Having just returned from a trip to Northern Europe, a couple of experiences resonate with me that, I hope, are worthy of sharing here. The first relates to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, British Petroleum, and the distinct ways in which BP's role and responsibility for the spill are viewed, depending on one's geographical roots.

My recent travels took me to Great Britain and then on a journey to the Baltic region of Northern Europe, during which I was accompanied by a substantial number of Brits. While there, I was also able to compare and contrast news coverage of the unfolding oil spill disaster as presented by the British (BBC/Sky News) and American (MSNBC/Fox) broadcast news networks.

The contrast in media coverage was striking. While U.S. TV news focused on the ecological and economic havoc the spill has wrought for the Gulf Coast region, British TV news has been largely silent on those particular topics. Instead, the British media coverage in recent weeks has focused on the deleterious effect the spill has had on BP stock value, and the ever-escalating costs of spill remediation–now approaching $2 billion–for the company.

This narrow focus on the economic impacts of the Gulf Coast spill on BP tracked closely the reactions of individual Brits with whom I spoke during my recent travels. Those informal conversations reinforced for me the central role that BP plays in the economic lives of so many individual British citizens–through jobs, investments, pensions and the like. By contrast, I heard precious little concern expressed by my British travel companions for the environmental consequences of the spill for the Gulf Coast region. Those with whom I spoke instead tended to view the disaster as an inevitable consequence of America's ongoing dependence on traditional fossil fuels, rather than more benign, renewable energy options. (More about this latter topic in a future post.)

The old adage of "where you stand depends on where you sit" certainly applies when contrasting British and U.S. media and public responses to the Deepwater Horizon spill. Notably, that disaster has done more to polarize relations between the two countries than any event in the recent political history of these closely-allied nations.

Yet another, unwelcome consequence of the largest environmental disaster in recent memory.