CERAWeek 2025 – Key Themes and Insights

Introduction

From March 10th to 14th, 2025, S&P Global hosted its CERAWeek 2025 conference in Houston, Texas, USA. The event drew over ten thousand delegates representing two thousand companies from eighty countries. This annual conference focuses on pressing energy issues. This year's theme, "Moving Ahead: Energy Strategies for a Complex World", emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to three key elements: energy security (reliable and stable energy supply), energy affordability (reasonable prices for consumers and businesses), and energy sustainability (decarbonization / reducing greenhouse gas emissions). Prioritizing only one of these elements may offer a short-term fix to a specific problem, but it will inevitably create negative consequences elsewhere. For instance, focusing exclusively on low-cost energy sources can degrade environmental quality, while placing excessive emphasis solely on the environment can drive up energy costs for households and businesses.

Glimpse of CERAWeek 2025

Record Attendance: Over 10,000 participants, up from 8,000 in 2023 and 5,000 in 2022.
Notable Participants: Leading players in the oil & gas, finance, technology, and government sectors, as well as the field of innovation:

- **Oil & Gas:** Chevron, Saudi Aramco, ExxonMobil, Shell, INPEX, TotalEnergies, Occidental, bp, ADNOC, Repsol, Occidental, ConocoPhillips, Petronas, Equinor, Petrobras, CNPC, ONGC
- **Finance and Trade:** BlackRock, Carlyle, Gunvor, Lazard, Mercuria, Trafigura, Glencore, Vitol
- **State Governance and Policy:** U.S. Secretaries of Energy and the Interior, politicians and state executives (U.S., Canada, Egypt, EU, Guyana, Libya, India, Kuwait, Argentina, Denmark, Angola, Turkey, Nigeria, Mexico)
- **Big Tech:** Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Accenture
- **Electricity and Grids:** Southern Company, RWE, National Grid, NextEra, Constellation, AES
- **Equipment and Services:** SLB, Baker Hughes, GE Vernova, Mitsubishi, Turboden, Caterpillar, Schneider Electric, Hitachi, ABB, Linde, Siemens Energy

Key representatives from Kazakhstan's energy sector regularly attend the CERAWeek conference to participate in discussions on energy industry development and the adoption of advanced technologies. In 2025, our country was represented by a substantial delegation including members of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministries of Energy and Foreign Affairs, national oil and gas companies, the KAZENERGY Association, and others.

This article summarizes what we consider to be the key statements made by speakers at the conference and highlights the most relevant issues discussed.

Shifting Focus to Energy Affordability and Reliability

Many speakers noted that in previous years, the world placed too much emphasis on a single factor in the energy sector – the environmental aspect – while energy affordability and reliability [security and availability] were largely ignored. There is now an opportunity to strike a balance between all three factors. Realism and pragmatism are replacing ideological disputes; the world needs all forms of energy.

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright set the tone in his opening remarks at the conference: "The Trump administration will treat climate change for what it is, a global physical phenomenon that is a side effect of building the modern world". He argued this is an inconvenient trade-off, but a worthwhile one. "The previous administration's climate policies have been impoverishing to our citizens, economically destructive to our businesses and politically polarizing. The cure was far more destructive than the disease," he stated.

This tone stood in stark contrast to CERAWeek's focus on decarbonization technologies in previous years. Conversely, at Agora [the technology exhibition within CERAWeek], most sessions and discussions remained centered on decarbonization and the commercialization of renewable energy sources.

Energy affordability was also a key focus at CERAWeek, as the cost of the energy transition remains a global challenge. Without affordability, there is no transition – households, industries, and governments cannot adopt low-carbon solutions that are economically unfeasible. U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright emphasized this, noting that "over 20 percent of Americans struggle to pay their energy bills and roughly 10 percent have received a utility disconnection notice in the last 12 months," reinforcing the point that cost must be a key metric in evaluating new energy solutions.

Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser also emphasized the importance of striking a balance, stating, "Let's use our industry's vast experience and practical expertise to usher in a truly golden new era of abundant, affordable, and sustainable energy for all." His call-to-action centers on promoting solutions that utilize existing infrastructure while reducing emissions

and costs. Nasser also issued a stark warning, saying, "There is more chance of Elvis speaking next than the current plan [to achieve carbon neutrality] working!" In essence, he argues that the current pace of infrastructure development is too slow to meet global energy demands while simultaneously cutting emissions.

