



## DrumBeat: October 14, 2007

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

### [Global warming an urgent problem](#)

Seven years ago scientists thought global warming might cause the North Pole arctic ice sheet to completely melt by the end of this century. But this September the Arctic summer sea ice shrank to more than 20 percent below the previous record low.

“The reason so much (of the Arctic ice) went suddenly is that it is hitting a tipping point that we have been warning about for the past few years,” said James Hansen, director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

In the last six months estimates of when the North Pole ice cap will completely melt have been revised to 2023.

At least one climate scientist, Wieslaw Maslowski of the Naval Postgraduate School, projects a blue, ice-free Arctic Ocean in summers by 2013, an event that has never occurred before, as long as human beings have inhabited our planet.

In the last year estimates of when climate change will cause widespread famine have been revised to 2020.

### [Peak Oil and Price Trends](#)

As already noted, many times, the media finds it is not ‘politically correct’ to explain high prices as due to oil – very simply – depleting and running out. So they prefer to cite storms, technical problems, refinery accidents, rebellion and wars in Nigeria, Chad and Sudan, the Iraq war, al Qaida, Vladimir Putin and the ‘anti western Kremlin’ now menacing pipeline routes in Georgia, the Kazakhs or Venezuelans applying ‘resource nationalism’ to their oil reserves and demanding higher taxes and shares of profits, the greedy and wasteful Chinese importing too much oil, the Indians doing the same, very hot weather (or very cold weather), and why not earthquakes ? – anything will do as long as NO mention of Peak Oil is made. It is however politically OK to cite declining or shrinking inventories as an explanation of why oil prices are high.

### [Upside to rising price of the black stuff](#)

Spiralling oil prices are a necessary inconvenience, says visiting American ecologist Richard Heinberg, as the world faces a double-headed monster of climate change and sinking fossil fuel reserves.

### [Production costs for farmers reaching new heights](#)

When commodity prices drop, there will be no commensurate decline in production input costs, setting the stage for an agricultural inflation trap like the one that created havoc in rural America through the 1980s.

...The key factor is the accumulative cost of transportation in all sectors - that means the price of diesel fuel.

### [Pickup dealers haul in sales — but can they last?](#)

With gasoline prices hovering near \$3 a gallon and the housing market in a slump, large pickup sales should be suffocating.

Instead, a price war among the major players in the sector is boosting sales and market share for gas-thirsty vehicles such as the Toyota Tundra, Chevrolet Silverado and Dodge Ram.

### [Erosion of Caribbean food security](#)

A fundamental change is taking place in the global role of agriculture.

Since prehistory, food has only been cultivated for human consumption or as feed for livestock; but lately, agriculture in developed and developing nations has been transformed, as cereals are being grown for conversion into fuel.

### [Energy follies](#)

Are you happy with the recent big increase in food prices? How about the big jump in gasoline prices? Do you enjoy being dependent on foreign oil? And finally, do you like seeing millions of acres of woodland and wildlife habitat being destroyed to make room for more corn production? The tragedy is none of it was or is necessary.

### [Nuclear reactors for sale: France vies for big stake in industry revival](#)

More than two decades after Chernobyl shook the world's faith in nuclear power, France

is vying to lead a worldwide revival of the nuclear industry as worries about global warming and rising energy prices have brought fission back in fashion.

### [Centrica considers seeking judicial review of green coal plant decision](#)

Centrica PLC is considering calling for a judicial review to overturn a government decision which excludes most energy companies from the contest to build the world's first green coal plant, The Observer reported citing industry sources.

### [Refiners feel oil prices' sting](#)

The recent surge in crude oil prices above \$80 a barrel came at a bad time for U.S. refiners, as profit warnings showed this week from some of the nation's largest oil refiners.

Higher oil prices not only drove up the costs of making gasoline and other fuels, they came during a period of weaker demand for those fuels, when refiners' ability to pass on added costs was limited, analysts said.

### [Houston CEO takes message to auto industry](#)

ConocoPhillips head James Mulva recently suggested the United States consider placing a surcharge on less fuel-efficient vehicles while promoting the purchase of more efficient models with rebates.

Now that in it itself probably doesn't seem all that shocking, but the fact that the Houston CEO made that speech before Detroit business leaders - gulp.

### [Coal-to-fuel plants considered, but few want to be first in line](#)

Developers of a coal-to-fuel plant in western North Dakota say more than a dozen similar plants are planned in the U.S. - though no one wants to be the first to build one.

