

Forum:	Environment Commission
Issue:	Addressing the issue of oil drilling in the Middle East while considering the COP28 climate summit
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Introduction

Oil drilling in the Middle East is a contentious issue that cuts across economic prosperity, geopolitical dynamics, and environmental concerns. Oil drilling is, in simple terms, the process of extracting crude oil from subterranean repositories. This has turned the region into a powerhouse for global energy production, especially for countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq. Together, these countries accounted for approximately 17 percent of the world's oil supply by 2002, reaping enormous riches and opportunities for millions. This prosperity has come at a great cost as oil revenues have also fueled conflicts and terrorism in neighboring regions. Contrastingly, COP28 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai sounded the alarm that the world has an urgent need for transition towards renewable energy. Too many countries, in particular those dependent on oil, lag in commitments to fight climate change. This conference brought in climate justice, which is supposed to address disparate impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable populations and pursue equal solutions. Confronted by twin pressures- economic dependency on oil and the necessity to minimize greenhouse gas emissions-the Middle East has become a playing field in which rich interplay between interests and strategies underlines the imperative for innovative and collaborative approaches toward meeting the goals of economic development while maintaining ecological sustainability.

Definition of Key Terms

Oil Drilling

The infrastructure developed in the Middle East has enabled those countries with reserves – such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia - to exploit their oil fields. For example, by 2002 the 3 main Middle East producers - Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia – were jointly producing an average of 13m barrels of oil a day. This was about 17% of global supply. Oil sales have created great wealth and boosted economic gains in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait. Millions of people in these and other parts of the Middle East have homes, jobs, and education as a direct result of oil. On the negative side, money made from the sale of oil has seen illegal funding of terrorism in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Cop 28

The largest conference of its kind, the COP 28 UN Climate Change Conference, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, was attended by approximately 85,000 participants. It concluded the first global stock take of the world's efforts on climate change, agreed upon under the Paris Agreement. The findings showed that with regard to

action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing resilience against climate change, and access to finance and technology for developing countries, many aspects were off-track. In return, countries pledged to take bolder action on all fronts by 2030. That includes a call for governments to move faster in switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy—such as wind and solar power—when updating their climate pledges.

Steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions should be taken, and it directly put an accusing finger at the extraction of oil. The results emphasized the need for financial and technical support for the diversification of these countries' energy sources by investing in renewable initiatives, including wind and solar power. Additionally, geopolitical dynamics could change if countries are perceived to be lagging behind and are under pressure from other countries while becoming recipients of more investments if their policies result in the adoption of sustainable energy.

Climate Justice

Climate justice recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities and communities of color around the world—the people and places least responsible for the problem. It seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in so doing, simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices. These can be accumulated under the banners of Six Pillars of Climate Justice: Just Transition, Social, Racial and Environmental Justice, Indigenous Climate Action, Community Resilience and Adaptation, Natural Climate Solutions, and Climate Education and Engagement.

History & Developments

The rise of oil in the Middle East

The discovery of oil in the early 20th century turned the Middle East, primarily an agrarian region along with limited commerce, into an international powerhouse in energy. The first major finding took place in Persia in 1908, which triggered a race for exploration and production throughout the region. In the 1930s, it would add Saudi Arabia and Iraq as large producers, while state-owned corporations such as Saudi Aramco began to be established. The geopolitical implications of such newfound wealth were profound: oil became a strategic asset that lured foreign investment and influence. Western nations, in particular the United States and the United Kingdom, forged alliances with oil-rich states. The end result was political intervention and, on several instances, military engagement in the region—a complex relationship shaping global politics today.

Ever since the early 20th-century discovery of oil near Mosul, a major city in northern Iraq, serving as the capital of Nineveh Governorate, the production of oil has gradually become one of the major economic and strategic issues in relations with the Middle East. In 1912, the European Powers began investing in Middle Eastern oil with the founding of the Turkish Petroleum Company. The finding of oil reserves in Iraq in 1927 got the region its first oil pipeline to the Mediterranean. In the 1930s, American oil companies also began operations in the region, mainly in Saudi Arabia where they were given a monopoly. It was only well after the Second World War that the development of Middle Eastern oil states really took off. The demand for oil exploded post-WWII due to rapid industrialization, the rise of automobiles, and increasing energy needs for transportation, urbanization, and military purposes. Middle Eastern oil reserves, especially after discoveries in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, became crucial to

meeting global energy demands, driving economic and geopolitical interests in the region. At the same time, the share of supplies from the Gulf States to the Western countries started to grow. They managed to strengthen their position gradually and regain control over their natural resources to turn into a symbol of national pride and justify their request for decolonization. The country determined to confront the bigger foreign oil companies that were dominating the market and undertook to wrest the control of prices.

