

ORSAM WATER BULLETIN

Weekly Bulletin by ORSAM Water Research Programme

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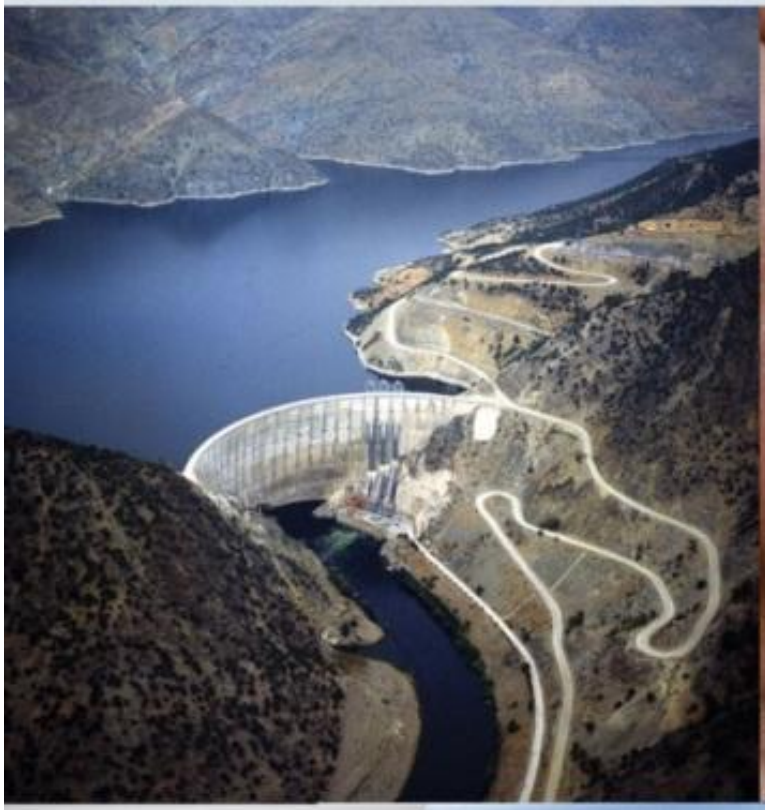



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26 May – 01 June 2014

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❖ Water experts gather in Istanbul

ISTANBUL – Experts from around the world met in Istanbul on Tuesday to discuss water security in preparation for the seventh World Water Forum to be held in South Korea in 2015.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Third Istanbul International Water Forum, Turkish Forestry and Water Affairs Minister Veysel Eroglu said that it is critical for states to provide healthy water to their citizens. Eroglu added that the three-day forum is also an opportunity to reopen for discussion the "Istanbul Water Consensus" which was adopted at the fifth World Water Forum, in which Turkey committed to improving the water resources and water sanitation management in 1,116 cities and towns.

"One-third of the world's population does not have adequate water," Eroglu said.

Remarking that Turkey's governmental institution for international development, TIKA (The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency), is present in African countries, Eroglu said, "Last year, we initiated a mobilization program through TIKA for $2.5 billion in Africa alone, through which we provide water."

Eroglu also called for the establishment of a fund to support access for water in disadvantaged countries, saying, "This should be raised in the upcoming seventh World Water Forum."

Speaking to press after the opening ceremony, Eroglu mentioned a possible water shortage in 2014 in Istanbul. He said that dams in Istanbul are only 28 percent full. He added that water from two rivers were being directed to Istanbul. "We are doing as much as we can to avoid a water shortage," he said.

The capacity of Istanbul's fresh water reserves dropped to 27 percent in May 2014 from 86 percent in the same month in 2013, according to data from Istanbul's water authority, ISKI.

Benedito Braga, President of the World Water Committee, said that access to clean water is a human right and of great importance.

Istanbul International Water Forum is organized every three years by the Turkish Water Institute, a think tank under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, one year before the World Water Forum. Articles from the forum will be published in the International Water Resources Association's magazine "Water International."

The main topics of the forum this year are 'Water Security and Legal Aspects of Water.'

The three-day forum will discuss issues of climate change, the water-food-energy-ecology nexus, water governance and integrated basin management. Other subjects will include the right to water and sanitation, national water laws, trans-boundary water cooperation and legislation on protection of water resources.

According to the UN, 85 percent of the world population lives in the driest half of the planet. 783 million people do not have access to clean, drinkable water, and almost 2.5 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. Between 6 and 8 million people die annually due to lack of drinkable water from disasters and water-related diseases.

"Water experts gather in Istanbul", 27/05/2014, online at: http://www.turkishpress.com/news/408530/

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❖ Water and Conflict in Syria

Drought, Water and Agricultural Management, and Climatic Conditions as Factors in the Syrian Conflict

Starting in 2006 and lasting through 2011, Syria suffered the worst long-term drought and the most severe set of crop failures in recorded history. In a new research paper, I've looked at the role of regional drought, unsustainable water management policies, and climatic conditions in contributing to the severe conflict in Syria in the past few years (see the peer-reviewed paper "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria" by Dr. Peter H. Gleick, coming out in the July issue -- and here online -- in the American Meteorological Society journal *Weather, Climate, and Society*. A press release on this paper is now available, here). Many factors influenced the civil war in Syria, including long-standing political, religious, and ideological disputes; economic dislocations from both global and regional factors; and the consequences of water shortages influenced by drought, ineffective watershed management, and the growing influence of climate variability and change.
The drastic decrease in water availability, water mismanagement, agricultural failures, and related economic deterioration contributed to Syria's population dislocations and the migration of rural communities to nearby cities. These factors further contributed to urban unemployment, economic dislocations, food insecurity for more than a million people, and subsequent social unrest. Key to mitigating risks in the region are improvements in water-use efficiency and productivity in agriculture, better management and monitoring of groundwater resources, and comprehensive international agreements on managing and sharing the rivers that cross political borders.

There is a long history of conflicts over water in the Middle East (this history can been seen in the Water Conflict Chronology, published online by the Pacific Institute). The region experiences high natural variability in precipitation and suffers from a lack of modernized agricultural and water management systems. Less than one-fifth of Syria's irrigated area uses modern sprinklers or drip irrigation. Half of all irrigation water comes from groundwater systems, which are in a condition of overdraft, leading to dropping groundwater levels and rising production costs. Water use and the construction of large water infrastructure upstream by Turkey have also decreased surface water supplies flowing into Syria (see Figure). Populations in the Tigris-Euphrates river basins have grown

rapidly, further stressing limited water supplies. All of these factors were worsened by severe multi-year drought.

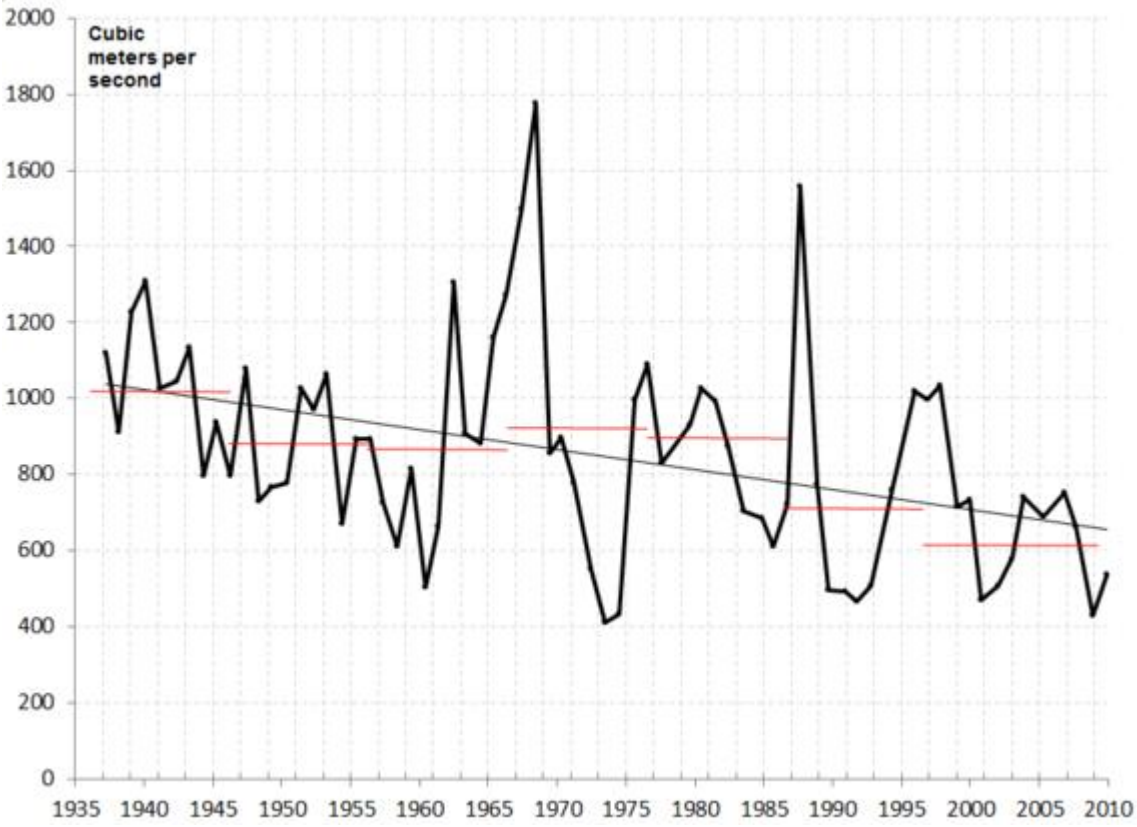

Figure. Discharge of the Euphrates River measured at Jarablus, Syria from the mid-1930s to around 2010. Red lines show the decadal averages. The long-term linear trend is also shown. Data from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2013.