### [The "Great Game" Enters the Mediterranean: Gas, Oil, War, and Geo-Politics](#)

The haunting spectre of a major war hangs over the Middle East, but war is not written in stone. A Eurasian-based counter-alliance, built around the nucleus of a Chinese-Russian-Iranian coalition also makes an Anglo-American war against Iran an unpalatable option that could turn the globe inside-out.

## [Tech Declared Both Culprit, Savior in Climate Change](#)

Climate change is both a large-scale crisis and a huge opportunity, and IT has a role in both, industry executives said at a panel discussion last week.

## [School districts struggle to reduce transportation bill](#)

The problem, many school administrators say, is that they've already squeezed the inefficiencies out of their departments. With rising fuel prices and insurance costs, the only way they'll be able to save money is to cut bus service. That could mean longer bus rides, longer walks to bus stops or school, and fewer extracurricular bus trips, they predict.

## [Richard Heinberg's Museletter: Powerdown Revisited/As the World Burns](#)

In my book *Powerdown: Options and actions for a Post Carbon World*, I outlined four scenarios for the oil-constrained future: Last One Standing (a fascistic battle for the world's remaining resources), Powerdown (government-led radical proactive conversion to energy frugality), Waiting for the Magic Elixir (denial of the problem until it's too late for proactive responses), and Building Lifeboats (small communities coming together to build a survivable, sustainable future for themselves and, ultimately, for the rest of humanity). I closed the book by suggesting that, while the current trajectory is toward the first and third options, we should work on the second and fourth because these offer the greatest hope.

After a few years of further thought, it seems to me that my description of these options could stand some modification. I would now say that our future options consist of three broad scenarios.

## [Not "Peak Oil", But Lots More Oil](#)

The fact is that there are billions more barrels to be found in the world, whether it's in the Middle East, Africa, Russia, Venezuela, and much of the yet to be geologically researched map of the world.

That bit of knowledge, however, rarely makes it into the mainstream media that can be depended upon to give lots of coverage to the "Peak Oil" crowd that has been predicting we will run out of oil any day now. A former chairman of Shell made news in late September when he warned the price of oil could hit \$150 a barrel "with oil production peaking within the next 20 years." You had to read further on in the article, published in London's *The Independent* on September 16 to learn that he also said "I don't know whether there is going to be a peak in world production...."

### [Thailand in search for energy supply from neighbouring countries](#)

Even with capacity of nearly 370 million cubic feet per day, the massive Arthit project will not be able to supply power-hungry Thailand, which is already looking further afield to meet demand.

### [Amid an Oil Boom, Poverty Persists](#) (slideshow)

This year, Angola joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, pumping out 1.5 million barrels a day, more than any other African country except Nigeria.

### [Food set to become the next big global news story](#)

AT the beginning of the summer, the National Farmers' Union of Canada put out a press release that included the headline *Global food crisis emerging*.

The release is scary reading. Based on early predictions by the United States Department of Agriculture on world grain supply and demand for the 2007-08 crop year, the NFU's director of research, Darrin Qualman, broadcasts a dire warning that "we are in the opening phase of an intensifying food shortage."

Qualman means a worldwide shortage.

### [Eating roo could cut gas emissions](#)

"SKIPPY" could soon be on the menu for the climate change-conscious if they take note of a report showing a switch from beef to kangaroo could help cut greenhouse gases.

### [Amazon tribe hits back at green 'colonialism'](#)

It's one of the most fashionable ideas to save the planet from global warming: buying up tropical rainforest to save it from destruction. Gordon Brown has even appointed the millionaire founder of one such charity, Johan Eliasch, as his special adviser on deforestation.

But like all big ideas it is controversial, and this week a leading Amazonian campaigner will visit Britain to protest that this latest trend is linked to a health and social crisis among indigenous people, including sickness, depression, suicide, obesity and drug addiction.

### [Keeping the next Katrina at bay](#)

A hurricane can release energy equivalent to a 10-megaton nuclear bomb every 20 minutes, which means that no amount of dike building will help a coastal city in its path. And while this year has been relatively tame (so far), scientists believe that the future will look a lot like 2005, when there were a record 15 whirlwinds. The culprit: global warming, which is increasing the supply of warm water at the surface of the ocean that acts as fuel for hurricanes as it evaporates into their swirling vortex.

Faced with the prospect of reliving Katrina on a yearly basis, our options seem to be either fine-tuning evacuation plans, or trying to weaken or divert storms while they are still at sea. Scientists have been considering the latter challenge for at least half a century with no success - but according to *How To Stop a Hurricane*, a documentary airing on CBC this week, the necessary technology and forecasting power are now making the prospect conceivable. Toronto-based director Robin Bengier evaluated more than 30 hurricane-busting ideas being developed around the world and chose seven he thinks could have the right stuff.