ADNOC CEO Sultan Al Jaber declared that "The agreement cemented the reality that sustainable progress is simply not possible without access to reliable, affordable and secure energy," highlighting the need for more LNG, natural gas, oil, and renewable energy sources.

Oil and gas executives spoke more openly about their core business than they have in the past four years, but they also discussed their decarbonization efforts, as well as the commercialization of new technologies and value chains. Oil prices had reached three-year lows leading to the conference, which fueled discussions about the industry's challenges. Major oil companies are facing pressure; for instance, Chevron announced cuts of up to 8,000 jobs (while simultaneously investing in technology and artificial intelligence). Murray Auchincloss, CEO of bp, advocated for a leaner, more focused company - "We were just pursuing a few too many things over the past five years, and it was really, really time to focus those [businesses] down to the very highest quality that compete on returns on behalf of our shareholders for the transition business."

Larry Fink, founder and chairman of BlackRock, the world's largest investment fund with $10 trillion in assets under management, voiced concerns about the US economy – from financial instability and slowing growth to the negative consequences of workforce deportations and America's massive debt, which is three times the size of BlackRock's assets.

Currently, oil and gas companies are prioritizing high-return investments and focusing on production efficiency to ensure sustainable financial performance and maintain investor confidence. Consequently, the investment focus has shifted to projects with rapid and predictable paybacks, while long-term and capital-intensive projects are "on hold" due to (geo)political risks.

Overall, climate change and global warming were downgraded to the background at CERAWeek 2025, as were alternative fuels previously touted as drivers of the energy transition. The "Hydrogen Hub," formerly a frequent topic of discussion, has been rebranded as a "New Energy Hub." Renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, were not a central focus. Nuclear energy was an exception; many speakers cited its growing potential as a low-carbon fuel source.

According to many speakers at the conference, previous net-zero targets appear unrealistic and require revision. Rather than a radical abandonment of hydrocarbons, the discussion centered on integrating all available energy sources. In other words, the future lies in combination ("AND") rather than exclusion ("OR"). The energy transition must encompass both increasing energy supply and reducing emissions simultaneously.

Demand for Hydrocarbons

"Drill, baby, drill" implies that the price of crude oil will go downward. This is, on one hand, a simple matter of supply and demand, but also the fundamental conundrum underlying President Trump's energy strategy. Calls for more energy of all kinds – not just hydrocarbons, but primarily crude oil and gas – were positively received by conference attendees. However, there was a distinct impression that the assembled energy company executives were still calculating the economics of what a surge in energy production would mean for them.

The world will need more energy, but the distribution of that energy may face significant challenges as countries and continents erect artificial barriers. Shell CEO Wael Sawan presented three energy security scenarios for the coming decade: the "Horizon" scenario, which expects to meet net zero emissions by 2050; the "Surge" scenario, which incorporates a maximalist view of economic growth and artificial intelligence demands; and a third scenario called "Archipelagos," which is the most concerning and increasingly plausible. In the world of Archipelagos, we would see a surge in demand, but supplies would be locked within production regions by nationalistic and protectionist policies, turning the global energy market into a chain of islands. This new energy world would be more unpredictable and less efficient.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in this world of Archipelagos is capital. Production at oil fields is declining – sometimes by as much as 5% per year – and most capital is going towards maintaining that production, rather than expanding it. Moreover, major oil and gas companies are increasingly signaling an intention to return much of that capital to shareholders, rather than investing in growth.

Analysts and industry leaders are widely discussing the impending plateau or peak in oil demand by 2035, or even as early as 2030. During a roundtable on the balance of energy supply and demand (with participants from Kuwait Petroleum Corp., ConocoPhillips, the International Energy Forum (IEF), Equinor, Carlyle, Hartree Partners, and S&P Global), experts converged on the following views:

- Demand for crude oil will almost certainly plateau around 2030.
- Fossil fuels will remain a significant component of the energy mix.

"I don't think anyone is surprised that in some sense, growth in oil demand is starting to slow," said Helen Currie, Chief Economist at ConocoPhillips. "In between now and 2030, we may see some choppiness where oil demand is flat or perhaps down if we have a recession, however we're still seeing a lot of growth in emerging markets."

Jassin Al-Shirawi, Secretary General of the IEF, strongly advocated for the necessity of energy security and the vital role of hydrocarbons. " At IEF, we provide opportunity for dialogue between energy sector stakeholders," said Al-Shirawi. " And what of the talk of

moving away from fossil fuels? We see that hydrocarbons have been fueling the world for over a century now. We might see regional shifts among countries, but overall, oil demand will stay around for the foreseeable future."