Assessing the role of climatic changes in altering water availability finds growing evidence that drought frequency and intensity in the Levant/Eastern Mediterranean region have changed from historical climatic norms. Researchers have identified an increasing tendency in annual and seasonal drought intensity corresponding with an increasing number of dry days in the rainy season, and there is evidence that climate changes are already beginning to influence droughts in the area by reducing winter rainfall and increasing evapotranspiration at rates higher than can be explained by natural variability alone.

Future climate projections for this region are also unfavorable from the perspective of water availability. Recent climate simulations all indicate growing water-related risks from higher

temperatures, increased evaporative water demands, reductions in future runoff levels, and changes in the timing of runoff.

In the face of this, there are viable options for reducing the risks of water-related conflicts in the region, including expansion of efficient irrigation technologies and practices, integrated management and monitoring of groundwater resources, and diplomatic and political efforts to improve the joint management of shared international watersheds and rivers. And as global warming worsens, populations increase, and pressures on water grow, efforts to reduce conflicts over water will have to expand and improve.

("Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria" will appear in the July 2014 issue of *Weather, Climate, and Society*. The Early Online Release notice and the abstract are available here: http://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/abs/10.1175/WCAS-D-13-00059.1 Media requests for the paper should be sent to Nancy Ross, nross@pacinst.org.)

"Water and Conflict in Syria", Peter Gleick, 28/05/2014, online at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-h-gleick/water-and-conflict-in-syr_b_5404774.html

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❖ Syrian Conflict Exacerbated by Effects of Poor Water Management

Wasteful irrigation practices coupled with a five-year drought in the Middle East increased tensions among those involved in Syria's three-year civil war, said the head of Pacific Institute.

Urban centers swelled and became more violent as water scarcity forced people to flee the parched countryside, Peter Gleick, president and co-founder of the Oakland, California-based Pacific Institute, wrote in an article that will appear in the July issue of the American Meteorological Society's "Weather, Climate and Society" journal.

"One of the cities where violence really started in Syria was Daraa, and that's one of the cities where the largest in-migration of farmers and dislocated rural populations occurred," Gleick said today in a phone interview. "Syria's not the only place where we see violence over water. Syria just happens to be a place that already was a tinderbox."

About four-fifths of the nation's irrigated lands are flooded instead of watered with sprinklers or drip systems, squandering a vital resource, Gleick said. Few, if any, political solutions exist for rectifying battles over water, especially across international borders, which leads to more violence.

"I worry about growing disputes on the Nile between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, and six more upstream nations," Gleick said. "I worry about southern Asia. There's a whole series of rivers that originate in the Himalayas, often in China, and flow through three or four or more nations."

While water shortages didn't cause the geopolitical and socioeconomic strife in Syria, they were "a clear contributing factor," he said.

"Water mismanagement and the change in climate played a direct role," Gleick said.

"Syrian Conflict Exacerbated by Effects of Poor Water Management", 28/05/2014, online at: http://www.businessweek.com/news/2014-05-28/syrian-conflict-exacerbated-by-effects-of-poor-water-management

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❖ UNHCR's Harper: 'No Evidence' of Zaatarı Water Pollution

Through more than three years of conflict, at least 596,000 Syrian refugees have fled south across the border into Jordan, straining the country's natural resources, especially its water supply. As refugees have poured in, the Jordanian media and government opine continuously about the impact of the Syrian refugees on the water supply of one of the 10 most water-deprived countries in the world.

Home to more than 100,000 Syrians, the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan is Jordan's fifth-largest population center and the second-largest refugee camp in the world. A recent report funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation warned that the Zaatari camp could potentially pollute the water basin beneath it.

The study, led by the Jordanian economist Khalid Al Wazani, concludes that "pollution may affect the water basin underneath Al Zaatari Camp because of the large number of refugees."

"It is too risky to leave the issue unaddressed," according to the report. The basin Zaatari sits on is crucial in supplying water to the nearby cities of Mafraq, Irbid, and Zarqa in a country where groundwater makes up 54% of the country's water supply.

The report recommends the UN "move the camp as soon as possible...otherwise, the result will be devastating for the environment and people."

The UNHCR, which administers Zaatari camp, refutes the hypothesis that the water supply is in danger of contamination. "There is no evidence that the water of any aquifers has been polluted," the UNHCR's Representative to Jordan, Andrew Harper tells Gioia Forster. While the final decision rests with the Jordanian government, as far as the UNHCR is concerned, Harper says, "Zaatari will not be moved."

Q: A recent report by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Amman warned the Zaatari camp could pollute the aquifer beneath it and have "devastating" effects on the environment and people. Is this the case?

The situation is that sewage in any refugee camp is a concern and it is one of the reasons why we invest so much in trying to ensure that the water table is not put at risk. We've undertaken a number

of studies, including with the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, to ensure that water tables are not being contaminated and there is no evidence that they have.

That being said, we need to ensure that not only in the camp but in all areas in the north that water treatment is enhanced. A lot of the communities in the north do not have proper sanitation facilities. Zaatari camp has a huge population but at the moment the risk is not as great as what that [report] may indicate.

But what we are looking into doing is trying to ensure that the resources are not put at risk. We are obviously extremely conscientious of any threat to Jordan's resources and we need to do more.

Zataari camp UNHCR works on water drainage in Zaatari. Photo courtesy of @ZaatariCamp.

Often refugees do not use communal latrines for one reason or another and make their own - that means we have to try and ensure that we improve the availability of the latrines so that they don't make their own.

If you look at how deep you have to drill to get down to the water – it is quite deep - and as far as I'm aware and as far as any reports have indicated, the aquifer is not as much risk as what this poll [report] may indicate.

I don't want to give the impression that we are not extremely concerned but it is not an issue which is going to come up any time soon. And if anything what has happened is that with the opening of Azraq it has actually relieved the pressure on Zaatari because the population will be reduced. And that is a very good thing. And as the population is reduced we are going to be able to [provide] more systematic infrastructure both on the provision of water as well as on the evacuation of sewage.

Also there are a number of donors including the Americans, USAID, and the Germans who are also investing and improving the situation of water and sewage from the north.

There are positive things now taking place, although, that being said, I can understand the concern of the Jordanians when you do have such a massive population on top of one of Jordan's aquifers.

Q: So the studies you and UNHCR have carried out do not indicate that the water basin has been polluted as of yet?

Yes, that is correct. Also [studies have been done] with the [Jordanian] Ministry of Water and Irrigation as well, and with UNICEF. There is no evidence that the water of any aquifers has been polluted.

Q: This KAS report suggests that Zaatari should be moved as soon as possible. Are you considering at all moving the camp or its population elsewhere?

No. One, we are not considering it, and two, it would be a decision for the government of Jordan. Jordan is responsible for the camps and we are supporting the government. But it makes no sense, because where would you move it to? Plus investors have put hundreds of millions of dollars into the camp, so it makes no sense.

What makes sense is to do a better job ensuring that the [management] of water is better and that, not only in the camp but also in the north of Jordan, the infrastructure receives further investment. On both accounts I believe that it is happening.

Q: Has the storage and disposal of water sewage changed or been improved in Zaatari in the last year?

Yes. There was a request by the Ministry of Water and Irrigation that all the sewage tanks get replaced, and they were replaced in December last year. And I think UNICEF is now putting two water treatment tanks in Zaatari as well, so that should also alleviate some of the pressure on the existing plants in the north which are being utilised quite [fully].

Q: You said pressure on Zaatari will be relieved – are you planning to move refugees to Azraq?

No, but since Azraq has opened very few refugees are going to Zaatari. And so there is a natural population movement out of Zaatari and so we expect the population of Zaatari to continue to decrease to a much more manageable level.

Q: What will that manageable level be? How many thousand refugees?

It could be anywhere between 50,000 and 80,000.

Q: Do you have a different water and sanitation system in place in Azraq?

The big difference between Zaatari and Azraq is that we had 10 days to plan for Zaatari and we had 10 months to plan for Azraq. So we put in very good septic tanks and the latrines are much more organised, they are more available. So we set up Azraq in a much more systematic way, taking into account that refugees do not want to use the communal toilets for instance, they want to have private toilets. So we've increased the number of toilets to take into account the refugees' desires not to use communal toilets.

So we have done as much as we can, given the resources we have. Again, if we had money, as with anyone, we could obviously do a better job. The amount of resources we have available is extremely limited.

Q: You mentioned Zaatari was built in 10 days, and it was not built for a population of 100,000 or even 80,000 people. Do you feel Zaatari is sustainable in the long-term?

No refugee camp is established to be sustainable. We would like Zaatari and all the refugees in it to close as soon possible and the refugees to return back to Syria. But until such time that the refugees can return it's going to [exist] in that area.

No one wants a refugee camp, no one wants anyone to live in a refugee camp. But we are where we are, the war in Syria is continuing to go on, and we are just trying to do whatever we can given the resources we have. Jordan has done a fantastic job in keeping the border open and allowing the refugees to stay here. And we are trying to do what we can given what we have.