### [Analysts Find Israel Struck a Nuclear Project Inside Syria](#)

Israel's air attack on Syria last month was directed against a site that Israeli and American intelligence analysts judged was a partly constructed nuclear reactor, apparently modeled on one North Korea has used to create its stockpile of nuclear weapons fuel, according to American and foreign officials with access to the intelligence reports.

The description of the target addresses one of the central mysteries surrounding the Sept. 6 attack, and suggests that Israel carried out the raid to demonstrate its determination to snuff out even a nascent nuclear project in a neighboring state. The Bush administration was divided at the time about the wisdom of Israel's strike, American officials said, and some senior policy makers still regard the attack as premature.

### [Air Force continues success in reducing energy impact](#)

Every October, the Air Force, along with the rest of the federal government, recognizes Energy Awareness Month. Our theme this year echoes our energy vision: "Making energy a consideration in all we do."

This vision serves as the foundation of our energy strategy:

- Reduce demand by increasing our energy efficiency and reducing our energy consumption
- Increase supply by researching, testing and certifying new technologies
- Investigating cutting edge uses of renewable and conventional sources of energy in order to create new domestic sources of supply;

- Change the culture to ensure energy is a consideration in all we do.

### [As Logging Fades, Rich Carve Up Open Land in West](#)

William P. Foley II pointed to the mountain. Owns it, mostly. A timber company began logging in view of his front yard a few years back. He thought they were cutting too much, so he bought the land.

Mr. Foley belongs to a new wave of investors and landowners across the West who are snapping up open spaces as private playgrounds on the borders of national parks and national forests.

### [Caspian Sea: Energy profile](#)

The Caspian Sea region, including the Sea and the states surrounding it, is important to world energy markets because of its potential to become a major oil and natural gas exporter over the next decade.

### [Go nuclear for a third industrial revolution, says EC](#)

We are on the brink of the "third industrial revolution", according to José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission - who believes it means nations may have to embrace nuclear power.

### [Fill 'Er Up—But With What?](#)

Oil is hovering above \$80 a barrel. Gas has been bouncing between \$2.50 and \$4 a gallon for the past two years. At \$3.33 per gallon, it costs \$100 to fill the tank of a Hummer H2—to carry the driver 350 miles. Fueling up even a Volkswagen Rabbit at the same pump will cost almost \$50. Surely, you'd think, there must be a better means of keeping our vehicles running than with pricey oil drawn out of hostile and distant places.

It is in this context of Western anticipation of the Next Big Energy Thing that Iain Carson and Vijay V. Vaitheeswaran, correspondents for *The Economist*, have written *Zoom: The Global Race to Fuel the Car of the Future*. What the authors describe, though, is not so much a race as inertia on the part of the auto and oil industries, petroleum-rich countries, politicians, environmentalists, and even consumers over what new energy sources will emerge as our primary fuels for autos. Overall, the book is an articulate and well-referenced survey that could have used more detail on the men and women trying to solve the West's, and increasingly the developing world's, addiction to oil.

### [South Africa: The Poor Fly Under the Solar Water Heating Radar](#)

- Earlier this year, IPS reported that the South African coastal city of Cape Town was debating a "first of a kind" bylaw that would make solar water heating compulsory for relatively costly new buildings, and certain renovations. This got us thinking: what of solar water heating for less expensive structures -- especially homes being built under the country's extensive low cost housing programme...Are any initiatives on the drawing board in this regard?

### [In China, a Lake's Champion Imperils Himself](#)

Pollution has reached epidemic proportions in China, in part because the ruling Communist Party still treats environmental advocates as bigger threats than the degradation of air, water and soil that prompts them to speak out.

### [How Malawi went from a nation of famine to a nation of feast](#)

Over the past couple of years, Malawi has broken with an orthodoxy long advocated by Canada and other Western donor nations: The impoverished country has gone back to subsidizing poor farmers. Condemned by donors as an impediment to the development of a sustainable agricultural sector, the subsidies have been a raging success.

"What is different [this year] is the access to inputs," explained Patrick Kabambe, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. "People are so poor they use recycled seed and no fertilizer. They can't meet their needs that way and they grow no surplus. People sink deeper and deeper into poverty. It's a vicious cycle. We had to do something."

### [All about oil: read about it in new book](#)

How can the US free itself from our oil addiction? David Sandalow in his new book, "Freedom from Oil: How the next President can end the United States' oil addiction" attempts to address this question.