In 1960, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait formed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. United Arab Emirates, and then subsequently the Sultanate of Oman, joined the market to establish this region as an important player in the oil business. The black gold often finances wars, with the permanent turmoil in the Middle East. With the biggest reserves of hydrocarbons in the world, and given the controlled market around OPEC, Saudi Arabia uses oil as a weapon against Israel's allies, going as far as instigating an oil crisis in 1973. The regional instability binds heavily onto the need to make sure that the delivery of oil is ensured. Immediately after the first Israeli-Arab war, the southern arm of the first pipeline bringing Iraqi petroleum to the Mediterranean had to be shut down, encouraging the United States in this position to establish a new line, the Tapline. At that time, nearly all oil was transported through the Strait of Hormuz and then the Suez Canal for delivery to Europe and the United States.

From the war in 1967 until 1975, Egypt closed the Suez Canal, and petrol tankers had to sail around Africa. At that period of time, Egypt, in concert with the Gulf States, started building for the future by laying a new pipeline to help make up for the deficiencies of the Canal. During the war with Iran and also tension with Syria, these countries cut off the possibility to send oil toward the Gulf and the Mediterranean. It was this state of affairs that led to the construction of a new pipeline across Turkish territory to Saudi Arabia. Egypt, Turkey and especially Saudi Arabia are now in a good enough position to control the transport and selling of oil, but they depend on regular intervention of the Great Powers, i.e. the influential nations like the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, and China, which have historically intervened in Middle Eastern affairs to protect their strategic and economic interests, to assure security of oil transports and territorial integrity of certain states, such as Kuwait in 1991.

Environmental Concerns of Oil Mining

The environmental issues related to mining for oil have shifted tremendously over the decades, from advances in technology and regulatory responses to growing awareness of ecological impacts. Crude oil is considered the lifeblood of modern society, used to provide fuel for transportation, heating, and manufacturing of various products. However, even the processes involved in extracting and distributing oil have become a source of grave environmental concern. Early concerns focused on habitat destruction and pollution from drilling activities. This resulted in the development of seismic surveying and directional drilling technologies, which cut down the number of exploratory wells and accordingly minimized land disturbance.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, took environmentalism to a fever pitch. The same technique that has let the United States launch a surprising surge in domestic oil production runs serious risks, including siphoning water and toxic chemical use. The disposal of fracking-generated wastewater has raised its own unique set of alarm bells due to its documented ability to induce seismic activity-most poignantly exposing the delicate balancing act at play with oil extraction and environmental safety.

Oil spills are another major concern. Incidents like the 1989 Exxon Valdez accident led to laws like the Oil Pollution Act, which placed higher safety requirements on tankers. Even so, with this legislation in place, spills remain a very serious threat, often caused by accidents during transportation. The catastrophic Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 generated new interest in practices for offshore drilling, leading to reform of regulations that better oversee the activities.

Apart from this, air pollution due to oil operations has posed a big challenge. Emissions from automobiles and industrial processes contribute to respiratory ailments and climatic change. Thus, the transport sector, relying most on oil, has become one of the leading sectors for greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. Phasing out fossil fuels is increasingly gaining momentum where it is acknowledged that these health and environmental impacts necessitate urgent transition to renewable sources.

Oil drilling presents peculiar problems in the Middle East. Large countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait face the negative consequences of gas flaring, the burning of the natural gas associated with oil extraction, over expansive areas. Research has indicated that air quality over such regions is greatly compromised by oil-related activities, thereby posing a potential threat to human health and biodiversity. The above challenges have inspired regulations that reduce emissions and protect the environment.

Another critical aspect of concern in the environment involves the relationship between oil drilling and indigenous communities. Oil exploration has disrupted traditional livelihoods and subsistence practices, hence eliciting cultural and economic challenges in the life of a population. While demand continues to rise, the balance between economic development and environmental sustainability is equally contentious.

Major Parties Involved

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a dominant player in the rank of the largest exporters of oil in the world. The major interest of this country is not only to keep its economic dominance but also to continue diversifying into other sectors through its program initiated as Vision 2030. In addition, it is an active participant in OPEC and G20, furthering initiatives related to the transition toward sustainable energy, even while heavy investment in oil production continues. Where the kingdom has kept strategic partnerships with the West on technologies and investments, Saudi Arabia works in very close concert with other members of OPEC to stabilize oil prices in a growing press for renewables.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

By hosting COP28, the UAE wants to work on climate action while continuing its economic dependence on oil. The country is very much involved in a variety of renewable energy projects and collaborates with both Western countries and neighboring Gulf states on many energy projects. The UAE approach reflects a greater regional trend aiming at a race towards sustainability while continuing to cash in on oil revenues.