And what is sustainable? A refugee camp relies on support from donors [and] international organisations to keep it moving and it can only be sustainable as long as we receive support.

Q: So it will remain open as long as the refugees cannot return to Syria?

Yes, that is unfortunately the case. No one wants the refugee camp to remain, no one wants to stay longer than absolutely necessary, and I am the first one to prefer them to [return home].

"UNHCR's Harper: 'No Evidence' of Zaatarı Water Pollution", 29/05/2014, online at: http://syriadirect.org/main/36-interviews/1407-unhcr-s-harper-no-evidence-of-zaatari-water-pollution

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❖ Iran's official says water transfer from Caspian to Lake Urmia unprofessional

The project on transferring water from Caspian Sea to the drying Lake Urmia is unprofessional, senior Iranian official said.

"Some people inside the administration try to prevent implementation of the government's plans for reviving the lake," Issa Kalantari, an official that was tasked with monitoring the efforts to revive the Lake Urmia said, Iran's Mehr news agency reported on May 26.

"These people hope to implement the project of water pipeline from the Caspian Sea to the lake with Iran's oil money," Kalantari said without revealing any further information.

If the water transfer project is implemented, some $20 billion of the country's assets will be lost, he added.

The project of the transferring water from Caspian Sea to Urmia Lake is not confirmed, and both Iranian and foreign experts do not approve it.

"Why should people pay money for inability of some officials to solve the problem," he underlined.

Earlier the head of Iran's Environmental Protection Organization, Masoumeh Ebtekar said that the Organization does not agree with the plan of transferring water from Caspian Sea or Aras River to Lake Urmia, saying these plans are unprofessional due to economic and environmental factors.

Commenting on the issue, Iranian environmentalist, Professor Esmail Kahrom said it is very difficult, because Caspian Sea is in the lower plain, and not on the same level as Urmia lake.

He said the altitude of Caspian Sea in some areas is about -21 meters below the level of the sea waters and oceans, but the Lake Urmia is almost 850 meters above the Caspian Sea, therefore Iran has to spend more money and energy to transfer the water.

The situation over the Lake Urmia has been widely debated by the Iranian officials and experts.

Lake Urmia in north-west Iran is experiencing its worst drought in many years, where over 70 percent of its water has dried up. The level has been declining since 1995.

Officials have said if the current restoration efforts are not effective, the lake will be turned into a swamp within four years. Previous reports said Lake Urmia needs 3.1 billion cubic meters of water per year to survive.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has established a working group to tackle the issue of saving Lake Urmia.

Issa Kalantari, who is also the secretary of the working group, went on to say that the approvals of the working group will be submitted to the administration in next weeks, forecasting that the revival projects will come to force within next month.

He also criticized mismanagement of the water sources in Urmia Lake's catchments in the agriculture sector.

Iran is located in an arid zone and the country has repeatedly faced drought in the past 40 years. The drought of 1992-2002 caused a major blow to agriculture. There were quotas imposed for fresh water in several cities, including Tehran.

"Iran's official says water transfer from Caspian to Lake Urmia unprofessional", 26/05/2014, online at: http://cpf.az/en/iran/4431-irans-official-says-water-transfer-from-caspian-to-lake-urmia-unprofessional.html

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❖ Iraq Launches 61 Water Network Projects

The Iraqi government said Tuesday (May 27th) it has launched 61 projects worth 800 billion Iraqi dinars ($687 million) to construct modern water networks in a number of cities per World Health Organisation (WHO) specifications.

"The projects include constructing 6,000 kilometres of modern water networks in residential areas and neighbourhoods in Babil, Anbar, Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar and Diyala provinces," said government media advisor Ali al-Musawi.

"Local government and private sector companies will execute the WHO specifications and standards compliant projects, which are linked to modern purification plants on the Tigris and Euphrates," he said.

The new projects are the third phase of a national project to rehabilitate water and sewage networks across the country, he said.

"Iraq Launches 61 Water Network Projects", 27/05/2014, online at: http://www.aina.org/news/20140527181921.htm

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❖ Threat of disease in Iraq villages flooded by militants

DUBAI, 27 May 2014 (IRIN) - Flooding caused by the forced closure of a major dam on the Euphrates river has destroyed villages and farms across a 200sqkm area west of Baghdad, leaving tens of thousands homeless and at high risk of waterborne diseases like cholera.

Aid agencies - already stretched to the limit trying to respond to the 434,000 people displaced by fighting in the troubled province of Anbar - are now scrambling to get food, shelter and hygiene kits to the estimated 40,000 families affected by the flooding in Abu Ghraib and surrounding areas in April.

The water - which at the height of the flooding was reported to have reached just a few kilometres short of Baghdad International Airport - is now slowly receding from Abu Ghraib and some families are starting to return home. But Nuaimiyah Dam, in the city of Fallujah in Anbar province, is still believed to be under the control of militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and it is feared they could cause more flooding at any time.

"The government does not yet have full control of the area or the dam," said Eliana Nabaa, spokesperson for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). "There is no reason to relax because it [the flooding] could happen again."

Despite these risks, however, some families, who had sought refuge on higher ground and in neighbouring governorates, are starting to return to the flood-hit areas to assess the damage and recover what is left of their homes and farms.

It is not clear how many people are still homeless because water-blocked roads and the security situation in Abu Ghraib have limited humanitarian access, but the UN estimates that at the height of the floods between 12,000 and 20,000 families were forcibly displaced.

"This is a big mess, a real tragedy. Everything is damaged, nothing is working and we have many problems," the mayor of Abu Ghraib, Othman Adil Al Ma'dhidi, told IRIN.

"The flooding happened very suddenly in the space of a day. People were very frightened and they had to leave their homes because of all the water and it was not safe," he added, explaining that the flooding had affected 49 villages and damaged more than 10,000 homes.

He said five people had died, some from being bitten by snakes living in the water. He appealed to the international community for help.

"It's going to take a lot to rebuild all this, there is a lot of damage and we need help," he said.

ISIL militants reportedly closed Nuaimiyah Dam, around 5km south of the city of Fallujah, in early April, having taken control of parts of Anbar in January when the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) withdrew from the city. The government forces retreated because of threats against them from Sunni tribal groups, following the forced closure of an anti-government Sunni protest camp in Ramadi, Anbar's capital.

Analysts told IRIN ISIL's primary intention was to cut off water supplies to the south of the country, where the population is largely Shia and sympathetic to the government. However, the shutdown also triggered a surge into the Abu Ghraib irrigation channel, causing widespread flooding in an area that is mostly inhabited by Sunnis.

Eyewitnesses described to aid workers how a tide moving at 5km per hour flowed into homes and across fields, submerging schools, dragging away livestock and forcing families to escape on rafts made from pieces of furniture.

On 6 May, an opening was created downstream from Nuaimiyah Dam to allow drainage, but this has left several dozen villages with no water at all. They are now dependent on trucked supplies.

"It's not a case of being able to open up one gate and then everything is fine," UNAMI's Nabaa said. "We still have a flood and the expectation that even when the flood goes down, there will be a long-term negative impact on the area and the agriculture. It was harvest time and a lot of crops have been lost."

Disease risk

Mohammed Al Bahbahani, a public information officer at the World Food Programme (WFP) in the capital Baghdad, who visited Abu Ghraib earlier this month, described a scene of damaged buildings and devastated crops.

"Most of these people are farmers; they live off their land; they grow their own food and sell what's left over to make some cash. The flooding has destroyed their livelihoods and left them without food."

"[The displaced] are suffering from not finding water to drink and they are getting sick; some have skin rashes and others are having diarrhoea," Mayor Al Ma'dhidi added.

Al Bahbahani said there were growing concerns about the risk of a disease outbreak due to the amount of standing water, general contamination and summer heat. However, so far, no major outbreak has been reported.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), a number of the families affected by the flooding were already internally displaced, having fled violence in Anbar.

"They were extremely vulnerable in the first place and now they have been displaced again," said Natalia Prokopchuk, UNHCR external relations officer. Many of the IDPs had been camping out in poultry sheds and farm buildings and so were doubly exposed when the water came, she said.

"We are getting reports of people suffering from waterborne diseases, particularly those who were displaced from Anbar," she added. "They don't have money to approach health services and the health situation does not look good."

Zach Thomas, an assistant project officer with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), told IRIN: "The water is receding but a lot of swampy areas remain and we have been told by the

local councils that there is sewage mixing with agricultural water and standing water and that is causing people to get sick.

Harvests lost

"Whole harvests of tomatoes, potatoes and okra have been lost and those people that did not lose livestock are now being forced to sell them because they need the cash for food and they have nowhere to keep them."

As part of a coordinated response, teams from UNHCR, WFP, the World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been delivering mattresses, jerry cans, cooking stoves, food parcels, hygiene kits and medical supplies.

UNICEF has also been trucking clean water to villages and running hygiene promotion campaigns; IOM has been delivering non-food items; and on UNHCR recently began providing cash handouts to the most vulnerable families. However, the amount of aid has not matched the number of people affected.

This flooding and displacement comes as Iraq is creaking under the strain of anupsurge in sectarian violence that has raised concerns about the country slipping back into civil war.

The rise in violence and insecurity has limited access for humanitarian workers; while the low level of funding is also threatening the capacity to respond.