### [Iraq's ex-oil chief accuses Kurds of suspect deal with US firm](#)

An Iraqi oil minister under former dictator Saddam Hussein accused the Kurdistan Regional Government of awarding an oil contract last month to a US company for areas outside its territorial control.



## [The Impact of Oil Contracts for the Government of Iraqi Kurdistan](#)

Unfortunately, these problems and difference in opinion were expected ever since the announcement of the Iraqi Constitution and its vague provisions regarding the prerogatives of the Iraqi Oil Ministry, the regions and the provinces in managing the country's petrochemical resources. The disputes we see today are a result of the manner and method in which the constitutional provisions on the oil sector and oil laws were drafted, resulting in disagreements in viewpoints between the oil minister and the Kurdistan regional government, or between prominent Iraqi oil experts and the Kurdistan government, and we are still at the beginning of the process. There is considerable fear that the obstacles to a natural development of the oil and gas sector in Iraq may grow larger, due to these vague legal arrangements. There is fear that these disputes are a bad sign for Iraq's most important economic sector, as if the security problems weren't enough already to obstruct the rise of a modern oil sector. Complicated legal problems have been invented, and the examples we have today are a telling sign of this.

## [China orders halt to refinery project of Taiwan's Formosa Plastics](#)

Formosa Plastics Corp's proposed refinery project in Ningbo, in eastern China's Zhejiang province, has been ordered halted by Chinese authorities, while a proposed ethylene plant with capacity of 1.2 mln tons will now be controlled by China National Petroleum Corp instead of Formosa, the Economic Observer reported.

## [BP chief 'to turn round oil giant in three years'](#)

Tony Hayward, the new chief executive of BP, has pledged to turn around the oil giant's fortune in the next two to three years. In an interview this weekend, Hayward told The Sunday Telegraph that "we have been on the downward spiral for three or four years and it will take us two or three years to come back up".

## [Look who's in denial about global warming now](#)

In light of all this, to continue to blame a handful of frankly pathetic global warming deniers for lack of federal action on global warming is, in itself, a kind of denial.

## [Peak Moment for Peak Oil in Queensland](#)

Until recently the peak oil debate in Australia has been largely confined to internet forums such as Webdiary. Those who have dared elsewhere make the obvious point that production of the finite resource upon which our entire economy is based will soon peak and decline, have usually been labeled as doomsayers, conspiracy theorists, socialists or rabid greenies. That situation has changed dramatically in recent weeks with the release of the Queensland Government's long-awaited Oil Vulnerability Taskforce Report.

World oil production is peaking – it's official, at least here in Queensland.

### [What is driving oil prices so high?](#)

A more controversial concern is the so-called "peak oil" theory: the idea that the world has reached the natural limits of oil exploitation, and that there is little more to be found in the ground whatever the price.

Although many in the business dismiss the concept, energy planners in several countries are nonetheless beginning to take it into account.

### [Running on empty - Oil is depleting but does anybody care?](#)

"The debate is over. This is real," said Adam Asquith, Ph.D., a local farmer and biologist who shared information with the audience on the urgency of the issues surrounding global oil depletion.

### [India: Thermal stations face shortage of coal stocks](#)

A serious coal shortage situation is brewing at a number of major thermal power stations across the country, with the coal stock position in 20 stations — total installed capacity of 24,420 MW — now being termed as "critical" since coal stocks in these plants are expected to last less than seven days.

### [A powerful mix: Future of North Dakota energy looks bright](#)

No other state is so well stocked with wind, coal, oil, water, biomass crops, and even hydrogen technology. It's almost an embarrassment of resources, enough to stir up a rich and powerful stew.

### ['Climate Year' heads for uncertain end](#)

It's October and global warming campaigner Al Gore has won the Nobel Peace Prize. In November the U.N.'s climate scientists issue a capstone report on where the planet is headed. And in December envoys of almost 200 nations gather in Bali, Indonesia, hoping for action to head off the worst of climate change.

But because of something that happened in September, their chances look slim.

### [Gore Nobel win shows up Bush: US press](#)

US newspapers Saturday hailed Al Gore's Nobel Peace Prize for his fight against climate change, saying it showed up failings of President George W. Bush in the seven years since he beat Gore to the White House.

### [European cities tackling climate change](#)

VAXJO, Sweden - When this quiet city in southern Sweden decided in 1996 to wean itself off fossil fuels, most people doubted the ambitious goal would have any impact beyond the town limits. A few melting glaciers later, Vaxjo is attracting a green pilgrimage of politicians, scientists and business leaders from as far afield as the United States and North Korea seeking inspiration from a city program that has allowed it to cut CO2 emissions 30 percent since 1993.



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