Bader Al-Attar, Managing Director of Kuwait Petroleum Corp., echoed this sentiment, stating, "It is a sure truth that oil and gas will stay part of energy mix supplied to the world. Even if we see a decline, oil will still be there."

Regarding where Equinor sees oil demand heading by 2035, Senior Vice President Eirik Waerness stated, "Using the word peak gives the wrong connotation here. It implies that we'll see a sharp decline after, and that's just not true." Concerning peak oil production, he noted, "Using the word peak gives the wrong connotation here. It implies that we'll see a sharp decline after, and that's just not true."

Experts identified energy security as a key factor influencing demand. "Energy security is paramount," said Jeff Currie, Chief Strategy Officer of Energy Pathways at Carlyle. "Oil trading and security go hand-in-hand."

Offering a geopolitical perspective, Jim Burkhard, Head of Research for Oil Markets at S&P Global, questioned how the world would react to a U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Russia dialogue regarding oil. " Is oil going to be viewed as more secure or less in the coming years? This is what is going to have a huge impact on oil demand," Burkhard said.

Artificial Intelligence [AI]

AI was everywhere at CERAWeek 2025. While it was understood that not all electricity load growth derived from AI/data centers, this segment drew considerable attention. AI has evolved beyond individual consumption; it's now being leveraged for optimization and innovation across industries. The symbiosis between technology and energy was clear: electricity supply is the constraint, and AI is a disruptive force. S&P Global (the organizers of CERAWeek) successfully interweave this theme throughout the conference.

AI's energy demands are surging faster than grid operators ever anticipated. With hyperscalers[1] like Google spearheading AI development (the tech giant plans to invest $75 billion in AI in 2025 alone), data centers are rapidly becoming the largest driver of new electricity demand in decades. Energy companies such as NextEra and Constellation are partnering with hyperscalers to co-locate data centers with power generation assets, aiming to ensure the AI boom doesn't overwhelm existing power grids. The AI race is quickly

[1] Hyperscale refers to the ability of a technology architecture or system to scale in response to increasing demands on a single business process. Hyperscalers typically comprise a large network of data centers located globally, striving for broader coverage and employed for large-scale computing.

evolving into a race for reliable electricity supply – and hyperscalers are exploring creative solutions to secure power quickly and gain a competitive edge.

Forty-two sessions at CERAWeek included the term "data center" in their titles. And it was difficult to find a conversation that didn't mention "hyperscaler". In just a few years, data centers have become such a significant source of global energy consumption that their aggregate usage is comparable to that of the entire Japanese economy. NextEra, a major energy provider in Florida, projects a 55% demand increase over the next 20 years, compared to 9% over the prior 20 – with AI driving a third of that growth.

AI will require significantly more gas-fired electricity to power these data centers. In 2024, U.S. data centers relied on natural gas for 43% of their energy, while nuclear provided roughly 20%, and coal somewhat less. Exclusive reliance on renewables is no longer feasible; several hyperscalers have scaled back their zero-carbon energy commitments for their data centers.

Energy Balance

Energy is needed urgently. Natural gas, along with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) systems, has become a temporary solution for securing energy for the United States, reinforced by strong tax incentives. However, a shortage of gas turbines and their rapidly escalating prices (having tripled in just a few years) are creating challenges for new power plants. As U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright put it, "Since the demand for energy is unlimited, since the demand for intelligence is unlimited, so will be the demand for energy".

"We are gonna need it all. We're gonna need renewables. We're gonna need gas, we're gonna be new nuclear... It's super important we get this right because we want to make sure that demand is here right now. We have to have the generation available to meet that demand at the lowest cost possible. Otherwise, we're gonna have a huge power affordability crisis in this country with utility bills going through the roof," stated John Ketchum, President and CEO of NextEra. " You don't hear green premium anymore. You just hear that we need a lot of energy," said Carlos Araque, co-founder and CEO of Quaise Energy. The industry is eager to expand in areas it can quickly implement – gas, geothermal, renewables, CCS, and potentially nuclear – without sacrificing reliability or affordability.

Conference participants support an "all of the above" approach, where oil and gas are certainly a focal point, but companies are not planning to abandon their alternative energy transition initiatives, perhaps only slowing the pace of their implementation.

Many expert panels on natural gas and LNG admired the virtues of this fuel, seen as a more acceptable hydrocarbon alternative to oil and coal, and as a "bridge" fuel for any energy transition scenario. One speaker from the U.S. gas industry even declared that LNG is "bigger

than Hollywood" in terms of its contribution to American exports. Gas is the new U.S. "soft power" in global energy.