Iraq

Iraq is rebuilding its economy after conflict and has become heavily reliant on oil revenues. The country is attracting foreign investment into its energy sector and is a member of OPEC, though it is afflicted with a number of internal governance problems. The bilateral relationship between Iraq and other powers in the region, such as Iran and the U.S., often shapes Iraqi policy regarding oil and the development agenda, further complicating its position at COP28.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an organization through which co-operation between leading oil-producing and oil-dependent countries will be able to influence the global oil market and maximize profit collectively. Currently, the organization is made up of 12 member countries responsible for an estimated 30 percent of global oil production. A 2022 report further details that OPEC member countries were responsible for approximately 38 percent of it. That is, it is expected that the OPEC countries will possess 79.5 percent of the world's proved oil reserves while the Middle East itself would account for 67.2 percent of the total OPEC's reserves.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event Name	Description
1973	The Oil Crisis	The crisis prompted many nations to reconsider energy dependency, leading to increased awareness of environmental impacts.
3-14 June 1992	The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro	The summit establishes the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), marking a commitment to sustainable development.
December 1997	Adoption of the Kyoto Protocol	The protocol establishes binding commitments for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thus having a knock-on effect on the policies of oil-exporting countries.
19-22 February 2001	The World Renewable Energy Congress in the UAE	The conference highlights the requirement for renewable energy development in the Middle East region.
30 November – 12 December 2015	Adoption of the Paris Agreement	Nations reach an international agreement to hold global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, further pressing oil-dependent nations to transition into cleaner energy resources.

2018	Publication of UN Report on Global Warming	The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change publishes a report on the urgency of taking rapid action to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by abandoning fossil fuel use.
2019	UAE Announcement of Strategic Initiative	The UAE announces a strategic initiative to invest \$163 billion in renewable energy projects by the year 2030, showing policy U-turn toward sustainable energy.
31 October 2021 – 12 November 2021	COP26	COP26 is held in Glasgow, with countries under pressure to commit to phasing out fossil fuel. OPEC countries are expected to declare how their oil production will be brought down to meet the climate goals.
30 November 2023 – 13 December 2023	COP28	COP28 concludes with a global stocktake that shows inadequate progress in climate commitments, calling for more acceleration in action and shifting away from fossil fuels.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Various international agreements have been considered in trying to solve the environmental implications of oil drilling. The Kyoto Protocol, 1997, and the Paris Agreement, 2015 lay binding targets for greenhouse gas reductions that bind oil-producing nations to commit to sustainable practices. This has seen variable compliance, nevertheless, as some countries do try to balance economic interests with environmental responsibilities.

Additionally, the establishment of the UNFCCC helps support international agreements and global cooperation to coordinate against climate change. UNFCCC COP meetings, among them COP28, put the records of countries on their promise towards climate change under scrutiny. This has often put oil-exporting countries in a tight spot amid economic reliance on resources from fossil fuel and urgent actions for environmental sustainability.

Middle East countries have made certain national policies to mitigate environmental impacts related to oil drilling. For instance, Saudi Arabia has developed the Vision 2030 initiative that is supposed to reduce dependence on oil and invest in renewable energies. Similarly, the UAE has pledged for diversified sources of energy, and with more investments in clean technologies, it is bound to achieve both economic and ecological goals.

In the wake of catastrophic oil spills, such as the tragedies involving Exxon Valdez (1989) and Deepwater Horizon (2010), numerous regimes had been brought into place with the aim of enhancing safety and environmental protection. The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 in the U.S. mandated that double hulls be fitted in oil tankers; the same later being brought into place in other parts of the world. These moves had been initiated as one of the various ways of minimizing some of the risks associated with oil transport and extraction.

Newer drilling technologies, such as horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking), are in development to reduce the impact that oil extraction has on the environment. While such technologies are reaching even greater efficiency, controversy over water use and possible contamination makes them contentious.

Yet, besides all such attempts, serious barriers persist, ranging from political resistance to dependence on the revenues of oil to the difficulties related to the shift in alternative energy sources. Continued dialogue and innovative solutions will be required as the environmental effects of oil drilling in the Middle East are being addressed.

Possible Solutions

Some possible solutions that could be implemented on oil drilling in the Middle East, with consideration of the COP28 climate summit, include transitioning toward renewable sources, more so solar and wind power, to lower dependency on fossil fuels for countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, receiving substantial sunlight. Second, improving regulatory frameworks in order to introduce and impose strict emissions standards, coupled with rigorous environmental impact assessments, will lessen any boons. This can be further offset by investment in clean technologies, carbon capture and storage, and better regulations to reduce gas flaring. Such investment may be responsible by government entities, international energy companies, renewable energy firms, multilateral organizations, and private sector investors, all aiming to transition toward cleaner energy and reduce fossil fuel dependency. Collaboration at a regional level can be helpful in sharing experiences and managing the environment on a uniform basis for all countries in the Middle East. Delegating the powers of decision-making to local communities and Indigenous peoples ensures that their rights and concerns are not violated. The economic diversification away from oil with the help of climate financing sourced from international sources helps. Educational campaigns can help raise awareness on the environmental impacts associated with oil drilling and the benefits that are accruable from renewable energy. Besides, the international agreements, like the Paris Accord, by imposing more stringent requirements, will make nations more accountable, and a robust monitoring mechanism ensures compliance with the rules in true letter and spirit. All of these together can bring in lasting change and can help in overcoming the environmental problems associated with oil drilling in the region.

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