

Hydro war crime

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WATER is as precious a commodity as oil for countries of the Middle East. In the absence of freshwater resources, the region relies heavily on expensive, desalinated water. During the current war in the Gulf, the protagonists have not only aimed projectiles at oil depots, they have also decimated two water purification plants. If more water plants are targeted, the fallout could be worse than the consequences of blasting oil stocks. Iran has claimed that the US attacked a freshwater desalination plant on Qeshm Island, disconnecting water supply to 30 villages. Bahrain has accused Iran of a drone attack, which has damaged a

water desalination plant. Iran has warned it will target water desalination units if its power plants are attacked. An alarmed EU has called for a moratorium on strikes against energy and water facilities during the war.

From Kuwait to the UAE, the Persian Gulf is dotted with over 400 desalination plants. Used by the inhabitants of sprawling, arid deserts, desalinated groundwater and seawater make up 90 per cent of the region's main water resources. The level of the region's reliance on desalinated water is evident from the fact that 42pc of the UAE's drinking water comes from desalination plants that daily produce an amount of over seven million cubic metres. Other Gulf countries also rely heavily on desalinated water — Kuwait, 92pc; Oman, 86pc; Qatar, 90pc; and Saudi Arabia, 70pc. The Gulf countries, with their growing economies and increasing population, are funneling more resources into water purification. Saudi Arabia plans to invest \$80 billion in desalination in the ongoing decade.



Saudi Arabia and Qatar have installed mega plants with desalination yielding over 200,000 cubic metres of water per day. In Qatar, the Umm al-Houl plant has a capacity of 894,000 cubic metres per day. The Jebel Ali plant in the UAE has a capacity of 2m cubic metres per day. These countries will have to continuously invest in these plants to meet the ever-increasing industrial, agricultural and domestic demand.

The UAE estimates an increase of 30pc in water requirement by 2030. The country has a deficit water budget as it receives less than 100 millimetres of annual rainfall and its groundwater recharge is less than 4pc of its annual consumption. It leaves the country with no choice but to desalinate seawater. The Gulf countries — where luxurious lifestyles result in reckless water consumption — spend huge sums of money to produce and subsidise expensive water purification processes. The daily per capita water consumption in the region is astonishingly extravagant, with 560 litres dwarfing the global average of 180. Saudi Arabia is the third largest per capita water consumer in the world after the US and Canada.

What exacerbates matters is that the Persian Gulf water is 25pc saltier than normal seawater. It makes desalination more expensive. Home to more than 70pc of the world's desalination plants, the region also releases exceptional amounts of brine, a concentrated liquid waste produced during desalination. About 70m cubic metres of brine are thus discharged into the Gulf, where evaporation rates are very high due to scorching temperatures.

Any aggression can endanger water in the ME. The Gulf countries are also engaged in regional

water trade. In 2018, Abu Dhabi imported around 47bn imperial gallons of desalinated water from Fujairah. At one stage, Qatar and Kuwait contemplated importing substantial amounts of water from Iran but the plan was abandoned after measuring the political sensitivity and vulnerability attached to such a move.

The high level of dependence on desalination plants adds another dimension to the regional conflict. Any aggression or even misdirected projectile can jeopardise this critical water infrastructure, resulting in catastrophic consequences. With the code of conduct during war being flagrantly violated — as seen in the targeting of schools and hospitals — water desalination plants too could fall prey to unscrupulous designs.

In 1991, when retreating from Kuwait, the Iraqi military destroyed desalination plants and dumped millions of gallons of oil into Gulf waters. Iraq was also accused of opening oil valves at the Kuwaiti Sea Island Terminal, creating a vast oil slick which extended to the Saudi coastline, imperilling desalination processes. In 1997, a barge grounded near Sharjah caused massive diesel spillage near a desalination plant, depriving Sharjah of water for a day.

In May 2024, a BBC report carried satellite photos of bombed water tanks of Khan Younis where more than half of the 603 water facilities were affected. The BBC also reported destruction of/damage to six wastewater treatment plants. Destroying drinking water sources is no less than a war crime. ■

Another Gas Discovery in Sindh Brings Happies

Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), as Operator (95%), along with Government Holdings (Private) Limited (GHPL) (5%



carried interest), has discovered gas from Sahito-1 exploratory well in Khewari Exploration License, located in District Khairpur, Sindh Province.

Based on wireline logs interpretation results, the sands of Lower Goru Formation (Massive sand) were tested through DST and yielded 17.2 million standard cubic feet of gas per day (MMSCFD) through choke size 32/64" at wellhead flowing pressure (WHFP) of 3390 pounds per square inch (psi).

Sahito-1 was spudded on December 24, 2025, as an exploratory well. The well was drilled down to a total depth of 3870m TVD in the Sembar Formation as an exploratory effort by using OGDCL's in-house expertise. The discovery represents a major milestone, and this development is anticipated to play a vital role in reducing the national energy demand-supply gap through indigenous resources, while also contributing to the enhancement of hydrocarbon reserves of OGDCL, Joint venture partner and the country.

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