In this day and age there's no shortage of new challenges that governments of the world have to face and tackle, including atmospheric pollution, climate change and the rapid human-caused environmental degradation. Under these circumstances, what didn't seem to be much of an issue yesterday, becomes a big issue today - like one's access to large volumes of drinking water.

Back in 2010, the UN General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of other human rights. Last Spring, the UN together with UNESCO released this year's edition of the World Water Development Report that described the problem of limited access to drinking water supply that a large number of international players are facing. In particularly it stated that 30% of the overall population (some 2.1 billion people) lacked access to safe, readily available water at home, while another 4.5 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation in 2015. These days, some 2 billion people live in countries that cannot provide enough water to meet the needs of their
populations, while the total number of people facing severe water scarcity reaches 4 billion people. It's been revealed that water use has been increasing worldwide by about 1% per year since the 1980s, driven by a combination of population growth, socio-economic development and changing consumption patterns.

In an attempt to prevent the spread of infectious diseases rich countries construct increasingly more complicated water supply networks, however over 80% of all wastewater returns to the environment without being treated. That's why those diseases carry on killing more people than wars every year. Last year alone such water-related diseases as diarrhoea and cholera claimed 780 million lives globally.

First wars over waters resources started in the pre-historic era, however, their number reached its maximum last century, as countries found themselves unable to meet the rapidly growing demand for drinking water, as their respective populations kept growing while the water supply remained unchanged. With the global economy slowing down and the imminent global food crisis approaching, it's inevitable that we're going to witness a new spike in the number of such conflicts.

A casual reader has grown accustomed that wars can be waged over hydrocarbons, however, they seldom hear water conflicts being mentioned. For instance, the now forgotten Six-Day War of 1967 was waged over water resources. In 1955, Israel started planning to use water from the Jordan river to meet the growing demand of its southern regions and growing settlements in the Negev desert. In response, Syria and Jordan started building a dam that could allow them to divert two of the three sources of the Jordan river in order to thwart Israel's National Water Carrier project. At this point there was no way of averting the crisis, which resulted in the Six-Day War. This conflict resulted in Tel-Aviv occupying the Golan Heights, Gaza Strip and West Bank, while blowing the above mentioned dam to pieces, thus securing its access to water resources.

According to UN, there were 263 transboundary conflicts waged in the time span from 2010 to 2018. Out of these, some 123 were directly triggered by water disputes. And it's hardly a secret that cross-border conflicts are just the beginning. Water-related tensions are on the rise within countries as well, between rural and urban communities, and among agricultural, industrial, and household consumers. In fact, there is a long history of conflicts over the waters of many major rivers, including the Nile, the Amazon, the Mekong, and the Danube. But the severity and frequency of such conflicts are set to increase, as climate change alters rainfall patterns, leading to more frequent, intense, and prolonged droughts and floods.

Last year, Nabil al-Samman, a Syrian expert on international waters, penned a piece on the possible large water conflict in the Middle East, as such states as Turkey, Iraq and Syria are facing the prospect of water disputes, as numerous conflicts across the region destroyed water canals and dams, leaving large areas without irrigation and drinking water and vulnerable to seismic activity.

Against this background, we must take a closer look at the recent attempts that the Pentagon has undertaken to establish control over the Euphrates river to shape the policies of a number of regional players, just like it did with Syria by capturing its oil fields.

It's curious that this was precisely the tactics that ISIS tried to use during its reign over the Middle East, as it captured the largest dam of Iraq – the Mosul Dam back in 2014. As Iraqi armed forces made an attempt at recapturing this most vital water infrastructure, the terrorists announced that they would destroy the dam, sending a wall of water toward Iraq's capital - Baghdad. A year later, the same terrorist group sealed all sluice gates on the Euphrates river shut, effectively depriving five major cities of water access. Fearing that the local population could revolt, Iraqi authorities had to surrender massive strips of land to this terrorist formation.

It's no wonder that the Pentagon is fully aware of the challenges that come hand in hand with attempts to improve water security, as The Pacific Institute has been keeping track of every single water-related conflict on Earth for decades. As it's been stated by Peter H. Gleick in 2015:

There is growing competition for limited water resources among agricultural, industrial, domestic, and ecological users. The misalignment of political borders and watershed boundaries has long complicated the effective management of water systems, and, in many parts of the world, these political challenges are getting worse, not better, leading to a growing risk of conflict.

It's curious that against this backdrop, Washington seems to remain ignorant of the challenges it may soon face with providing its own population with drinking water. According to Reuters, as many as 96 water basins out of the 204 supplying most of the US with drinking water could fail to meet monthly demand starting in 2071. However, in
spite of this prospect, Trump has nevertheless decided to turn his back on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, while terminating a number of environment protection laws that were adopted under his predecessor – Barack Obama.

Washington closest ally – the United Kingdom is set to run short of water within 25 years, according to Sir James Bevan, the chief executive of the Environment Agency. In his opinion, the country is facing the “jaws of death” at the point where water demand from the country’s rising population surpasses the falling supply resulting from climate change.

Thus, the problem of drinking water is becoming a factor that threatens peace in numerous regions of the world. For many people in Africa and Asia, water conflicts is no longer a thing from the not-so-distant future. And these wars may soon start spreading to other regions of the world. As far back as in 1995, Ismail Serageldin, the then Vice President of the World Bank, announced that all through the 21st century wars will be fought over water instead of oil.

In order to prevent this scenario, the UN believes that a joint peaceful approach to addressing this problem must be developed. We’re living on a planet where some 97.5% of all water is unsuitable for drinking. Therefore, the only way to avert water crises in the future is the construction of desalination plants. A number of rich Middle Eastern countries are building them already. Such states as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, and Kuwait. In Oman, such a plant was built by Tel-Aviv, with Moscow putting forward a similar project for the UAE. However, there’s only a handful of countries that can actually afford such construction projects, while others are in dire need of financial assistance.

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