



## INFOALERT SEPTEMBER 2010

### DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

**IA43** Angier, Natalie **Listening To Bacteria.** (Smithsonian, vol. 41, no. 4, July/August 2010, pp. 76-82) Currently available online at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/specialsections/40th-anniversary/Listening-to-Bacteria.html>

Bacteria are smarter than you think, according to the findings of the Princeton University microbiologist profiled in this article. Bonnie Bassler is a leader of a new field of microbiology called "quorum sensing," which studies the communication between bacteria. Contrary to traditional view, scientists now have found that bacteria "converse" in complex chemical languages. They discuss their shared environment, its conditions, and what actions they may take in concert, as their quorum is formed. "They can compost an elephant, fertilize an oak forest or light up the oceans in the eerie teal glow of bioluminescence," Angier writes. They can also decide to transform a chronic condition into a virulent one in the human body, causing serious disease symptoms, and even death. Having detected that process, researchers are hoping that they can develop a drug that will interrupt the process, though Bassler acknowledges that achieving that goal is still likely a decade away.

**IA44** Kurlantzick, Joshua **The Hired Guns** (Newsweek, July 26, 2010) Currently available online at <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/26/the-hired-guns.html>

Kurlantzick, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, writes that, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, the number of lobbyists for foreign countries in Washington, D.C. has grown from about 1,800 in 2005 to 1,900 in 2009. Human-rights activists say that the amount of money spent on lobbying has grown at a faster rate -- and by some of the most brutal regimes on earth, including several sanctioned by the U.S. for their human-rights abuses. Angola, one of the most corrupt nations in the world, spent more than \$3 million on lobbying in the first half of 2009. According to the author, the rise in foreign lobbying may have compromised the policymaking of U.S. government officials and may have reduced Washington's pressure on authoritarian regimes. Human-rights activists or government opponents in authoritarian countries are unable to make their case in Washington, or to match the funds spent by their rulers. The result, says Kurlantzick, is that "while thugs get heard in U.S. halls of power, the voices of their opponents remain silent."

**IA45** Parfitt, Tom **Pavlovsk's Hopes Hang On A Tweet** (Science, vol. 329, August 20, 2010, p. 399) More about the Twitter campaign can be found online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cary-fowler/kremlinrussia-stop-the-de\\_b\\_659123.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cary-fowler/kremlinrussia-stop-the-de_b_659123.html)

The Pavlovsk Experimental Station of the N.I. Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry near St. Petersburg, Russia, is one of the oldest seed banks in the world, with several thousand varieties of fruit and other edible crops that exist nowhere else. Its treasure trove of genetic diversity is imperiled – much of the land may be sold later this year to developers for a housing project. The Russian government has no relocation plan, and moving the collection could take a decade – unlike most seed banks, Pavlovsk is a field collection of plants propagated by grafting, and cannot be stored as frozen seeds. A global Twitter campaign directed at Russian President Medvedyev, who recently opened a Twitter account, has persuaded him to review a court ruling allowing the developers to proceed.

**IA46** Tolmé, Paul **The Dirty Truth Behind Clean Natural Gas.** (National Wildlife, June/July 2010) Currently available online at <http://nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/National-Wildlife/Animals/Archives/2010/The-Dirty-Truth-Behind-Clean-Natural-Gas.aspx>

Natural gas may burn cleanly compared to other fossil fuels, but drilling for gas is environmentally destructive, causing air and water pollution, scarring the landscape and endangering wildlife and people. Since 2000, a drilling boom ensued when the previous administration opened up large swaths of public lands in Western states to gas drilling, exempting energy companies from environmental regulations. The gas deposits being exploited are in underground strata that require hydraulic fracturing – injecting a toxic cocktail of chemicals at high pressure into the rock formations to break them up and release the gas. The author notes that there is growing pressure on Congress to eliminate the environmental exemptions granted by the previous administration, and to require energy companies to use directional drilling in order to reduce the number of wells.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

**IA47** Kotkin, Joel. **Ready, Set, Grow** (Smithsonian, vol. 41, no. 4, July/August 2010, pp. 60-67) Currently available online under the title THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF AMERICA: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/specialsections/40th-anniversary/The-Changing-Demographics-of-America.html>

The population of the United States will likely grow by 100 million people over the next several decades, and urban development expert Joel Kotkin offers a few projections on how the country may be affected. Kotkin predicts this level of population growth will keep the U.S. vibrant while population drops in other developed world nations will lead them into decline. Excerpting his 2010 book THE NEXT HUNDRED MILLION, Kotkin agrees with other demographic predictions that the U.S. growth will be concentrated in immigrant populations. As a result, Hispanic Americans will comprise a larger proportion of the population, and the white population will slide below 50 percent. Contrary to the predictions of others, Kotkin doesn't see this increased population concentrating in major urban centers. Rather, he thinks Americans will continue to choose the suburbs in the future, and predicts that "super fuel efficient cars of the future are likely to spur smart sprawl." Fulfilling the promise of upward mobility for that growing population will be the major national challenge, the author predicts, and reviving the nation's manufacturing sector will be a key factor in doing so.