In March, the UN launched an emergency appeal for US$103 million to pay for food, shelter, medical, water and sanitation supplies to support IDPs from Anbar, but so far it is only 10 percent funded. Several country teams have warned that if more money does not come, services will have to be reduced.

"Threat of disease in Iraq villages flooded by militants", 27/05/2014, online at:
http://www.irinnews.org/report/100134/threat-of-disease-in-iraq-villages-flooded-by-militants

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❖ Ex-minister arrested in Italy's embezzlement probe of funds for Iraq waterway Project

ROME - Italian police have arrested a former environment minister for allegedly embezzling 3.4 million euros ($4.6 million) from ministry funds earmarked for a water resources project in Iraq.

Tax police in the northern city of Ferrara said Corrado Clini, who served in the government of ex-premier Mario Monti, was put under house arrest. An Italian businessman was also put under house arrest Monday.

Clini remained in the environment ministry as a top administrator after Monti's government ended.

Tax police said the alleged embezzlement involved false billing from a Dutch company to a Ferrara engineering firm, as well as transferring funds, through Caribbean companies, to Swiss bank accounts.

The probe is one of several unrelated corruption investigations involving former ministers or politicians.

"Ex-minister arrested in Italy's embezzlement probe of funds for Iraq waterway Project", 26/05/2014, online at: http://www.brandonsun.com/business/breaking-news/ex-minister-arrested-in-italys-embezzlement-probe-of-funds-for-iraq-waterway-project-260675461.html?thx=y

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❖ U.S. Wars in the Middle East: Imperialism and the Battle for Water

Water is to the twenty-first century what oil was to the twentieth century: the commodity that determines the wealth and stability of nations.

People who think that the West's interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria are only about oil are mistaken. Broadly speaking, Western interest in the Middle East is becoming increasingly about a commodity more precious than oil, namely water.

According to the U.S.-based Center for Public Integrity, Western nations stand to make up to a US$1 trillion from privatizing, purifying and distributing water in a region where water often sells for far more than oil.

Although over two thirds of our planet is water, we face an acute shortage. This scarcity flies in the face of our natural assumptions. The problem is that 97 percent is salt water. Great for fish, not so good for humans. Of the world's fresh water, only one percent is available for drinking, with the remaining two percent trapped in glaciers and ice.
Put differently: if all the water on earth was represented by an 11-litre jug, the freshwater would fill a single cup, and we can only access the last drop.

Nature has decreed that the supply of water is fixed; all the while, demand is rising as the world's population increases and enriches itself. By 2030, climate change, population growth, pollution and urbanization will compound, such that the demand for water globally is estimated to outstrip supply by forty percent.
Increasingly, for water to be useful, it needs to be mined, processed, packaged, and transported, just like gold, coal, gas or oil. Unlike oil, there are no substitutes, alternatives or stopgaps for water.

There have been three waves of resource-driven imperialism in the modern era.
A quest for gold fueled the first wave. Old-fashioned colonialists, regal and unembarrassed, rode in on horseback, brutally took control of American territories, sent in ostrich-plumed governors, minted coins with the Queen's head on them, and gazed proudly over natives toiling away in perilous mine-shafts. An unprecedented kidnapping of millions of Africans ensued, so as to replace the indigenous Americans that had initially been exterminated by their European conquerors. This coincided with white pioneers brutally conquering Southern Africa, also in search of gold.
The second wave of imperialism has been driven by an unquenchable, post-industrial thirst for oil. Modern petro-imperialism, the key aspect of which is the U.S. military's transformation into a global oil-protection armed force, puts up a democratic facade, emphasizes freedom of the seas (or pipeline routes), and seeks to secure, protect, drill, and ship oil, not to administer everyday affairs.
Nevertheless, the means by which the U.S. is centering its foreign policy around oil is hardly new in spirit, albeit unprecedented in scope.
The third wave of imperialist wars is currently being fought over nature's most valuable commodity: water.

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Prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, CIA analysts reported on a prediction of a new theater of war: hydrological warfare, "in which rivers, lakes and aquifers become national security assets to be fought over, or controlled". These predictions became realized in quick succession, beginning with the recent wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria. It is now clear that the age of hydro-imperialism is upon us. On April 17, 2003, in Iraq, the American company Bechtel received a no-bid reconstruction contract from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for US$100 billion; thus, making it the largest Iraq reconstruction contract. Therefore, the most lucrative Iraq reconstruction contract was not used to repair oil facilities, build schools and hospitals, or to repair bombarded infrastructure: it was used to source, process, and distribute *water*.
The secretive, opaque and no-bid nature of the water contract award process is made even worse by one incredible fact. Bechtel has botched many of its previous projects.

In California, Bechtel installed one of the nuclear power plant reactors backwards. In Boston, what promised to be a US$2.5 billion job for an infamous "Big Dig" project became the most expensive in U.S. history costing US$14.6 billion. The tunnel project was plagued by charges of poor execution, corruption, criminal arrests, and even four deaths.
In Bolivia, Bechtel`s record is one of privatizing water by inflating prices by 35 percent. The inflation caused public riots, in which several people died. Bechtel was ousted from the country and tried to sue the Bolivian government for canceling their contract.

Since the turn of the century, Iraq was the first casualty of hydro-imperialism, and Colonel Gaddafi's assassination marked the second. Libya sits atop a natural resource more valuable than oil: the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer, which is a vast underground reserve of fresh water, estimated to be the largest in the world. Mr. Gaddafi had invested $25 billion into the aquifer, which had the potential to turn a country that is 95 percent desert into an arable oasis. As it now stands, France's global mega-water companies: Suez, Ondeo, and Saur, control almost half of the world's $400 billion water market. They are poised to rake in billions of dollars from Libya's eighth wonder of the world.
Mr. Gaddafi had intended the scheme to be designed by Libyans, constructed by Libyans, for the benefit of the Libyan population. Now it is being redesigned by Frenchmen and women at inflated costs, constructed by French contractors, largely for the benefit of French shareholders. Libyan taxpayers will undoubtably be stuck with the bill and higher water bills.

The most recent case of hydro-imperialism is the war in Syria. Israel has been leading a Western campaign to support Syrian rebels; in part, because its leaders assert that the Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad, poses an existential threat to Israel on the issue of water. Assad has vowed to reclaim the Golan Heights – a strip of land that Israel captured from Syria in the Six Day War of 1967. The Golan Heights provides a staggering 40 percent of Israel's fresh water.

"Syrian control of half of our water poses more of a threat than Iran with one bomb", once remarked ex-Israeli intelligence head, Meir Dagan.
Assad has also been reticent to privatize the water industry and expose the population to predatory pricing, thereby preventing the West from tapping into a multi-billion dollar revenue stream.

Mr. Assad`s refusal to play ball on water privatization and his choice to play hardball over the Golan Heights meant that the Syrian President, like Mr. Hussein and Colonel Gaddafi before him, is an obstacle to the West`s hydro-imperialist agenda.

Control of nature`s most precious and increasingly valuable commodity will, for any nation, spell the difference between greatness and decline. Mr. Hussein, Colonel Gaddafi and a defiant Mr. Assad know that all too well.

"U.S. Wars in the Middle East: Imperialism and the Battle for Water", 26/05/2014, online at: http://www.globalresearch.ca/u-s-wars-in-the-middle-east-imperialism-and-the-battle-for-water/5384015

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❖ Israel's desalination program averts future water crises

Through desalination, Israel has created the possibility of transforming the region in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago.

After experiencing its driest winter on record, Israel is responding as never before — by doing nothing.

While previous droughts have been accompanied by impassioned public service advertisements to conserve, this time around it has been greeted with a shrug — thanks in large part to an aggressive desalination program that has transformed this perennially parched land into perhaps the most well-hydrated country in the region.

"We have all the water we need, even in the year which was the worst year ever regarding precipitation," said Avraham Tenne, head of the desalination division of Israel's Water Authority. "This is a huge revolution."

By solving its water woes, Israel has created the possibility of transforming the region in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago. But reliance on this technology also carries some risks, including the danger of leaving a key element of the country's infrastructure vulnerable to attack.

Situated in the heart of the Middle East, Israel is in one of the driest regions on earth, traditionally relying on a short, rainy season each winter to replenish its limited supplies. But rainfall only covers about half of Israel's water needs, and this past winter, that amount was far less.

According to the Israeli Meteorological Service, northern Israel, which usually gets the heaviest rainfalls, received just 50 to 60 percent of the annual average.

Tenne said the country has managed to close its water gap through a mixture of conservation efforts, advances that allow nearly 90 percent of wastewater to be recycled for agricultural use and, in recent years, the construction of desalination plants.

Since 2005, Israel has opened four desalination plants, with a fifth set to go online later this year. Roughly 35 percent of Israel's drinking-quality water now comes from desalination. That number is expected to exceed 40 percent by next year and hit 70 percent in 2050.

The Sorek desalination plant, located roughly 15 kilometers (10 miles) south of Tel Aviv, provides a glimpse of that future.

With a loud humming sound, the massive complex produces roughly 20 percent of Israel's municipal water, sucking in seawater from the nearby Mediterranean through a pair of 2.5-meter-wide pipes, filtering it through advanced "membranes" that remove the salt, and churning out clean drinking water. A salty discharge, or brine, gets pumped back into the sea, where it is quickly absorbed. The facility, stretching nearly six football fields in length, opened late last year.

