Going Green: A Strategic Minefield

Description

Iâ€™ve been pondering this issue for a few weeks now and will get busy on posting my thoughts on the topic, figuring there are many issues associated with our current mania with all things green. Iâ€™m not against it, and because I was thinking of a title for such postings, my thoughts moved to another plane, that of the world-wide issues, but unlike those being discussed. Maybe I just havenâ€™t tripped across those editorials yet, butâ€¦going â€œgreenâ€• has far ranging implications for the entity at the top of the food chain, some good, some potentially very, very bad.

I suspect Al Gore and company hasnâ€™t thought them through yet, or he may not have ever made his movie.

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So, that being stated as the opening salvo, hereâ€™s a short run down of some of my installed filters: BS â€“ Biology, emphasis in marine and botany regions of the science. Degrees in International Relations and Strategic Studies. Lived on two islands in the Pacific and spent a lot of time swimming the reefs. Post military career, spent 4 years in electronic recycling sales, in a small operation, where I was involved not just in making the sales of what came out of the â€œwaste stream,â€• but helping sort through large and small loads of â€œhazardous waste,â€• to see what was there, and also worked contact proposals, so I had to describe the processes involved in proper disposal techniques and get a reasonable understanding of current HAZMAT practices as it related to electronic waste.

My original title was going to be something like â€œGo Green â€“ For National Security.â€• The premise was you can hate the junk science, or embrace it, but it still had value at that level. Certainly from a national level, going green in regards to reducing our oil consumption provides a variety of benefits in the short run. If we could create the technology, affordable and effective, to replace basic petroleum based fuels with any combination of alternative energies, we would have a tremendous impact on the Worldâ€™s complaint about how we use 25% of the energy for less than 5% of the Worldâ€™s population. The tyrannical and theocratic nations of South America and the Middle East would have to back off on how we were â€œstealing their oilâ€• (as a side note, weâ€™re stealing at a competitive price!) and come up with a new â€œsloganâ€• to make the World hate us. Weâ€™d have much more control of some of the more contentious issues worldwide along those lines. Overall, a real plus.

I have often pondered pulling up John F. Kennedyâ€™s speech about going to the moon and re-writing it on the topic of energy independence. If we actually had plenty of â€œhome grownâ€• engineers, the sleeves could be rolled up and I bet some amazing results could be achieved. Not having a lot of real scientists and engineers coming out of the colleges and universities to support this is an entirely separate, yet tightly linked subject for discussion at another time.

If we did â€œgo to the moonâ€• in developing methods and techniques such as you might imagine, we certainly would export it, creating entirely new companies and corporations around the globe, all the the benefit of mankind.

Butâ€¦Iâ€™ll get to my thoughts in a few paragraphs.

From my view point in the recycling company (still going strong, BTW), the two owners were not tree hugging liberals. In fact, despite their penchant to vote for the Democrats, at the â€œlocalâ€• level, they were very much capitalists to the core. They did enjoy their success, and not a word was ever spoken about how they were doing any of this to â€œsave the planet.â€• They were two smart business guys. Rough cut, from a contract proposal response: In three years, they went from $3M to $12M in gross revenues, with about an average of 25 people a new forklift and some building additions, totaling maybe $100K during that period. Most of what was taken in was paid for in the collection fees, and I was the one getting unbelievable money for what some would consider obsolete equipment in unknown operating condition, that was still needed by companies â€œstuckâ€• with a requirement to maintain what they had in place and could not afford to wholesale replace. In many cases, on the equipment I sold, we came close to, and exceeded in some cases, a 100% profit margin. And, readers, that was but one of seven such companies within about 50 miles around us.

Taking a jump to the tree-hugger side of that same story, I was amazed at just how many different components were recycled, saving further mining of metals and also reducing the energy needed to make new product, as some of the â€œfront endâ€• of some manufacturing processes were shortened by feeding recycled material into the production lines. I also was amazed at how much truly functional equipment was just disposed of due to age. About the only thing that we paid to get rid of was the plastics, which we had made a decision to not separate the types (like defined by the number you see on the bottom/side of plastic items), so we had to pay to have that hauled off.

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Summary: You can make a handsome living in electronics recycling, if you donâ€™t mind getting your hands dirty and learning some EPA (Federal and local) regulations and complying with them and it does, in fact, benefit the environment.

Back to the issue of petroleum based fuel replacement and how we must consider carefully how we do this:

- Bio-Fuels. A few weeks back, on some talk show, a caller said â€œYou think they hate us now? Wait until we take their food to drive our cars!â€• Precisely! I have read in several places, since the push to burn ethanol has become a life of its own, that They already have! Its hitting our bank accounts already. Add to that that estimates I have seen say our total corn output, if only used to make ethanol, would only replace between 12 and 15% of our oil consumption in vehicles. In other words, we canâ€™t reach â€œescapeâ€• velocityâ€• from the dead dinosaur addiction. So, you say we can use sugar cane, and beets, and soy beans. Yes, we can. And those are all used to produce food, too. Youâ€™d have to have someone regulating the balance between food and fuel production, similar to the market for fuel oil and gasoline that changes gas prices each fall. The bottom line: Is it food, or is it a way to get to the mall?
- Wind/Solar/Hydrogen: I have hopes smart minds could make it happen, so we could thumb our noses at the people who pull the fuel from the ground, but hereâ€™s the rub, economically and, therefore strategically: The nations that sell us the oil, for the most part, have never developed any other industry that would allow them to â€œlive in the manner to which they are accustomed.â€• See where this is going? They hate us now for buying their product, screaming in the streets and at international conferences about how wasteful and greedy we are (as they count our money. Now, when we get serious about listening to their criticisms and do something about

> it, the cash flow will no longer head to them and they will holler loud and long, about how America is screwing them. That metaphor is already being used to recruit terrorists around the world and on our own streets. Canâ€™t win for losing, you see, and those people, with the oil reserves, have not had the foresight to â€œdiversifyâ€• their revenue producing capability. As our nation leads the way in innovation, and freedom, no one else seems to get that those are the very mechanisms that have allowed this upstart of a nation surpass all other economies in human history.

So here if the conundrum, economically, geo-politically and strategically: We go â€œgreenâ€• to save the planet (the < 5% of us on the face of the planet), with other sneering at us, saying itâ€™s all our fault that they now have no money, so all the more reason to attack us, sooner, while there still is an oil producing infrastructure to make things go, rather than later when thereâ€™s no oil to make things go and they canâ€™t afford the new technologies to get around.

Our economy is tightly intertwined with the rest of the world. for all we bring to the table for humanity to use, we are accused of using more than our fair share now. We will be accused of not using any in the possible future. It appears that keeping our wallets open to economic blackmail may keep us more stable than if we invent better ways to get around and thereby clean up the air globally.

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I think itâ€™s a dangerous minefield we have wandered into, yet I donâ€™t know if others have yet looked at this endgame.

So, what do you think?

Category

1. Geo-Political
2. Political
3. Technology

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