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Abe and Abbot Out under Australia's Midday Sun 豪州の炎天下に立つ安倍とアボット
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July 9 was the final day of Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's historic and surreal 3-day visit to Australia. He and Australia's climate-denialist Prime Minister Tony Abbott[1] jetted together to Rio Tinto's West Angelas iron ore mine in the western Pilbara region, five hours away from the Australian capital of Canberra and home to earth's oldest rocks and evidence of life.[2] Rio Tinto had arranged a "money shot," putting the two leaders atop an enormous, and automated, Komatsu 930E dump truck.[3]

https://twitter.com/TonyAbbottMHR

With a capacity of 300 tons, roughly the amount of irradiated water Fukushima Daiichi leaks every day into the sea, the 930E is not just a humongous robot. It is also a striking symbol of the extent to which information and communications technology (ICT) capabilities are accelerating their diffusion through a range of industries and sectors at the perilous edge of our present era. This is not just in mining, but also in "extreme energy" oil and gas, airlines, farming, and of course the drone weapon systems and cyber-spying capacities of America's military-industrial complex and its cousins and competitors everywhere.

The above line-up of players is not exactly "friends of the earth." But the deployment of ICT, to cope with the climbing costs of harvesting and using depleting resources as well as real or imagined threats, is rapidly reducing the cost of smart urban infrastructure for mitigating and adapting to climate change. These facts were plain as day in Pilbara, especially from the top of a Komatsu robo-truck. Even as Abbott and Abe mounted the 930E, Komatsu's outstanding smart factory in Awazu, a showpiece of ICT-enabled renewable power and conservation, was consuming 92% less power than it had in 2010.[4] And the day before, on July 8, Mitsui Fudosan's flagship smart city project in Kashiwanoha (Chiba City) had opened its solar-topped "Gate Square" in a desperate campaign to draw national and

international attention to the radical efficiency and renewable energy potentials at the core of this unfolding and increasingly resource-lite paradigm of urbanization.[5]

The "energy building" in Gate Square equipped with a rechargeable battery system and the power interchange unit (source: Nikkei BP)

But neither Abe nor Abbott stepped forward to connect the dots and link the grim, automated business of digging even deeper into Pilbara's ancient red earth with the emergence of a resilient urban paradigm. They are both devotees of the recklessly extractive past and are working to extend it into the future. The West Angelas mine itself is a joint venture between Rio Tinto, Mitsui Bussan Metals and Nippon Steel; and indeed the vast Pilbara region's resource exploitation is - as Abbott himself emphasized at the site - rooted in Japanese investment that flowed in the wake of former Japanese PM Kishi Nobusuke's (Abe's grandfather) 1957 trade pact with Australia.[6]

The West Angelas Mine

The day before their trip to Pilbara, Abe and Abbott had signed off on an economic partnership agreement grounded in the 20th-century confidence in endless growth through free trade in seemingly limitless resources and energy-intensive commodities. This fossilized mindset has been preserved forever by the pair's bizarre "crotch shot"[7] photo

op, both clad in pricey RM Williams dandy-man boots and leg-up on a mammoth Komatsu tire. Hatless and hung over in the midst of a region with reputedly the highest concentration of solar radiation on this planet, they perhaps hallucinated the immense tire as a round monolith signaling endless and effortless mass consumption and conventional energy.

http://news.ninemsn.com.au/national/2014/07/10/07/51/carbon-tax-will-soon-be-history-cormann

Neither Abe nor Abbott represented his country's real potential very well in Pilbara. But that's hardly the end of it. Reality is very fluid, driven by physics and chemistry towards an increasingly visible gap between costly recklessness or realism. Abbott went back to Canberra to eliminate the carbon tax in a country plagued by biblical fires and floods.[8] Abe went home to opportunity: Against the backdrop of a new record low in global solar prices,[9] Japan's METI reported that it had authorized an astounding 66 gigawatts of solar deployment.[10] Nobody expects all of that renewable capacity to be installed, at least as solar. But out of the midday sun, and confronted by the evidence, including the new Indian commitment to smart cities and solar,[11] surely Abe has incentives to opt for realism by supporting the promising initiatives in solar and ICT.

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1 Oliver Milman, “Abbott's climate stance is 'reckless' and 'deeply shaming', senior UK Tory says,” The Guardian, July 9, 2014: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/09/abbott-climate-stance-reckless-shaming

2 See “Zircon crystal found in the Pilbara dates from the very origins of Earth’s crust — 4.37 billion years ago,” News.Com.Au, February 24, 2014: http://www.news.com.au/technology/science/zircon-crystal-found-in-the-pilbara-dates-from-the-very-origins-of-earths-crust-437-billion-years-ago/story-fnjwl2dr-1226835837092

3 James Massola, “Abbott, Abe put mining on centre stage,” The Sydney Morning Herald, July 10, 2014: http://www.smh.com.au/national/abbott-abe-put-mining-on-centre-stage-20140709-3bncs.html

4 Komatsu describes the project in detail (in Japanese) in its 2013 news release "Komatsu: A More Affluent Life Through the Climate Change Mitigation and Power-Cut Project": http://www.komatsu.co.jp/CompanyInfo/csr/environment/2013/pr-03.html

5 See "Solar Electricity Interchanged for Peak Cut Adjustment," House of Japan, July 10, 2014: http://www.houseofjapan.com/electronics/solar-electricity-interchanged-for-peak-cut-adjustment

6 See Katie Robertson, “Tony Abbott says our mining boom would not have happened without Japan at Rio Tinto in the Pilbara region,” News.Com.Au., July 9, 2014: http://www.news.com.au/finance/business/tony-abbott-says-our-mining-boom-would-not-have-happened-without-japan-at-rio-tinto-in-the-pilbara-region/story-fnkgdg1h-1226983351920 and “2GB, Sydney - interview with Chris Smith,” Transcript from Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP, July 8, 2014: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/Pages/2014/jb_tr_140708.aspx

7 Adam Withnall is merciless in his criticism, in “Tony Abbott embarrasses Australia by praising Japanese WWII military, ‘getting on the sake’ and posing for ‘crotch-shot’ photo opportunity,” The Independent, July 10, 2014: http://www.independent.co.uk/incoming/tony-abbott-embarrasses-australia-by-praising-japanese-wwii-military-getting-on-the-sake-and-posing-for-crotchshot-photo-opportunity-9596793.html

8 Peter Martin, “Carbon tax going, but don't expect big savings,” Sydney Morning Herald, July 13, 2014: http://www.smh.com.au/national/carbon-tax-going-but-dont-expect-big-savings-20140713-zt65e.html

9 Jeff Spross, “Global Solar Module Prices Just Reached A Record Low,” ClimateProgress, July 11, 2014: http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/07/11/3459225/solar-spot-price-record-low/

10 James Byrne, “Japan’s solar wave could herald new energy age,” Interfax, July 11, 2014: http://interfaxenergy.com/gasdaily/article/11375/japans-solar-wave-could-herald-new-energy-age

11 Zainab Mulla, “Top 12 ideas by Prime Minister Narendra Modi which turned into reality,” India.com, July 12, 2014: http://www.india.com/top-n/top-12-ideas-by-prime-minister-narendra-modi-which-turned-into-reality-94210/