Avshalom Felber, chief executive of IDE Technologies, the plant's operator, said Sorek is the "largest and most advanced" of its kind in the world, producing 624,000 cubic meters of potable water each day. He said the production cost is among the world's lowest, meaning it could provide a typical family's water needs for about $300 to $500 a year.

"Basically this desalination, as a drought-proof solution, has proven itself for Israel," he said. "Israel has become ... water independent, let's say, since it launched this program of desalination plants."

By meeting its water needs, Israel can focus on longer-term agricultural, industrial and urban planning, he added.

Disputes over water have in the past sparked war, and finding a formula for dividing shared water resources has been one of the "core" issues in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Jack Gilron, a desalination expert at Ben-Gurion University, said Israel should now use its expertise to solve regional water problems. "In the end, by everybody having enough water, we take away one unnecessary reason that there should be conflict," he said.

Israel has already taken some small steps in that direction. Last year, it signed an agreement to construct a shared desalination plant in Jordan and sell additional water to the Palestinians.

Israel's advances with desalination could help it provide additional water to the parched West Bank, either through transfers of treated water or by revising existing arrangements to give the Palestinians a larger share of shared natural sources.

"Desalination, combined with Israel's leadership in wastewater reuse, presents political opportunities that were not available even five years ago," said Gidon Bromberg, the Israel director of Friends of the Earth Middle East, an environmental advocacy group.

Under interim peace accords signed two decades ago, Israel controls 80 percent of shared resources, while Palestinians get just 20 percent. A more equitable deal could remove a key source of tension, opening the way for addressing other issues, he said.

But with the most recent round of peace talks having collapsed last month, there is little hope of making progress on any of the core issues anytime soon.

Moreover, Bromberg said desalination is not an end-all solution. The plants require immense amounts of energy, consuming roughly 10 percent of Israel's total electricity production, he said.

The exact impact of desalination plants on the wider Mediterranean also isn't clear, he added. A number of countries, including Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt, are either using or considering the use of desalination plants.

IDE's Felber said the impact of returning brine to the sea is "minor." But Bromberg insists it is too early to say what impact multiple plants would have, saying "much more research is required."

Relying so heavily on desalination also creates a potential security risk. Missile strikes or other threats could potentially knock out large portions of the country's water supply.

The threat is even more acute in Arab countries of the Gulf, which rely on desalination for more than 90 percent of their water supplies and are located much closer to rival Iran.

The Sorek plant is heavily protected with fences, security cameras and guards, and it is not connected to the Internet, instead using a private server, to prevent cyber attacks. But like other key

infrastructure, it could be susceptible to missile strikes. During a 2006 war, for instance, Lebanese Hezbollah militants attempted to strike an Israeli power plant.

Tenne, of the Water Authority, acknowledged that "anything in Israel is vulnerable," but said the same could be said for sensitive infrastructure behind enemy lines. "I hope that people will be smart enough not to harm infrastructure," he said.

"Israel's desalination program averts future water crises", 31/05/2014, online at: http://www.haaretz.com/1.596270

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❖ Up to 80,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem left without tap water for three months

Tens of thousands of Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem have spent three months without running water, despite petitions and calls from human rights bodies after an Israeli water utility company stopped supplies in March.

Hagihon, Jerusalem's water utility company, stopped regular supplies of running water to several neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem, such as Shu'fat Refugee Camp, Ras Khamis, Ras Sh'hadeh and Dahiyat a-Salam, said a statement from the website of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.
The camps are located inside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries and isolated from the rest of the city by the Separation Barrier.

According to B'Tselem, some households in these camps *"have been completely cut off from the water supply"* while others *"receive water intermittently."*
"As for the rest, the water pressure in the pipes is so low that the water does not reach the faucets," says the statement.
As a result, between 60,000 and 80,000 Palestinians, the majority of whom are permanent Israeli residents, have been left without a regular water supply, adds the organization.

According to B'Tselem, the fact that people have to live without a proper water supply is but *"another outcome of the severe and ongoing neglect of the residents in the Jerusalem neighborhoods separated by the Separation Barrier from the rest of East Jerusalem."*
"The construction of the barrier and the isolation of these neighborhoods have led to a state of neglect even more severe than that endured by East Jerusalem neighborhoods for decades," says the group.
Meanwhile, the local residents continue looking for running water in the camps. Families have no choice but to buy bottled water and limit their consumption – drinking, showering and laundry – to minimum.

"Every other week, I take the kids to my family's home in Ras al-'Amud [Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem] to shower. We go by bus and it takes us an hour to get there," Linda Abu Rajeb told B'Tselem.

She said that her husband has to walk over to his brother's house, which is nearly a kilometer away to get water.

When the running water was stopped back in March, people spent at least three weeks calling the Hagihon Company and the Jerusalem Municipality to restore the water supply in their neighborhoods.

On March 25, local residents, community leaders and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) wrote a petition to the Israeli High Court of Justice over negligence that has cut water supplies to tens of thousands of people.
"This is a humanitarian crisis of the first degree, and infringes on the right to water, dignity and health, especially of children and infants, the elderly, the sick and persons with disabilities," said the petition.
According to ACRI, the water infrastructure in the affected areas can support only 15, 000 people, while there are more than 80,000 in the camps.

Hagihon in its turn said that "security problems (including employees needing to have a police escort) and frequent attacks against infrastructure," were preventing the company from carrying out its maintenance work properly in the Palestinian neighborhoods.

On 2 April, 2014, the Court told Israeli officials to give a response to the petition within 60 days. The deadline is set on the first week of June 2014.

"Up to 80,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem left without tap water for three months", 31/05/2014, online at: http://rt.com/news/162680-jerusalem-palestinians-no-water/

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❖ Water in Gaza - total collapse draws ever nearer

After suffering devastating winter floods, Gaza now prepares for a long, dry summer of acute water shortages, declining water quality and a collapsing sewage system, as its coastal aquifer faces permanent damage from over-use and seawater contamination.

"The majority of water resources are concentrated in the hands of Israel, while the Palestinian population endures significant water deficits."

The consequences of a dry winter in the Middle East are being studied particularly closely in Gaza, where the area's 1.9 million residents already face a number of largely man-made threats to water security.

The following round-up of recent publications by think tanks, analysts and human rights organizations highlights the close link between water security and electricity supplies, and the near exhaustion of Gaza's coastal aquifer.

A power crisis in the territoriy has reduced the availability of running water in most households, according to a factsheet produced by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with more than 30% of homes in Gaza receiving running water for just 6-8 hours every four days.

Immediate action needed to avert 'irreversible damage'

In March, a petition signed by nearly 13,000 people and organised by the Emergency Water and Sanitation-Hygiene Group (EWASH), a coalition which includes national and international NGOs and UN agencies, was handed to the European Parliament to urge action to end the water crisis in Gaza.

"The scale and severity of the water crisis facing the Gaza Strip is enormous, and unless immediate action is taken, the damage to Gaza's natural water resources will be irreversible", says a factsheet produced by thePalestinian Water Authority (PWA).

At least 90% of the water supply in Gaza is contaminated with a combination of nitrate (NO3) or chloride (Cl), according to the PWA. It says water quantity is also an issue, with average consumption of 90 litres per person per day, below WHO's recommendedguidelines for minimum health requirements of 100 to 250 litres per person per day, say EWASH.

In the coming years, the population of Gaza is expected to continue growing, creating increased water and power needs. The power supply required to operate current water and wastewater facilities, currently 29 MW (megawatts) is expected to rise to 81.5 MW by 2020, according to PWA, as the population grows and new water projects are built.

'Significant water deficits' loom

According to an OCHA factsheet on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), *"The insufficient supply of electricity and fuel to operate water pumps and wells has caused a further reduction in the availability of running water in most households. This has increased people's reliance on private, uncontrolled water suppliers and lowered hygiene standards."*

Israel is the main source of electricity in the OPTs, with 4,702 gigawatt hours purchased from Israel in 2012, constituting 89% of its total energy purchases.

The Gaza Strip, specifically, is supplied with electricity from three sources: purchases from Israel (120 megawatts) and from Egypt (28 MW) and production by the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) (currently 60 MW). According to OCHA, this supply meets less than half of the estimated demand.

In a recent report on water in the OPTs, Friends of the Earth says: *"Water injustice and inequitable allocation of water to Palestinian people has seriously deteriorated the overall economic and social well-being of the people ...*

"The majority of water resources are concentrated in the hands of Israel, while the Palestinian population endures significant water deficits."

B'Tselem: 'an unequal division'

In a press release issued in February, the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem said the Israeli government was largely responsible for this discrimination due its water policy:*"Minimal amounts of water are supplied to Palestinians and water from shared resources is unequally divided."*

The Israel Water Authority on the other hand says Israel goes well beyond existing water obligations in providing additional water supplies to OPT. It says uncontrolled drilling in OPT is a major threat to supply:

"Over 300 unauthorized wells were drilled by the Palestinians in the West Bank. These unauthorized wells may ruin the shared aquifer as they almost completely ruined the one in Gaza and caused an ecological disaster."

Gaza's coastal aquifer 'unusable' by 2016

Almost all the water in Gaza comes from the coastal aquifer, which is shared with Israel. "[D]ue to the absence of any policy coordination between Israel and the Gaza Strip with regard to the Coastal Aquifer, both authorities are currently over-extracting", says EWASH.

A UN report in August 2012 entitled *Gaza in 2020* forecast that at current rates of deterioration the coastal aquifer will become unusable by 2016 and beyond repair by 2020.

