

Article Round-up

January-February 2009

ECONOMIC POLICY

1. Asia: The Coming Fury

Walden Bello. Foreign Policy in Focus, February 9, 2009.

As goods pile up in wharves from Bangkok to Shanghai, and workers are laid off in record numbers, people in East Asia are beginning to realize they aren't only experiencing an economic downturn but living through the end of an era.

Full text available at: <http://fpif.org/fpiftxt/5855>

2. The Real Price of Gold

Brook Larmer. National Geographic, January 2009, pp. 34-61.

Humanity's attachment to gold is experiencing a frenetic resurgence, as global economic uncertainty fuels demand for gold, its price having driven to unprecedented levels. The author writes that demand for gold in 2007 outstripped mine production by almost 60 percent. Although investors are flocking to gold-backed funds or buying gold for investment, two-thirds of the demand for gold is for jewelry, with India far and away the biggest consumer of gold. Only 161,000 tons of gold have ever been mined, but half of that has been in the last fifty years; all the richest deposits are being rapidly depleted, and most of the remaining deposits are traces in remote and ecologically fragile regions. Larmer writes that modern gold mining is highly environmentally destructive, resulting in huge swaths of rainforest being cleared, mountains of tailings and widespread mercury contamination. In addition, the rush for gold is fueling conflicts in many developing nations.

Full text available at: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/01/gold/larmer-text>

3. Bad Credit History

Barry Eichengreen. Current History, Vol. 108, No. 714, January 2009, pp. 14-20.

Everyone knows that policy errors exacerbated the Great Depression. So what is stopping the world's policy makers from getting their act together this time?

4. Risk Management

Joe Nocera. New York Times Magazine, January 4, 2009, pp. 24/51.

Nocera notes that stabilizing the U.S. economy is probably the most important issue the Obama administration will face. The risks taken by the U.S. and European investment firms have threatened to bring down the entire financial system. Many have suggested that the cause of the catastrophe was the widespread institutional reliance on a value-at-risk (VaR) financial model that did not take into account the biggest risk of all -- the possibility of a financial meltdown. This was one of Alan Greenspan's primary excuses when he testified about the financial crisis before Congress in 2008. The late 1980s and the early 1990s were a time when many firms were trying to devise more sophisticated risk models because the world was changing around them. Banks, whose primary role was assessing credit risk, were merging with investment banks, which traded stocks and bonds. Derivatives and securitizations -- pools of mortgages or credit-card loans that were bundled by investment firms and sold to investors -- were becoming an important component of Wall Street activity, but were very difficult to value. Nocera notes that at the height of the bubble, there was so much money to be made that any firm that turned

away deals because of misgivings about the risk would miss out on huge short-term gains to less-cautious rivals; all the incentives were on the side of taking on more risk. The fact that VaR didn't measure the possibility of an extreme event was a relief to the heads of investment firms, making such a possibility easy to ignore.

Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/04/magazine/04risk-t.html>

5. China Entices Its Scholars to Come Home

Mara Hvistendahl. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 55, No. 17, December 19, 2008, pp. A20-21.

Between 1978 and 2005, more than 770,000 Chinese students went abroad, but less than one quarter returned to China after completing their studies. Today, Chinese government and private efforts to improve the country's academic environment and reverse this brain drain appear to be succeeding. As part of its effort to create internationally-recognized universities, the government has provided money to top universities specifically for hiring from overseas. University administrators have also been busy recruiting top Chinese-American academics like Yusheng Zheng, who was lured away from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School to return to his native Shanghai and become associate dean of Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, where 27 of 35 faculty members are Chinese academics educated in the United States. Chinese universities now offer competitive benefits and salaries to those academics interested in returning from abroad, says Hvistendahl, who terms the about-face from earlier Chinese policies on study abroad "remarkable." In 2005, about 35,000 returned, often to positions of leadership and with real power to effect educational reforms. "In the U.S., you're one of thousands of people who end up there," says Dean Zheng. "In China, every one of us chooses to be here." While there are problems, such as the resentment of locals against returnees who may earn many times more in salary depending on their credentials and professional profile, the "sea turtles," as they are called, are returning home, bringing the American model of education with them.

Full text available at: <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i17/17a02001.htm>

6. Think Again: Climate Change

Bill McKibben. *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2009.

Noted author Bill McKibben writes that it may be too late to avert climate change, but that it is imperative that the international political order stop delaying and adopt the few options humanity has left. He notes that there is no doubt left among the scientific community that global warming is a reality, and adds that many scientists feel that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest report is too conservative. The claims that agriculture will improve in some regions as frost recedes may hold true for a while, but eventually the threat of heat stress and drought will be global. Solving the climate crisis is no longer an option, as human activities have already raised the global temperature by a degree; all we can do is mitigate its worst aspects. Coordinating this effort with every country on earth will be "far and away the biggest foreign-policy challenge we face."

