



PERSPECTIVES

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Potable Water vs. Energy Resources: National Security Under Trump and Netanyahu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Access to potable water is critical for Israel's future, yet Israel depends more and more on desalination plants, aquifers, and water from outside its borders to provide this resource. These sources could be in jeopardy as Israel seeks to extract oil and natural gas off its coast and on land. There is a real possibility that President Donald Trump might seek access to Israel's energy supplies at the cost of its water, an ominous prospect.

Perhaps few resources are more valuable to a nation than water and energy supplies. Israel will soon reach what could be a point of no return in which the Netanyahu government will have to decide which to put first: water or energy. That decision, should it become necessary, would result from President Donald Trump's likely push for access to oil and natural gas deposits for US-based companies within Israel.

The struggle therefore is how best to protect Israel's water supplies given the continued demand for energy resources. The wealth Israel's natural resources can generate is vast indeed, but could come at a steep price – the possible contamination of the aquifers and the Sea of Galilee, making the desalination plants either unusable or lowering their capacity to produce potable water.

The Israeli government must put access to drinkable water at the top of its list of national security issues. It must forsake any attempt by the Trump administration to open Israel's energy reserves to development and extraction. The future of Israel depends upon this decision.

Access to fuel, in the form of coal, oil, or natural gas, has historically been almost as vital a concern for Israel as national security. The country now finds itself at the early stages of a massive oil and natural gas boom, but is struggling to find a means to exploit it while ensuring its survival as a Jewish state.

The challenge is to find a balance between the need to provide Israel's citizens with potable water and the desire to generate the level of wealth that can be derived via the newfound energy reserves. Similarly, the US is experiencing a boom of its own through the extraction of oil and natural gas due, in part, to the extensive use of hydraulic fracturing.

Shale deposits have been known to exist in Israel for some time, but only recently have researchers discovered methods for extracting the oil and natural gas from the shale. When considering the use of hydraulic fracturing to gain access to the massive oil and natural gas reserves that lie underneath the Golan Heights and throughout much of Israel and the West Bank, Israel needs to consider not just what will occur over the next few years, but over the next twenty, fifty, hundred, and so on.

The Golan Heights, where water flows from the tributaries and Upper Jordan River to the Sea of Galilee, requires special attention in terms of water purity. Taken from Syria in the June 1967 war, the Golan now has implications for the close relationship the Trump administration has with Moscow due to the latter's patronage of the Assad regime.

The central struggle for Israel's long-term future under the Netanyahu government, in conjunction with the Trump administration, will prove to be balancing the needs for energy and potable water. It is unclear whether Israel would consent to a quid pro quo allowing for the extraction of its oil and natural gas by US-based companies in exchange for financial or political support from the Trump administration.

Israel has sufficient natural gas reserves off its coast for its domestic needs. But the scale of sheer wealth embedded in the land and sea might be sufficient to tempt both Trump and Netanyahu to consider doing the unthinkable by allowing large-scale extraction of oil and natural gas.

The future of Israel depends on viable long-term sources of potable water. Continued struggles over water among its neighbors, especially Syria, and the evolving relationship between Presidents Trump and Putin must factor into Israel's decisions about whether it should pursue its natural resources and whom it should trust to assist (e.g., those supporting renewable energy and access to viable water resources, or those focused on the extraction of energy resources at the expense of environmental concerns, à la the Trump administration). It is

hoped that Netanyahu and Trump will make the right choice for everyone, not only for this generation but for future ones as well. Access to drinkable water must be the first of Israel's national security goals.

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