In 2009 the UN Environment Programme recommended ending abstraction from the aquifer completely, but with low rainfall and no year-round rivers, Gaza has few other options.

PWA has long-term plans for a central desalination plant and short-term plans for several low-volume desalination projects, wastewater treatment plants and developing treated wastewater reuse for irrigation. But given the challenges posed by the blockade and electricity shortages, the viability of such plans is in question.

Without power, adequate water is a pipe-dream

While large-scale emergency and strategic water desalination and wastewater treatment projects are necessary to provide for the population in the future, without adequate power sources, these projects will only add to the challenges.

As part of its 2014 response plan for OPT, the UN has appealed for US$25 million to help improve access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for 1.9 million of the people in need. So far, the chronically underfunded Water and Sanitation-Hygiene (WASH) sector is just5.6% funded, well below the average of 18% for other sectors.

"Water in Gaza - total collapse draws ever nearer", 31/05/2014, online at:
http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2414449/water_in_gaza_total_collapse_draws_ever_nearer.html

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❖ 7,000 times NO! Signatures against Italian cooperation with Mekorot delivered to mayor of Rome

On Thursday, May 29, with 25 meters of signatures, the resounding NO to Italian cooperation with Israeli water company Mekorot was taken to Rome City Hall. The 7,114 signatures on the petition against the agreement signed between Rome's water utility ACEA and Mekorot snaked their way through the public square where a delegation of the Committee Against ACEA-Mekorot Cooperation and the Rome Coordination for Public Water delivered a copy to the office of mayor Ignazio Marino. The petition calls on the city of Rome, the majority shareholder in ACEA, thus far silent on the issue, to take the necessary steps to block the agreement signed by the two companies.

Mekorot, Israel's national water company, is responsible for serious violations of international law. The company extracts water illegally from Palestinian water sources, in turn providing the stolen water to Israeli settlements built illegally in the occupied Palestinian territory, which could not exist without Mekorot. An artificial water shortage that concerns only the Palestinian people has been created by Israeli policies, implemented by Mekorot, while abundant water supplies flow to the swimming pools, lawns and intensive agriculture of the Israeli settlements. The Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq refers to this as "water apartheid," and organizations such as Amnesty International have stated that the purpose of these policies is to expel the Palestinians from their land.

On the Campidoglio Square in front of City Hall, where the movement for the right to housing was also protesting, activists noted that while the ACEA denies the fundamental right to water with cutoffs for those unable to pay their water bill, the company is now looking to go into business with those stealing water in Palestine in order to turn a profit on a common good.

Beyond Rome and Italy, the signatures on the petition also came from more than 60 countries around the world, including Israel. Just days prior, on May 25 a letter from Israeli citizens was sent to the City of Rome and ACEA demanding that all cooperation with Mekorot cease immediately.

Protests will continue on June 5 at 10:00 am during the ACEA annual shareholders meeting, where activists working to defend the fundamental right to water, from Rome to Palestine, will reaffirm, in

addition to the calls for an end to the agreement with Mekorot, that there is no room for profits and private speculation on water and its management must be public.

"7,000 times NO! Signatures against Italian cooperation with Mekorot delivered to mayor of Rome", 31/05/2014, online at: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/europe/11788-7000-times-no-signatures-against-italian-cooperation-with-mekorot-delivered-to-mayor-of-rome

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❖ Italians say "No" to Israeli water thief Mekorot

All over the world, people of conscience are saying "No" to cooperation with the racist Zionist regime in Israel.

The latest to speak out are the people of Rome, who have submitted a 25-metre-long petition to the city council against cooperation with Israeli water company Mekorot.

Mekorot is responsible for serious violations of international law. It steals water from Palestinian water sources and supplies it to Jewish squatter colonies, which are built illegally on occupied Palestinian territory.

Here's a report we received from the Italian committees that have been organizing the protest against cooperation with the water thieves.

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"Italians say "No" to Israeli water thief Mekorot", 31/05/2014, online at: http://www.redressonline.com/2014/05/italians-say-no-to-israeli-water-thief-mekorot/

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❖ For Israel, desalination solves many water woes, but key challenges remain

SOREK, Israel — After experiencing its driest winter on record, Israel is responding as never before — by doing nothing.

While previous droughts have been accompanied by impassioned public service advertisements to conserve, this time around it has been greeted with a shrug — thanks in large part to an aggressive desalination program that has transformed this perennially parched land into perhaps the most well-hydrated country in the region.

"We have all the water we need, even in the year which was the worst year ever regarding precipitation," said Avraham Tenne, head of the desalination division of Israel's Water Authority. "This is a huge revolution."

By solving its water woes, Israel has created the possibility of transforming the region in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago. But reliance on this technology also carries some risks, including the danger of leaving a key element of the country's infrastructure vulnerable to attack.

Situated in the heart of the Middle East, Israel is in one of the driest regions on earth, traditionally relying on a short, rainy season each winter to replenish its limited supplies. But rainfall only covers about half of Israel's water needs, and this past winter, that amount was far less.

According to the Israeli Meteorological Service, northern Israel, which usually gets the heaviest rainfalls, received just 50 to 60 percent of the annual average.

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"Basically this desalination, as a drought-proof solution, has proven itself for Israel," he said. "Israel has become ... water independent, let's say, since it launched this program of desalination plants."

By meeting its water needs, Israel can focus on longer-term agricultural, industrial and urban planning, he added.

Disputes over water have in the past sparked war, and finding a formula for dividing shared water resources has been one of the "core" issues in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Jack Gilron, a desalination expert at Ben-Gurion University, said Israel should now use its expertise to solve regional water problems. "In the end, by everybody having enough water, we take away one unnecessary reason that there should be conflict," he said.

Israel has already taken some small steps in that direction. Last year, it signed an agreement to construct a shared desalination plant in Jordan and sell additional water to the Palestinians.

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"Desalination, combined with Israel's leadership in wastewater reuse, presents political opportunities that were not available even five years ago," said Gidon Bromberg, the Israel director of Friends of the Earth Middle East, an environmental advocacy group.

Under interim peace accords signed two decades ago, Israel controls 80 percent of shared resources, while Palestinians get just 20 percent. A more equitable deal could remove a key source of tension, opening the way for addressing other issues, he said.

But with the most recent round of peace talks having collapsed last month, there is little hope of making progress on any of the core issues anytime soon.

Moreover, Bromberg said desalination is not an end-all solution. The plants require immense amounts of energy, consuming roughly 10 percent of Israel's total electricity production, he said.

The exact impact of desalination plants on the wider Mediterranean also isn't clear, he added. A number of countries, including Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt, are either using or considering the use of desalination plants.

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"For Israel, desalination solves many water woes, but key challenges remain", 30/05/2014, online at: http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/view/story/d950b465aba540acb83375f44449a4f0/ML--Israel-Water-Woes

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❖ Jordanian gov't official: Israel, PA, Jordan must move forward with water cooperation

AMMONNEWS - Regardless of the ongoing stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Jordanian government official Saad Abu Hammour told The Jerusalem Post on Tuesday that environmental cooperation among the region's players must continue to flourish , Turkish Weekly reported.

"We shouldn't miss the opportunities to improve the chances for peace among the three countries," Abu Hammour, the secretary-general of the Jordan Valley Authority, said on the sidelines of a conference in Jordan on Tuesday.

A prominent figure in environmental collaborations among Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, Abu Hammour served as Jordan's representative to December's trilateral water negotiations, in which the parties agreed upon water swaps and funneling Red Sea brines to the shrinking Dead Sea.

On December 9, senior officials from the three governments met at the World Bank headquarters in Washington to sign a memorandum of understanding on the subject. A key component of the agreement is the development of an 80 million cubic meter desalination plant in Aqaba, from which Israel would be able to buy 50 to 60 percent of the water. Jordan would be able to buy an additional 50 million cubic meters of water from Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) annually, roughly double the current allocation, and Israel would allow the direct sale of an additional 20 million cubic meters of water from the Mekorot national water company to the PA.

The understanding calls for a 200-kilometer pipeline to carry residual salt brines from the desalination process to the Dead Sea.

"This project is the first peace process project," Abu Hammour said. "It is a water project; it's not politics. It should not go to the level of politics."

Abu Hammour spoke with the Post during Tuesday's International Protecting Ground Water

Conference, held on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea, in the town of Swemieh. The conference took place under the framework of the cross-border "Protecting Groundwater" project, funded by the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation in the Mediterranean and implemented by Friends of the Earth Middle East. Organized by FoEME, the conference occurred in partnership with ENPI-CBCMED, Diputacion de Malaga and Water and Environmental Development Organization, with financing from the European Union.

Abu Hammour is a mechanical and sanitary engineer by trade and has held related positions in the public and private sectors of Jordan for 31 years. He is also the Jordanian head of the Joint Water Committee between Israel, Jordan and the PA, which was established following the Oslo Accords.

Progressing with the trilateral water agreement is also particularly critical to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority due to the relative scarcity of water in each of these places, Abu Hammour explained.

"It's very important for the people living in Palestine and Jordan to have water," he said. "As a Jordanian, the only solution for us is to go for desalination."

Leaders of FoEME and also of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies have long been advocating similar messages to that of Abu Hammour on trilateral water cooperation, stressing that solutions regarding shared natural resources cannot wait until the formulation of a final peace agreement.