Full text available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4585&page=0

REGIONAL SECURITY

7. ASEAN'S "Black Swans"

Donald K Emmerson. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, July 2008, pp. 70-84.

Following the brutal suppression of Burmese pro-democracy demonstrators in fall 2007, ASEAN issued a statement expressing "revulsion" and urged a "transition to democracy" in the country. But the organization's apparently newfound human rights legitimacy was soon dashed after the Burmese junta

successfully prevented the U.N. special envoy to Burma from briefing EAS leaders at its 40th anniversary summit in November 2007 and the organization adopted a charter that watered down reformist pro-democracy elements. The author, head of the Southeast Asia Forum at Stanford University's Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, argues that ASEAN's tradition of non-interference in the affairs of its member states, particularly with regard to democracy and human rights, can be modified only as the balance of its membership swings more on the side of "free" countries. "Too few countries are democratic enough for their leaders to exert effective pressure on the association to liberalize," he writes. The organization must also seize upon unexpected "black swan" opportunities such as financial, political and natural crises to broaden its agenda.

Full text available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v019/19.3.emmerson.pdf

8. The United States and Southeast Asia: Toward a Strategy for Enhanced Cooperation

Derek J. Mitchell, ed. A Conference Report of the CSIS Southeast Asia Initiative, December 2008, 33 pages.

The report discusses the United States' role in Southeast Asia, trends in ASEAN affairs, shifting external power dynamics in Southeast Asia, and the status of U.S. alliances and emerging partnerships in the region.

9. On the Eve of Obama's Inauguration: American Soft Power in Asia

Richard C. Bush III. The Brookings Institution, January 2009, 6 pages.

When it comes to Asia, there may be some disagreement on the size of the U.S. soft-power deficit created by the Bush administration. The author examines the U.S. soft-power policy toward Asia following the departure of George W. Bush and the arrival of the new Obama administration.

10. A Concert-Balance Strategy for a Multipolar World

Michael Lind. Parameters, Autumn 2008, 13 pages.

Why does the United States have to prepare itself to cooperate on security interests with other major powers? The author examines U.S. military strategy in the 21st century, and discusses why a concert-balanced strategy would work for a multi-polar world in which the United States is not a solitary hegemony, but rather one of several great powers.

DEMOCRACY and GLOBAL ISSUES

11. How Meat Contributes to Global Warming

Nathan Fiala. Scientific American, February 2009.

Producing beef creates prodigious amounts of heat-trapping greenhouse gases; pound for pound, beef production generates 13 times as much greenhouse gas emissions as producing chicken. For potatoes, the multiplier is 57. Beef consumption is rising rapidly, due to global population growth and people eating more meat. Producing the annual beef diet of the average American emits as much greenhouse gas as a car driven more than 1,800 miles. The author notes that improving waste management and farming practices can help reduce the "carbon footprint" of beef, but dietary changes and eating less beef would be more effective.

Full text available at: <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-greenhouse-hamburger>

12. Where Will the Growth Come From?

John Mauldin. Investors Insight, posted February 9, 2009.

In a guest post, financial-services executive Louis-Vincent Gave notes that multinational companies following a new business model will most likely emerge with great success from the current economic turmoil. These companies have retained knowledge-intensive design and distribution tasks in-house while outsourcing low value-added manufacturing tasks to developing countries, have worked to create new products and new markets, and have piled up cash. This preparation should allow them to take advantage of the current dislocations in the global economy to increase their efficiencies even further. “Globalization is far from dead,” Gave says, “and the companies that are positioning themselves today to reap its rewards will be the winners of tomorrow.”

Full text available at:

http://www.investorsinsight.com/blogs/john_mauldins_outside_the_box/archive/2009/02/09/where-will-the-growth-come-from.aspx

13. Soft Censorship: How Governments Around the Globe Use Money to Manipulate the Media

Don Podesta. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance, January 9, 2009, 32 pages.

In many countries, censorship of the news media now manifests itself in far more subtle ways, phenomena sometimes referred to collectively as “soft censorship.” This report explores the spread of indirect means of censorship, particularly in countries where democracies are fragile and there is no culture of a strong, independent news media. Possible remedies that might be employed to attack the problem are also examined.

14. “Frightsizing” Newspapers: What Derailed the American Newspaper Industry?

Ken Doctor. Global Journalist, Fall 2008, 7 pages.

The decline of the U.S. newspaper industry has been so dramatic that rather than using terms like “downsizing” or “rightsizing,” this author coins the term “frightsizing.” He explains what has happened to the American newspaper industry, focusing on revolutions that have quickly sapped the vitality of the U.S. print news industry.

15. Wikis as Legitimate Research Sources

Suzanne Bell. Online, November/December 2008, 4 pages.

The U.S. troops in Afghanistan are using a wiki to record and pass along vital operational information. Meanwhile, libraries use wikis for staff communication and collaboration, to provide information to and invite participation from users, and as teaching tools. Can we start to count wikis among other legitimate information sources?

