


**Why we should be optimistic about decarbonization:
what Martial Law, the Round Table, and the Berlin Wall, can teach us about the future of decarbonization.**

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“Keeping in mind that decarbonization is just as much about technology as it is about politics, and how unlikely transforming the global political system anchored in nuclear arsenals seemed in 1981, as difficult as it might be to imagine now, we may be surprised to see where the global energy system is by 2030”




New Year's is a time of hope; the expectancy of a better future and the capacity to look far ahead. Watching "Don't look up", a satire of the disdain towards the scientific evidence for human-induced climate change might not have been exactly helpful in boosting that spirit. Recognizing the danger of disdain for scientific evidence of climate change and applauding the film's brilliance in highlighting the consequence of inaction in the face of global warming, I am nevertheless, as far as decarbonization is concerned, entering 2022 on an optimistic note.

Besides the unprecedented policy and business momentum that made 2021 the best year for decarbonization thus far, my hope is also rooted in the memories of witnessing the greatest shift in global political systems since WWII. I vividly remember tanks rolling into my hometown on a snowy Sunday morning on the 13th of December, 1981. Hours earlier, General Jaruzelski declared Martial Law, crushing hopes for a new beginning the Solidarity movement had brought just a year before. At that point, it was difficult for anyone to imagine that the political systems guarded by nuclear arsenals would crumble in a matter of years.

Yet, within the decade that saw Reagan and Gorbachev set the right conditions for change, in 1989, the Round Table brought together the Polish opposition leaders and its former foes and triggered a political tsunami in Eastern Europe. Within 2 years, Poland, and later other countries of the former Soviet bloc had their first non-communist governments, the Berlin Wall fell, Germany reunited, and the Soviet Union's regime collapsed.

The Polish Round Table offers an interesting perspective on accelerating change. Seizing the opportunity to transform the system, as the Soviet Union's power crumbled, would not have been possible unless opposition leaders rose above the walls of divisions and accounted for the position of those with a vested interest in



the continuity of the old system. "Out with the Old, in with the New" activates powerful defenses that sabotage change. The organizers of the Polish Round Table recognized that, and accelerated change by negotiating a pathway for a peaceful transition of power.

This prompts the question: might being more neutral in the service of change not be a stance to consider for leading a transition to a carbon-neutral world too? Being neutral does not imply embracing the OLD or questioning the need for urgent action to advance the NEW. It means that until and unless the conditions for companies and people whose businesses and livelihoods directly or indirectly rely on fossil fuels have been accounted for, leading sustainable business transformation will be unsustainable. It also means creating ways for all players to participate in the NEW.

The technology to decarbonize shipping is almost there; with adequate incentives in place, by pooling the resources of various stakeholders and organizing pilot projects, the industry will eventually overcome the chicken and egg problem, develop solutions that will grow in scale, and take marine energy transformation to the next level. But for adequate incentives to be put in place, we must rise above the walls of defenses to overcome divisions along the global warming faultline. Keeping in mind that decarbonization is just as much about technology as it is about politics, and how unlikely transforming the global political system anchored in nuclear arsenals seemed in 1981, as difficult as it might be to imagine now, we may be surprised to see where the global energy system is by 2030.

Let us look forward with optimism towards 2022 and do our part to make it the best year for decarbonization thus far. And let us also hope, just as it played a pivotal role in starting the transformation of the global economy with containerization 60 years ago, that shipping will again take a center stage and lead in transforming the global energy system!

Happy New Year everyone! The best is yet to come!