As far as the 80 million cu.m. Aqaba desalination plant is concerned, Abu Hammour said that the Jordanian government is working with international consultants to prepare a build-operate-transfer tender for the facility. The tender should be finalized within a year-and-a-half, and the plant should be operating within five years, he added.

Ultimately, Jordan intends to increase its desalination capacity in the future, beyond the initial plant, according to Abu Hammour.

Regarding the 200-kilometer pipeline to carry the Red Sea brines to the Dead Sea, which would fall entirely within Jordanian territory, Abu Hammour said that government officials are actively seeking the necessary $350 million from a variety of countries.

"We are making great efforts to have a donors' meeting with the three countries to ask for financing for the brine pipe," he said. "There are a lot of countries that are interested in participating in financing this pipe."

As the secretary-general of the Jordan Valley Authority, Abu Hammour is also directly involved in the Jordan River rehabilitation efforts. While Israel is already releasing water from the Kinneret into the depleted river to increase its flow, Jordan is not able to do so because of the country's water scarcity situation, he explained.

Nonetheless, the Jordan Valley Authority has succeeded in constructing one sewage treatment facility in the northern part of the valley, and the government is working with NGOs and the Jordanian government to plan more, he said. In addition, relevant parties are considering establishing a national committee for environment and the Jordan River, Abu Hammour added.

"Many precious resources are lost due to the high pollution levels in the country," he told conference attendees, in a presentation about the Jordan Valley region's environmental status.

Just as he emphasized in his conversation with the Post, Abu Hammour stressed to audience members the importance of maintaining the process of extensive talks among the region's nations on water issues. He described the existing relationship among environmental professionals in Israel, the PA and Jordan as nothing less than "progressive cooperation between countries."

"Jordanian gov't official: Israel, PA, Jordan must move forward with water cooperation", 30/05/2014, online at: http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=25477#.U419svl_uFU

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❖ Israel, Massachusetts celebrate Ra'anana water treatment plant

Desalitech, a Massachusetts-based Israeli firm, will be constructing the reverse osmosis system in Ra'anana.

Massachusetts and Israeli government officials and innovators announced the cornerstone laying of a future water treatment facility that is to provide a new water source for the city of Ra'anana, at a water collaboration seminar in Tel Aviv on Wednesday.

The facility, which will treat 100 cubic meters per hour of water from a well contaminated with nitrates, will provide enough potable water for about 15,000 people, according to Nadav Efraty, CEO of high efficiency water treatment company Desalitech. The Massachusetts- based Israeli firm is to be constructing the reverse osmosis system in conjunction with the Israeli Water Authority and Mei Ra'anana water company with the support of Israel New- Tech.

There to celebrate the project's cornerstone announcement was Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, who participated in a water-tech seminar that afternoon as part of his Massachusetts-Israel Innovation Partnership Mission 2014. Water technology and global water challenges are one of the key focuses for the trade mission, explained Alicia Barton, CEO of Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (Mass- CEC) – a state-run cleantech accelerator established by Patrick in 2009.

"Much of the recent growth and organization in the Massachusetts water-tech sector is the direct result of our trade mission here in 2011," Patrick said. "Since then, with encouragement from many of you, Massachusetts has applied itself to becoming a world-class destination for water technology."

Following Patrick's trade mission to Israel in 2011, Massachusetts and Israel formed the Massachusetts-Israel Innovation Partnership, run by Mass- CEC and MATIMOP: Israeli Industry Center for R&D of the Israeli Economy Ministry's Chief Scientist Office.

During the Wednesday event, Patrick announced the latest winners of the MIIP water innovation grants – Chelmsford, Massachusetts- based Triton Systems and Petah Tikvah-based Applied Cavitation Technologies.

In addition, the governor and Chief Scientist Avi Hasson confirmed that Mass- CEC and MATIMOP would again each be providing $250,000 for a new round of MIIP grants this year.

"Israel represents one of the strongest water technology sectors in the world, and we want to learn from you," Patrick said.

"Israel, Massachusetts celebrate Ra'anana water treatment plant" , Jerusalem Post, 28/05/2014, online at: http://mideastenvironment.apps01.yorku.ca/2014/05/israel-massachusetts-celebrate-raanana-water-treatment-plant-jerusalem-post/

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❖ Egypt: Presidential Runner Pledges to Peacefully Resolve Dam Row With Ethiopia

Addis Ababa — Egypt's presidential front runner Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi said he would be keen to resolve the long running Nile water dispute with Ethiopia through dialogue if he is elected as the new president of the North African nation.

Al-Sisi said he was ready to visit Ethiopia for talks over the massive hydro plant project the East African country is building at the Blue Nile River. Egypt fears the dam will diminish its water share and will eventually affect the country's people, most of whom heavily rely upon the Nile's water.

Just over a year ago Egyptian politicians were caught discussing whether to launch military attacks against Ethiopia to sabotage the construction of the multi-billion dollar power plant project.

The comments were made at a meeting hosted by the President Mohamed Morsi - who has since been deposed - when several politicians debated bombing the dam while unaware that television cameras were recording the discussion.

At the time Ethiopia responded to the threat by saying it was ready to defend the dam project to any external threats, raising fears of a possible military confrontation between Addis Ababa and Cairo.

Morsi was deposed by the military a month later with al-Sisi assuming control of the government and putting himself in poll position to become president in elections which began on Monday and will end on Tuesday 27 May.

"Dialogue and understanding are the best way to resolve the crisis," al-Sisi told the state-run Al-Ahram daily newspaper in recent interview.

He added: "This is better than going into a dispute or an enmity with anyone."

The former army chief, who led the army to oust Mohamed Morsi last July, said he would exert utmost efforts to sustain Egypt's water security which he said was a "life-or-death issue".

Ethiopia is the source to 85% of the Nile River's water, however, colonial-era treaties written by Britain has granted down stream countries of Egypt and Sudan the lions share of the water.

When completed, the $4.3 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam which is being built in the Benishangul Gumuz region near the Sudanese border will have an electric generation capacity of 6,000 MW.

According to Ethiopia's Electric and Power Corporation (EEPCo) the dam which will be Africa's largest is currently 33% completed.

An international panel of experts with ten members composed of two experts each from Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, as well as four international experts in its final report in June said the dam project will not cause significant harm to Sudan or Egypt but will in fact benefit them.

The panel of experts has delivered its final report to the respective governments of Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.

"Egypt: Presidential Runner Pledges to Peacefully Resolve Dam Row With Ethiopia", 26/05/2014, online at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201405270430.html

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❖ Is an end to the Nile drought in sight?

As with Egypt overall, it's been touch and go with travel on the Nile River since the country's January 2011 revolution introduced an era of political instability that has been hard to shake.

But with this week's presidential elections, combined with pent-up demand from passengers who have been waiting it out with Egypt, there are glimmers of hope that the ships on the Nile will soon start to move again.

Viking Cruises, which has continued offering Egypt sailings through the slowdown, said things are looking up for the back half of 2014 and into 2015.

"We are seeing some booking activity for the fall 2014 dates that are available," said Richard Marnell, Viking's senior vice president of marketing. "We've also received enough interest from customers that we made the decision to begin selling 2015 dates.

"Yes, there is still some uncertainty among some travelers who would like to visit the region. But we are optimistic about the 2015 season, and we have slightly increased our number of departures for next year." MichelleBaran

Viking charters the 150-passenger Mayfair, built in 2010, on the Nile, and the 160-passenger Omar El Khayam, built in 2011, on Lake Nasser.

Abercrombie & Kent has added five departures this fall for its "Egypt & the Nile" itinerary and has announced additional dates for 2015. The itinerary includes a four-night Nile sailing onboard the 80-passenger Sun Boat IV.

"The current interest in travel to Egypt has even surprised us," A&K President Phil Otterson said in a release about adding the departures. Otterson traveled to Egypt in March with 69 A&K guests. "It's been a waiting game, for travelers, tour operators and Egyptians, but it looks like it's finally turning a corner."

For some operators, though, it's too soon to make a call on Egypt just yet. They've been burned with having had to cancel departures or, in the case of Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, which

sails the 82-passenger River Tosca, a luxury vessel that was built exclusively for Uniworld, the company doesn't have the option of returning unsold cabins.

"The River Tosca is our ship, and once we re-enter the market, we have a commitment and obligation to deliver a certain number of guests to make sure that we can operate the itinerary profitably," said Uniworld President Guy Young. "Given the relative uncertainty in Egypt and our selling cycle for this destination, the earliest opportunity we see to re-enter the market would be the fall of 2015."

Young noted that prior to the uprising in Egypt, the Tosca was operating at very high occupancy levels and the itinerary received fantastic feedback from guests.

Avalon Waterways, which had to cancel departures last year due to the unrest, will only reintroduce Nile itineraries when the situation appears considerably more stable.

"We do not have plans to reintroduce Egypt in 2015," noted Avalon's Managing Director Patrick Clark.

"We hope the presidential election brings stability — and tourists — to Egypt. It would be great to see Egypt return to its previous popularity among travelers," he added. "And, while we prepare our 2016 plans for Avalon Waterways, we will be closely monitoring developments."

"Is an end to the Nile drought in sight?", 29/05/2014, online at: http://www.travelweekly.com/River-Cruising/Insights/Is-an-end-to-the-Nile-drought-in-sight/

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❖ Nile Basin countries to negotiate Entebbe Agreement

Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Bernard Member plans to meet with foreign ministers of the Nile Basin countries in July to discuss amendments to the Entebbe Agreement over the allocation of Nile water, the minister announced in a Wednesday statement.