16. Humanitarian Dilemmas

G. Pascal Zachary. *Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 44-51.

The moral necessity of humanitarian action seems no longer self-evident, suggests Zachary, former foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and a consultant on African issues to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Many believe that humanitarianism is facing a full-blown identity crisis as a result of nearly two decades of rapid growth in the humanitarian enterprise. According to Zachary's research, after the crackup of humanitarian efforts in the Rwandan crisis, where humanitarian aid actually prolonged the suffering in the refugee camps, the demand for humanitarian assistance called for more robust, self-critical and efficiency-minded humanitarianism. Good intentions are no longer sufficient to meet the demands today, says Zachary. “Even as they confront the tension between their traditional mission to do good and the need to think about all manner of unintended consequences,

humanitarians are also weighing a third element: tackling the root causes of humanitarian crises, and delivering the sort of aid that might provide durable 'insurance' against them.”

Full text available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=wq.essay&essay_id=478160

17. Does the Doha Round Matter

Kimberly Ann Elliot. *Current History*, Vol. 108, No. 714, pages 39-44.

According to the author, if rich nations devalue the World Trade Organization's role in governing trade, the poorest and most venerable countries will suffer most.

18. The Most Important Number on Earth

Bill McKibben. *Mother Jones*, November/December 2008, 6 pages.

The author discusses aspects of global warming and climate change, including the need for action on global environmental damage, the impact of excessive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and courses of action that could be taken to reduce carbon emissions.

19. The Origin of the Ocean Floor

Peter B Kelemen. *Scientific American*, February 2009.

The deep basins under the oceans are carpeted with lava that spewed from submarine volcanoes and solidified. Scientists have solved the mystery of how all that lava reaches the seafloor -- eighty-five percent of Earth's volcanic eruptions occur deep underwater along mid-ocean ridges. Lava ejected from those narrow chains of seafloor volcanoes produce the rocky underpinnings of all oceans. Until recently, no one understood how the molten lava rises up into the ridges. Scientists now think they have deciphered the process, beginning with the formation of microscopic droplets of liquid rock in regions up to 150 kilometers deep.

Full text available at: <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-origin-of-the-ocean-floor>.

AMERICAN SOCIETY & ITS VALUES

20. Groping for Words: A Guide to Slang and Usage Resources

Edwin Battistella. *Choice*, vol. 46, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 619-631.

In this bibliographic essay, the author, a linguist in the Department of Language, Literature, and Philosophy at Southern Oregon University, discusses the style and usage of grammar in the United States. By definition, grammar is the field of linguistics that covers the conventions governing the use of any given natural language. It includes morphology and syntax, often complemented by phonetics, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. Each language has its own distinct grammar. A fully explicit grammar exhaustively describing the grammatical constructions of a language is called a descriptive grammar, as opposed to linguistic prescription, which tries to enforce the governing rules of how a language is to be used. Three of the earliest proponents were Benjamin Franklin, who hoped that Americans would adopt the best British models of speaking and writing; John Adams, who promoted the idea of a national academy for the study of English; and Thomas Jefferson, who was a great collector of dictionaries and stressed an American language and new words as a means of progress. In the 19th century, controlling errors in English became especially important for writers. At the dawn of the 21st, Americans now embrace grammar in unconventional forms, in regional and ethnic varieties, on the web, and as entertainment. In the U.S., the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar (SPOGG) and MSN has designated March 4 as National Grammar Day.

21. It's Not What We Teach, It's What They Learn

Alfie Kohn. *The Education Digest*, December 2008, 4 pages.

The author discusses effective teaching and student motivation, comparing parent-child and teacher-student relationships, with the intention of focusing action on using encouraging comments instead of punishment to promote cooperative learning behavior.

22. Asian American Identity: Shared Racial Status and Political Context

Jane Junn and Natalie Masuoka. *Perspectives on Politics*, December 2008, 12 pages.

Using the dynamism of racial construction and the implicit comparisons across groups in the racial order of the United States as a backdrop, the authors analyze the dynamics of racial group consciousness among blacks and Asians Americans by examining the results of an embedded survey experiment designed to activate group identity.

23. Wikipedia: Friend, Not Foe

Darren Crovits and W. Scott Smoot. *English Journal* 98.3 (2009), pp. 91-97.

The authors, a teacher educator and middle school teacher, collaborate on successful ways to build Wikipedia assignments into English classes.

24. America's Best High Schools

Eddy Ramirez. *U.S. News & World Report*. vol. 145, Issue 13, p43-46, 3pages.

This article explores educational innovations being tried by the top high schools in the U.S. compiled by this magazine and the Standard & Poor's Corp. The article also assesses the potential economic benefits of redesigning the U.S. education system so that student performance in mathematics and science matches that of other countries. The performance of urban charter schools in fields such as mathematics and science are also discussed.

END