizing that we don’t have a monopoly on good ideas,” Kundra told Thompson in an interview. “And that the federal government doesn’t have infinite resources.” Currently available online at http://www.wired.com/politics/onlinerights/magazine/17-07/mf_cio

ECONOMIC SECURITY

9. Kim, J.S. **THE COMING CONSEQUENCES OF BANKING FRAUD** (Seeking Alpha, posted September 9, 2009)

The author, an independent financial advisor and analyst, writes that the rally in Western stock markets in recent months has been the result of financial fraud, a "scheme executed by an elite global financial oligarchy ... to fool the world into believing that global economies are recovering." Kim contends that the banking and financial establishment have engaged in transactions that have been kept secret from the public and "will have severe and negative consequences in the not-so-distant future," and the blowback from these activities will exceed the downturn the world experienced in 2008. In view of the worsening economic data, the current stock market rally makes sense only when viewed through the prism of fraud, with the rise of computerized ultra-fast high-frequency proprietary trading programs, and the fact that much of the trading volume in recent weeks has been in only a handful of financial firms. He adds that all government-produced economic statistics "have been massively distorted towards the side of optimism and away from reality" during financial crisis, and this false front of optimism has been abetted by financial journalists. Currently available online at http://seekingalpha.com/article/160619-the-coming-consequences-of-banking-fraud?source=article_sb_popular

10. Naím, Moisés **MINILATERALISM: THE MAGIC NUMBER TO GET REAL** INTERNATIONAL ACTION (Foreign Policy, no. 137, July/August 2009, pp. 136-137)

Not only globalization is falling out of favor in many countries but multilateralism is going through a crisis too, says the author, editor-in-chief of the magazine. The need for effective multicountry collaboration on such issues as climate change, nuclear proliferation and pandemics has soared, but related multilateral talks have failed or execution of agreed solutions has stalled. Naím proposes what he views as a smarter, more targeted approach: bringing to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem. The magic number will vary greatly depending on the problem, but the author suggests that between a dozen and 20 countries should be able to effectively handle all important global problems. Countries not invited to such "minilateral" talks will denounce this approach as undemocratic and exclusionary, but Naím notes that agreements reached in smaller groups can provide the foundation on which more-inclusive deals can be subsequently built. Currently available online at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/18/minilateralism

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

11. Cohen, Roger **THE MAKING OF AN IRAN POLICY** (New York Times Magazine, August 2, 2009, pp. 36-43)

    The author, a New York Times columnist just back from Tehran, discusses the Obama administration's struggle with what he considers its biggest diplomatic challenge. The Bush administration's ideologically driven "axis-of-evil" approach to Iran had failed; Tehran had prospered by expanding its regional influence and was accelerating its nuclear program. The Obama administration believed it was time to seek normalization through a new approach. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose instincts on Iran have always been more hawkish than the president's, was pushing for a harder line, supported by Vice President Joe Biden; they did not prevail. The Obama administration's conviction is that Ahmadinejad's election was fraudulent, but in the American interest, it is ready to overlook that and to talk. The White House had been deliberately impartial on the election outcome by directing its diplomatic overture chiefly at Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. In early May, Obama sent Khamenei a secret personal letter that proposed a framework for talks on the nuclear issue and regional security. The two things it had not planned for, however, were a situation of near-insurrection and Khamenei's shift into explicit alignment with Ahmadinejad. Currently available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/02/magazine/02Iran-t.html

12. Wheatcroft, Geoffrey **CONTINENTAL DRIFTS** (National Interest, no. 100, March/April 2009, 39-47)

    Wheatcroft, a British journalist and author, notes that the Israeli incursion into Gaza at the beginning of 2009 highlighted the growing gulf between the U.S. and Europe. As judged by media coverage, the gap between American and European perceptions of the conflict was wider than ever, as if Gaza "might be two entirely different stories." Despite sharing a common heritage, America and Europe have long diverged on matters of politics, war, religion and the social contract. The Cold War concealed a number of differences, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the author writes that "we should not be surprised to see the rifts turning into chasms." A major point of contention was the disparity in sharing the cost of the NATO alliance, an arrangement that fueled unprecedented economic prosperity in Western Europe, while the U.S. shouldered debt from military spending. Wheatcroft says that the demilitarization and civilianization of Europe may also be connected to the decline of religion in Europe, too. Europe has been bloodied by centuries of conflict fueled by

religious passions, and endured the past century with two major wars, totalitarian regimes and millions of deaths, something America has been insulated from. "Europeans have had quite enough experience with violence to have rejected it consciously," says Wheatcroft, suggesting that, after military debacles from Vietnam to Iraq, "is it possible that the Americans themselves will look eastward at Europe one day, and be tempted to wonder if that is the better future?" Currently available online at http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=20974