Natural gas accounts for approximately 25% of global energy, and in a world that will require significantly more energy, significantly more gas will be needed, especially in the form of LNG. Ryan Lance, CEO of ConocoPhillips, believes that demand for LNG could double in the next decade. This has already occurred in the U.S., largely thanks to a massive technological revolution in the gas industry that has helped to significantly increase production while decreasing the number of drilling rigs.

LNG growth projections are impressive. Shell expects global LNG demand to grow by more than 50% by 2040, as producers in China and other Asian economies accelerate their shift from coal to natural gas to support their economic growth while simultaneously reducing emissions. India alone will need to double its LNG imports to meet rising demand by 2030.

Nuclear energy is experiencing a renaissance. A multilateral pledge - including Google, Amazon, and 31 countries - aims to triple global nuclear capacity by 2050. Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) are still under development, but the first units are expected as early as 2029. Meanwhile, the U.S. is doubling down on nuclear and geothermal energy to compete with China's dominance in solar, batteries, and electric vehicles. According to Jeff Currie, Chief Strategy Officer of Energy Pathways at Carlyle, "Oil is OPEX, nuclear is CAPEX." " We've got to drive hard to accelerate fusion, otherwise China will," stated Glenn Youngkin, Governor of Virginia. Nuclear energy may play a significant role in the long term, as it is a priority for the U.S. industry and government, but it will not solve short-term energy supply constraints.

Coal remains critical for supporting baseload power needs, especially given the slow pace of renewable energy expansion and regulatory uncertainty. The challenge of rapidly scaling up coal production to meet increased demand has been noted, as well as the ongoing need for investment in infrastructure and a skilled workforce. Europe's reliance on coal is evident amidst rising natural gas prices, making coal more competitive for electricity generation. Meanwhile, banks and insurance companies are returning to the coal sector, easing capital constraints, which should help the industry maintain production to meet growing energy demand.

The boundary between molecules (oil, natural gas, coal) and electrons (renewable electricity) is blurring. CERAWeek is now as much an energy conference as it is a fossil fuel forum, with discussions about artificial intelligence and data centers dominating. The focus has shifted to unlocking capacity through optimized electricity grids and flexible solutions. Microgrids, small gas turbines, and waste heat recovery are all being explored as creative ways to meet demand more quickly. " It’s a joule pool. The color line [of energy types] has been erased," noted Jeff Currie, Chief Strategy Officer of Energy Pathways at Carlyle. "A lot of gigawatts are going to come from flexibility, as it can be done faster than new build," said Caroline Golin, Global Head of Market Development & Innovation at Google. The energy

sector is moving toward a more flexible, demand-driven model, where speed and volume are just as important as the energy source.

The Bottom Line

At the conference, alongside companies and think tanks, the presentations by political leaders from regions and countries seeking investment stood out, including Alberta (Canada), Alaska (USA), Louisiana (USA), and Guyana. At the same time, Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced significant investments in the United States, intensifying the competition for investment capital.

The conference also provided a platform for direct engagement between the industry and the new US administration, offering valuable insights into how the administration views energy policy and its priorities.

CERAWeek is a unique event, unmatched in its influence and scale, except perhaps by the ADIPEC conference in Abu Dhabi. To benefit both government and business, it is essential to attend such events, connect with colleagues, and exchange ideas. The next CERAWeek conference will be held from March 23-27, 2026, in Houston, USA.

In Kazakhstan, significant events for the oil, gas, and energy sectors will take place in May (S&P Global Commodity Insights Astana Energy Forum 2025) and October (KAZAKHSTAN ENERGY WEEK 2025).

ENERGY Insights & Analytics

Analytical center "ENERGY" LLP (ENERGY Insight & Analytics) is a joint venture between the KAZENERGY Association and IT company AppStream. The company aims to become a priority source of data, analytical information, and recommendations for Kazakhstan's oil, gas, and electric power industries, allowing decision-makers to analyze and predict the most significant industry indicators with details on leading market players. Activities of ENERGY Insight & Analytics incorporate the whole analytics cycle with consequent stages: Descriptive, Diagnostic, Predictive, and Prescriptive analytics.

The key tool and product of ENERGY Insight & Analytics is internally developed software - the Analytical Platform EXia, aimed to identify, localize, format, and present data most efficiently for the specified use cases.

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