

Bright sun, warm Earth. Coincidence?

Lorne Gunter, National Post

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Mars's ice caps are melting, and Jupiter is developing a second giant red spot, an enormous hurricane-like storm.

The existing Great Red Spot is 300 years old and twice the size of Earth. The new storm -- Red Spot Jr. -- is thought to be the result of a sudden warming on our solar system's largest planet. Dr. Imke de Pater of Berkeley University says some parts of Jupiter are now as much as six degrees Celsius warmer than just a few years ago.

Neptune's moon, Triton, studied in 1989 after the unmanned Voyager probe flew past, seems to have heated up significantly since then. Parts of its frozen nitrogen surface have begun melting and turning to gas, making Triton's atmosphere denser. Even Pluto has warmed slightly in recent years, if you can call -230C instead of -233C "warmer."

And I swear, I haven't left my SUV idling on any of those planets or moons. Honest, I haven't.

Is there something all these heavenly bodies have in common? Some one thing they all share that could be causing them to warm in unison?

Hmmm, is there some giant, self-luminous ball of burning gas with a mass more than 300,000 times that of Earth and a core temperature of more than 20-million degrees Celsius, that for the past century or more has been unusually active and powerful? Is there something like that around which they all revolve that could be causing this multi-globe warming? Naw!

They must all have congested commuter highways, coal-fired power plants and oilsands developments that are releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide into their atmospheres, too.

A decade ago, when global warming and Kyoto was just beginning to capture public attention, I published a quiz elsewhere that bears repeating in our current hyper-charged environmental debate: Quick, which is usually warmer, day or night?

And what is typically the warmest part of the day? The warmest time of year?

Finally, which are generally warmer: cloudy or cloudless days?

If you answered day, afternoon, summer and cloudless you may be well on your way to understanding what is causing global warming.

For the past century and a half, Earth has been warming. Coincidentally (or perhaps not so coincidentally), during that same period, our sun has been brightening, becoming more active, sending out more radiation.

Habibullah Abdussamatov of the Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory in St. Petersburg, Sami Solanki of

the Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research in Germany, Sallie Baliunas and Willie Soon of the Solar and Stellar Physics Division of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and a host of the rest of the world's leading solar scientists are all convinced that the warming of recent years is not unusual and that nearly all the warming in the past 150 years can be attributed to the sun.

Solar scientists from Iowa to Siberia have overlaid the last several warm periods on our planet with known variations in our sun's activity and found, according to Mr. Solanki, "a near-perfect match."

Mr. Abdussamatov concedes manmade gasses may have made "a small contribution to the warming in recent years, but it cannot compete with the increase in solar irradiance."

Mr. Soon showed as long ago as the mid-1990s that the depth of the Little Ice Age -- the coldest period in the northern hemisphere in the past 1,500 years -- corresponded perfectly with a solar event known as the Maunder Minimum. For nearly seven decades there was virtually no sunspot activity.

Our sun was particular quiet. And for those 60 to 70 years, the northern half of our globe, at least, was in a deep freeze.

Is it so hard to believe then that the sun could be causing our current warming, too?

At the very least, the fact that so many prominent scientists have legitimate, logical objections to the current global warming orthodoxy means there is no "consensus" among scientists about the cause.

Here's a prediction: The sun's current active phase is expected to wane in 20 to 40 years, at which time the planet will begin cooling. Since that is when most of the greenhouse emission reductions proposed by the UN and others are slated to come into full effect, the "greens" will see that cooling and claim, "See, we warned you and made you take action, and look, we saved the planet."

Of course, they will have had nothing to do with it.

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