He added that discussions would take into account the importance of the Nile water in meeting the economic needs of Egypt.

Egyptian foreign ministry spokesman Badr Abdelatty said in a press release that Egypt considers Tanzania's proposal an important step to protect the interests of all Nile Basin countries and enable them to achieve the maximum benefit of the Nile River.

According to Abdelatty, the issue of the dam currently being built in Ethiopia will not be discussed "directly", but rather within the framework of the Entebbe Agreement.

Abdelatty added that the Tanzanian initiative reflects the understanding of the Nile Basin countries regarding the importance of the Nile to Egyptians, due to the unavailability of an alternative source of water.

The Entebbe Agreement, signed in February 2011, includes Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan and Burundi, and would increase the share of Nile water for these countries at the expense of downstream countries. Egypt did not sign the agreement, as Mohamed Bahaa ElDin, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation at the time, said that it was not "suitable for downstream countries" and was "against the interests of Egypt and Sudan".

"Nile Basin countries to negotiate Entebbe Agreement", 28/05/2014, online at:
http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/05/28/nile-basin-countries-negotiate-entebbe-agreement/

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❖ Burundi ready to attend meeting on Nile deal review

If it is invited, Burundi is ready to attend a meeting – which has been proposed by Tanzania – to review a 2010 Comprehensive Framework Agreement signed by upstream Nile Basin countries, known as the Entebbe Agreement.

"We will not shun away from the meeting if Tanzania invites us," government spokesman Philippe Nzobonariba told Anadolu Agency.

"But the position Burundi takes will depend on consultations with all stakeholders," the spokesman said.

Tanzania has called for a review of the 2010 treaty in order to consider Egypt's water needs.

"Tanzania feels that the chapter [of the agreement] providing [an] equal and fair share of the natural resources of the Nile… ought to be reviewed in favor of Egypt, considering that it is a desert country whose lifeline is the Nile," Bernard Kamillius Membe, minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation, said in a written document submitted to parliament on Monday.

In 2010, upstream states Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania all signed the Cooperative Framework Agreement regulating Nile water use. Burundi signed on to the treaty in 2011.

The deal aimed to replace a colonial-era treaty that gives Egypt and Sudan the lion's share of river water.

Minister Membe said his country felt an obligation to consider the vast population of Egypt, which he described as a desert country lacking any underground water or rainfall.

Tanzania, he said, would call for a meeting of all Nile Basin states to review the 2011 agreement.

The meeting will be attended by foreign ministers and ministers dealing with water issues.

Nzobonariba told AA that the Burundi government would take a position on the issue in due course if consulted.

"We are all beneficiaries of that river [the Nile]; no party should feel disadvantaged or frustrated," he said.

Nzobonariba also stressed that "the interests of all parties must be safeguarded."

Burundi claims to be the source of the Nile and one of its chief tourist attractions is the Nile pyramid in Rutovu in the south of the country.

Burundi and Egypt have inked cooperation agreements in various fields, including education and health.

"Burundi ready to attend meeting on Nile deal review", 31/05/2014, online at: http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/137828/burundi-ready-to-attend-meeting-on-nile-deal-review

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❖ UN Water Treaty Surpasses Ratification Threshold

Earlier this month Vietnam became the 35th country to ratify a United Nations treaty on rivers that cross international boundaries. Having now acquired an adequate number of signatures, the treaty will come into force on August 17, 2014. The International Water Law blog is hosting a series of essays exploring what this means for the management of shared rivers.

Water Supply

Laws passed in California that require irrigation districts to track water use and levy fees arelargely being ignored, finds the Center for Investigative Reporting. Only 20 percent of the districts required to file water-use reports, which were due 10 months ago, have done so.

With its major reservoirs near record lows, Austin, Texas has convened a task force to find new sources of water, StateImpact Texas reports. The panel will consider a range of options: using treated wastewater, decreasing reservoir evaporation, and storing water in aquifers and in cisterns in commercial buildings.

Parts of at least 40 U.S. states could face water shortages under average conditions in the next decade, according to a report from the U.S. government's internal watchdog. Updating a 2003 report, the Government Accountability Office found that states are taking steps to prepare by ordering water assessments and drought plans.

"UN Water Treaty Surpasses Ratification Threshold", 28/05/2014, online at:
http://www.circleofblue.org/waternews/2014/the-stream/stream-may-28-un-water-treaty-surpasses-ratification-threshold/

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❖ Water: new 'core issue' in India-Pak ties?

Pakistan and India have inter mittently but consistently engaged each other in dialogue over several unresolved issues between them related to peace and security in the region. Of late, however, Islamabad has been attempting to include water as a core issue and to inter nationalise this bilateral matter.

Until a few years ago, while there were arguments about certain Indian projects on the western rivers and their conformity to the Indus Water Treaty that has guided the division of river waters between the two countries since 1960, no one in Pakistan talked about water as being a major issue.

But, the early 2010 onwards, this changed. Ever since, Pakistan has been projecting water as a new "core issue" as important as Kashmir, if not more.

BEST EXAMPLE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

All bilateral issues pertaining to water disputes, so far, have been dealt with most efficiently under the Indus Water Treaty, regarded internationally as an example of successful conflict resolution.

It is, perhaps, the only agreement that has survived three wars. The treaty contains provisions for dealing with any "questions" or "differences" or "disputes" that might arise in the course of operation.

The resolving of problems as perceived by Pakistan regarding construction of Baglihar Dam and Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project within the framework of the treaty bears testimony to and is indicative of the inherent strength of its provisions.

INCLUDING WATER IN COMPOSITE DIALOGUE

Recently, Pakistan foreign office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam said her country had no plan to rene gotiate the historic Indus Water Treaty with India and instead considered getting the water dispute included in the composite dialogue process.

She added that this policy development was credited largely to the parliamentarians. Sughra Imam of the People's Party of Pakistan (PPP) had stated in Senate that since Pakistan ranked 31st among the most water-stressed countries, steps were needed to stop India from violating the water treaty.

She specified that the purpose of the resolution was to ensure that the government raised the water issue in any dialogue process that Pakistan initiated with India, something Islamabad had failed to do effectively in the past. The resolution was passed unanimously.

Pakistan had invited technical experts from international agencies such as World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Inter national Water Management Institute (IWMI), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the United Nations (UN) to Pakistan Water Summit on March 20 to discuss and prepare a "water policy" on 14 themes, one being transboundary water (internal and national dialogue).

PLOT TO GATHER WORLD SYMPATHY

Projecting water as a core issue appears to be Pakistan's well-thought out plan to tell the world that water is an unresolved issue between the two countries and that India accepts implicitly that it has given Pakistan cause for complaints. The world's sympathy is with the lower riparian nation always.

PAKISTAN'S OWN FAILINGS

There is a need to analyse as to why Pakistan is so keen to include water among the core issues. The instinct is to blame India for all water paucity but Pakistan has to consider own failings that have led to a most serious disaster.

Excellent irrigation development projects exist in Pakistan, which with its extensive network of canals and storage facilities provided water for one of the largest irrigated areas (2.6 crore acres) for any single river system. However, a tragic decision demoted water policy on the priority list.

In the years since, increasing silt because of the lack of maintenance has reduced the storage capacity by 30% of the 1976 figure. The politicising of Kalabagh Dam only served to highlight the inherent lack of foresight, which has proven so costly already.

Further, more than 35 million acre feet (MAF) of water from Pakistan (approximately 30% of its requirement) runs off into the sea in the absence of dams.

Pakistan federal minister for planning and development Ahsan Iqbal recently admitted that domestic factors were responsible for up to 1,186 MAF water going into the sea unutilised in 35 years, causing a loss of $174 billion (more than Rs. 10 lakh crore) to the national exchequer.

The situation continues, in spite of the fact that even today more than 5 to 11 MAF of water from the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej flows into Pakistan, according to its own government records.

DISTURBING PORTENT

Pakistan accuses India of diver ting/storing water in violation of the Indus Water Treaty. It demands a bigger share from rivers that run from India, even though India, gave away a generous 80.52% of the Indus system waters to it for indefinite duration.

Pakistan also blames Indian action for the water scarcity in Pakistan, which would jeopardise its economic growth and create a health hazard.

A recent report stated that Pakistan's annual per-person water supply had dropped from about 5,650 cubic meters in 1947 to about 964 cubic meters now, a serious situation when the population is set to double over the next 25 years. Climate change will exacerbate it and overexploitation will lower the groundwater levels further.

WATER IS FOREVER

Therefore, the main reasons for Pakistan to project water as a core issue seem to be (a) dissatisfaction with the Indus Water Treaty and the functioning of the Indus commissions on both sides; and (b) its attempts to divert attention from inter-provincial water conflicts by accusing India of wrongdoing.

The inclusion of water as a core issue is a new and disturbing development in India-Pakistan relations that will have far-reaching consequences. It may gain more importance than Kashmir.

And even if Kashmir gets resolved tomorrow, water will remain a core issue. Do not accept it at face valu

"Water: new 'core issue' in India-Pak ties?", 27/05/2014, online at:
http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/chandigarh/water-new-core-issue-in-india-pak-ties/article1-1222917.aspx

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