**IA48** Levinson, Marc **Faulty Basel: Why More Diplomacy Won't Keep The Financial System Safe** (Foreign Affairs, vol. 89, no. 3, May/June 2010, pp. 76-88)

Following some financial crises in the mid-1970s, representatives from the major economic powers have worked together to create regulations to make the global banking system safer. A new organization was formed in Basel, Switzerland, known as the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, and has crafted successive international agreements to regulate banking and securities. However, notes the author, Senior Fellow for International Business at the Council on Foreign Relations, Basel did little to protect against the global financial meltdown that started in 2007. In this article, published before the recently-concluded Basel III talks, Levinson argues that regulation at the national level creates more resilience than a single set of international rules, which could be exploited at a global level. As an example of such regulatory "diversity", he points to Spain, whose banks weathered the financial crisis much better than their other European counterparts, despite the collapse of the Spanish property market; Spain required its banks to set aside extra reserves for potential future losses. Levinson does not like the idea of an international bank bailout fund, which would present a moral hazard for lax national regulators; he concludes that "when it comes to financial regulation, less international diplomacy might be better than more."

## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

**IA49** Bergen, Johan. **The Nuclear Domino Myth** (Foreign Affairs online, August 31, 2010) Currently available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66738/johan-bergenas/the-nuclear-domino-myth>

According to Bergen, research associate at the Henry L. Stimson Center, the historical record does not support a widespread notion that if Iran develops nuclear weapons, other Middle East countries will do so also. Aside from India and Pakistan, no other countries have locked into a race with nuclear neighbors. Also, Iran would likely use a nuclear weapon for deterrence, not as a credible threat to its neighbors, just as other nuclear powers do. Asserting the nuclear domino myth could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating excuses for Middle East countries to acquire nuclear weapons.

**IA50** Lichtenstein, Jesse. **Digital Diplomacy** (New York Times Magazine, July 18, 2010, pp. 24-29) Currently available online at [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/magazine/18web2-0-t.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/magazine/18web2-0-t.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

On Twitter, Jared Cohen and Alec Ross are among the most followed of anyone working for the U.S. government, coming in third and fourth after Barack Obama and John McCain. This didn't happen by chance. Their Twitter posts have become an integral part of a new State Department effort to bring diplomacy into the digital age, by using widely available technologies to reach out to citizens, companies and other non-state actors. Traditional forms of diplomacy still dominate, but 21st-century statecraft is not mere corporate rebranding (swapping tweets for broadcasts). Diplomacy may now include such open-ended efforts as the short-message-service (S.M.S.) social-networking program the State Department set up in Pakistan last fall. The State Department recently cut financing for some activist groups based outside Iran that promote democracy and began to focus on providing information technologies that would facilitate communication among

dissidents in Iran. Restrictions imposed by U.S. sanctions were lifted to allow for the export of instant-messaging and anti-filtering software.

**IA51 Starks, Tim. For Their Ears Only.** (CQ Weekly, July 17, 2010)

In the late 1940s, early in the Cold War, Congress enacted the Smith-Mundt Act, designed to keep the State Department from the domestic use of propaganda aimed at foreign audiences. In July, two House members introduced legislation to dismantle Smith-Mundt, saying that it makes no sense in an era of the Internet and satellite communications, and may be interfering with efforts to combat terrorism. The Pentagon, which has embraced some of the law's precepts, have complained that Smith-Mundt prevents them from disseminating false information to deceive insurgents for fear that the bogus reports might end up getting republished as truth in the U.S.; the State Department recently prohibited a public radio station in Minneapolis from rebroadcasting Voice of America Somali-language broadcasts to the area's large Somali émigré community, even though there was nothing to prevent the station from airing broadcasts from terrorist groups in Somalia. The author notes that Smith-Mundt has not kept up with technology, and is complicating diplomacy in the age of global terrorism.

## US SOCIETY AND VALUES

**IA52 Hirschorn, Michael Closing The Digital Frontier** (Atlantic Monthly, July/August 2010) Currently available online

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/closing-the-digital-frontier/8131/>

The Internet's founding ideology -- that information should be free, and that attempts to constrain it are not only hopeless but immoral -- is crumbling under the onslaught of applications ("apps"), smart phones, and pricing plans. The shift of the digital frontier from the Web, where the browser ruled supreme, to the smart phone, where the "app" and the pricing plan now hold sway, is far from a given, however, especially with the under-30 crowd accustomed to free content. The prospect of paying hundreds or thousands of dollars yearly for print, audio, and video on expensive new devices is not going to be an easy sell. Even so, media companies see profits to be made from pushing their best and most timely content through their apps instead of their Web sites.

**IA53 Wilkinson, Katherine K. Climate's Salvation? Why And How American Evangelicals Are Engaging With Climate Change** (Environment, Vol. 52, No. 2, March/April 2010, pp. 47-55)

Scientists have presented the public with complex climate models and projections on rising temperatures to gain awareness of global warming. Growing numbers of supporters of climate change action offer up a much simpler argument: The Earth is God's creation, and it is the duty of humankind to protect and preserve it. While American evangelical Christians are often perceived to be quite conservative, on this issue, the political lines are not so cleanly drawn. "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action" is a four-year old campaign that now has more than 260 followers. One plank of this document is that "Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem." Wilkinson argues that the climate change issue may end the traditional alliance between evangelical leaders and the Republican Party, at the same time it conveys understanding of the issue and a commitment to action to a new demographic group in the population.