13. Wilson, David (Maj.) **A GLOBAL PROBLEM: CYBERSPACE THREATS DEMAND AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH (**Armed Forces Journal, July 2009)

Cyberspace has changed the way people communicate forever, the author writes, but with that change comes a host of new problems including identity theft, computer viruses, the defacement of websites and network intrusions. He says cyberspace has become "an entity unto itself, not controlled by anyone, but affecting all in one form or another." Nations need to establish agreed-upon standards to help resolve problems plaguing cyberspace, including cybercrime. Wilson, who is chief of cyberlaw at the Army's U.S. Space and Missile Defense Command, advocates setting up an international organization comprised of cyber-faring nations to oversee the borderless domain of international cyberspace. Such an organization would promote collaboration by governments and industry on software and filtering standards needed to block viruses and create an international firewall. He also calls for the creation of an international cyberspace convention to monitor the health of cyberspace and to deal with problems. Within that context, the author says an international Computer Emergency Response Group must be created. Available online at http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2009/07/4062667/

U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

14. Brinkley, Douglas **TR'S WILD SIDE** (American Heritage online, posted August 31, 2009)

In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt commemorated the 10th anniversary of his charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War by creating 45 new national forests in 11 states. He believed that "something in the American wilderness experience," including his experiences hunting in the West in the 1880s, "had given him an edge over the Spaniards" in Cuba, says Brinkley, a distinguished professor of history at Rice University. Similarly, Roosevelt's Rough Riders had spent much of their lives in the mountains and plains of the Southwest -- cowboys, military veterans, prospectors, hunters and lawmen. "There could be no better material for soldiers," he enthused. When Roosevelt

assumed the presidency in 1901, he brought his love of nature, his doctrine of "the strenuous life," and his belief that "the American fighting spirit would only continue as long as outdoorsmen didn't get lazy and rest on their laurels." As a champion of conservation, Roosevelt added over 234 million acres to the public domain between 1901 and 1909. He used his executive power to save the Grand Canyon, Crater Lake, Devils Tower, Mesa Verde and the Dry Tortugas, and he initiated many innovative protocols for range management, wildfire control, land planning, recreation, hydrology and soil science throughout the American West. Adapted from Brinkley's book THE WILDERNESS WARRIOR: THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE CRUSADE FOR AMERICA. Currently available online at http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/web/20090831-President-Theodore-Roosevelt-Cuba-Spanish-American-War-Splendid-Little-Conservationism-Douglas-Brinkley-California-Florida.shtml

15. Monan, J. Donald **VALUE PROPOSITION** (Boston College Magazine, vol. 69, no. 3, Summer 2009, pp. 24-27)

The author, former president of Boston College, addressed a group of higher education leaders at a Boston hotel on the purpose of a liberal arts education. From his perspective, Monan notes that liberal education has been weakened by a variety of factors, including the pressures for specialized skills in a mobilized society and, within the undergraduate college itself, the increasing specialization, departmentalization, and consequent isolation of faculty members and their offerings. Instead, American higher education should be directed almost exclusively at the intellects of students through the communication of truths, skills, habits and qualities of intellect. Liberal education should aspire, at its deepest level of intention, to educate for the enriching and constructive exercise of liberty. Currently available online at http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/summer_2009/features/value-proposition.html

Recipients are advised that there is no permission to reproduce or republish any of the articles summarized here. Requests for such permission should be addressed to the American Center. If you like to receive a full text of any of these articles please call or write to the American Center, 44 Galle Road, Colombo 03.
Telephone: 2498169/2498146/2498128 Fax: 2498101 e.mail: amcentersl@state.gov.

For more information visit our website at: http://srilanka.usembassy.gov