



4. **NUCLEAR ENERGY: Leaked cables show Wales increasingly uneasy with U.K. nuclear power stance** (02/08/2011)

Lisa Friedman, E&E reporter

Wales aims to become a leader in the fight against climate change -- but its growing independence could become a thorn in the side of the United Kingdom's quest for nuclear power, according to a newly leaked U.S. State Department [cable](#).

The 2009 unclassified cable released over the weekend by WikiLeaks notes that the Welsh Assembly Government saw "no need for nuclear" because it felt the country was self-sufficient with renewable power and was concerned about nuclear waste. Yet Her Majesty's Government (HMG) had put nuclear power at the core of its strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"As its independent political power grows, the Welsh may look to exert their power and block projects seen as beneficial to the U.K. but harmful to Wales," diplomats in the London embassy wrote. Noting that Wales could soon experience "Scottish-style devolution," officials noted that the country could develop power to legislate over the environment and block nuclear projects.

"If this occurs, HMG will have more difficulty in making country-wide decisions. Energy and environmental issues could become the focus of an intense struggle between London and Cardiff," diplomats wrote.

Meanwhile, the cable lays out what diplomats called the "considerable national pride" among the Welsh, particularly in the realm of innovative energy programs. The country has produced its own strategy to address climate change, calling for a 3 percent cut in emissions annually starting this year.

A key part of the strategy involves developing domestic renewable energy resources like the Severn Estuary, which officials say holds potential to generate 9 to 10 gigawatts of power. Others have pushed for a dam across the Severn, but that option has faced a torrent of criticism from environmental groups. Wales is also poised to become a leader in offshore wind. In 2008, local officials approved the Gwynt y Mor Offshore Wind Farm, expected to produce 750 megawatts of energy. Another, off the northern coast, could supply enough electricity for 21,000 homes, and a third wind farm, in South Ayrshire, will power 120 megawatts.

All of that clean energy potential -- combined with widespread opposition among the public to nuclear energy -- could in fact add to the friction with London, U.S. diplomats wrote.

"There is considerable national pride among the Welsh, as various contacts referred to Wales as 'our country' to Emboffs [embassy officials] on multiple occasions," diplomats wrote. But noting the several large-scale domestic clean energy projects, they cautioned: "On the other hand, Wales' independent streak may cause friction with the UK. Many Welsh think the UK has already 'milked' Welsh resources without providing anything in return."

Also in climate change-related WikiLeaks this week:

China's maneuvers during the 2009 U.N. climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, were a top factor in the U.K. government's rethinking of its engagement with the Asian economic giant. According to a Jan. 15, 2010, [cable](#), then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown and then-Foreign Secretary David Miliband had been "surprised" by the Chinese "approach and tactics" in Copenhagen.

That, diplomats wrote, combined with new Chinese positions on a bilateral human rights dialogue, "has caused UK ministers to rethink how they are engaging with China." By January, nothing had changed, the diplomat said, but "ministers are wondering if they are taking the right approach to China in general."

By January 2009, the United Kingdom had still not decided whether to join the newly minted International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Of primary concern: whether China, Japan and the United States would join. If not, diplomats noted in a [cable](#), "there is fear that the institution would be too Euro-centric." The United Kingdom did ultimately join IRENA, as did the United States and Japan. China has not.

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