

ISSN 2314-5609 Nuclear Sciences Scientific Journal 6, 171-180 2017 http://www.ssnma.com

# IRON SCRUBBING FROM D<sub>2</sub>EHPA AND TOPO MIXTURE DURING SECOND CYCLE OF URANIUM EXTRACTION FROM PHOSPHORIC ACID USING OXALIC ACID

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### ABSTRACT

The iron scrubbing from organic mixture, 0.03 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO was carried out using oxalic acid solution. The influence of various factors affecting the scrubbing process as shaking time, oxalic acid concentration, scrubbing temperature and aqueous/organic phase ratio has been studied in terms of the maximum iron scrubbing efficiency and the minimum uranium scrubbing efficiency. The obtained results have been mathematical treated in order to model the iron scrubbing process. The logarithm of the apparent scrubbing equilibrium constant K was calculated and found to equal -1.55 ± 0.09. The iron scrubbing process shown the endothermic character and the thermodynamics parameters ( $\Delta H$ ,  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta S$ ) were 20.17 KJ/mol, 8.84 KJ/mol and 38.02 J/mol K respectively. By applying the optimum conditions for iron scrubbing process, it is found that one stage is sufficient for scrubbing about 96.0 % of the total iron in loaded organic phase. The iron concentration in the precipitated yellow cake was with in the permissible limits of the yellow cake international standard.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Phosphoric acid,  $H_3PO_4$ , is second only to sulfuric acid in volume produced in the world. About 80% of the rock phosphate is being used as raw material for the manufacturing of phosphate fertilizers whereas the remaining 20% rock phosphate is being utilized for the production of detergents, metal surface treatment reagents, chemicals for food industry, and phosphorus compounds (European Fertilizer Manufacturers Association, 2000). During the treatment of rock phosphate with sulfuric acid, about 80 – 90 % U<sub>3</sub>O<sub>8</sub> of the total uranium content present in the rock matrix is solubilized (Guzman et al., 1995).

Although several methods such as ion-exchange (Beltrami et al., 2012), solvent impregnated materials (Aly et al., 2013), membrane separation (El-Hazek and El- Sayed, 2003), and precipitation (Mousa et al., 2013) have been investigated, Solvent extraction alone has been found to be a successful process for industrial recovery of uranium from commercial phosphoric acid. On the pilot plant scale, three solvent extraction systems are of commercial interest for uranium recovery from wet process phosphoric acid assaying about 28-30 %  $P_{0}O_{c}$  and produced by the dihydrate process. Two of these are based on the extraction of U(IV) by octylpyrophosphoric acid (OPPA) (Khorfan, 1993) or mono (MOPAP) plus dioctylphenyl acid phosphate (DOPAP) (Ali et. al., 2002) and the third is based on the extraction of U(VI) by a mixture of di(2-ethylhexyl) phosphoric acid (D\_EHPA) plus trioctylphosphine oxide (TOPO) (Beltrami et al., 2012; Khleifia et al., 2013; Ali et. al., 2012). This process has proved greatly successful and several plants were constructed in different

## countries since 1976 (Hurst, 1977).

Based on D<sub>2</sub>EHPA/TOPO process, uranium is recovered from wet phosphoric acid in two cycles; first cycle: this cycle contains two stages, at the first stage; uranium is extracted from the commercial acid in four counter current stages using organic solvent using D<sub>2</sub>EHPA &TOPO mixture in kerosene. At the second stage, uraniumis stripped form loaded organic phase in three counter current stages using 6.0 M pure phosphoric acid containing 10-20g iron powder as a reducing agent to convert uranium to less extractable tetra valent uranium. In the second cycle uranium is extracted from the concentrated acid by contacting it with D\_EHPA/TOPO solvent in kerosene in other four stages. The loaded solvent is then stripped by an alkaline solution. Ammonium carbonate solutions in different concentrations and pHs are usually used at a temperature of 50°C (Hurst, 1977).

During the stripping step in the first cycle, Fe (II) is oxidized to Fe (III) and remains in the resulting strip solution with uranium according to equation (1);

$$4Fe^{2+} + O_2 + 4H^+ \leftrightarrow 4Fe^{3+} + 2H_2O \qquad (1)$$

Therefore, it creates a problem due to hydroxide precipitation during subsequent carbonate stripping. This caused pollution of the yellow cake. The high concentration of Fe leads to precipitation of iron phosphates in the mixer-settler (Dahdouh et.al., 1997; Stas et al., 2002).

When iron is extracted from acidic solution by solvation, its stripping from  $D_2$ EHPA phase is difficult even with concentrated  $H_2SO_4$  acid. In view of the above difficulty, it is therefore desirable to examine the feasibility of using other reagents such as oxalic acid (Akhlaghi et al., 2010; Ambikadevi and Lalithambika, 2000). Removal of extracted Fe from the loaded organic phase,  $D_2$ EHPA& TBP, at various stages of scrubbing with 20 % sulfuric acid and 7.5 % (w/v) oxalic acid has been reported (Mishra et al., 2002; Singh et. al., 2006; Singh et al., 2013).

Although the extraction behavior of iron (III) f rom phosphoric acid medium by  $D_2$ EHPA & TOPO has been reported (Ocio and Elizalde, 2011; Meles and Prostenik, 1984), the information given about the parameters affecting the iron (III) scrubbing from loaded organic phase,  $D_2$ EHPA&TOPO, is limited. In addition, iron (III) scrubbing mechanism, during uranium recovery from phosphoric acid, has not yet been well understood.

Therefore this work aims to study the different factors affecting the maximum iron scrubbing and the minimum uranium from loaded organic mixture 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA+0.075 M TOPO using oxalic acid prior to the stripping of the uranium with ammonium carbonate solutions in order to precipitate yellow cake with iron content in the permissible limits of the international standard. In addition, the obtained results will be mathematically treated to suggest an approximate model for the iron (III) scrubbing process and to calculate the thermodynamic parameters of the scrubbing process.

#### **EXPERIMENTAL**

#### **Reagent and Solution**

All reagents used were of analytical re-

agent grade except D.EHPA and TOPO manufactured by Aldrich AG which were of a commercial grade and used without purification. Kerosene was obtained from Misr petrol. Ltd., Egypt. Iron (III) solution was prepared from analytical grade ammonium iron (III) sulfate. Crystalline uranyl nitrate hexahvdrate was an AR product of Fluka. Switzerland. It is used for the preparation of all uranium solutions. Oxalic acid solution (Laboratory grade) was prepared by dissolving the required amount in desired volume of water. Iron and Uranium concentrations were determined by ICP-MS. A synthetic ortho phosphoric acid solution prepared from AR ortho phosphoric acid 85 %  $P_2O_5$  supplied from Merck, Germany. Concentration of AR ortho phosphoric acid used is 35 %  $P_2O_5$  and uranium and iron concentrations are 7 g/ L and 15 g/ L respectively. This phosphoric acid represents the loaded feed phosphoric acid in the second cycle of uranium extraction from phosphoric acid according to Hurst, 1977 (Hurst, 1977).

Synthetic loaded organic phase of 0.3 M  $D_2$ EHPA+ 0.075 M TOPO was prepared separately by contacting with the synthetic prepared ortho phosphoric acid in four stages at phase ratio ( $R_{org/ag}$ ) equal 1. The loaded extract (analyzing 12.2 g/L iron and 11 g/L uranium) was performing to the iron scrubbing study.

### Procedure

The utilized loaded organic extract was composed of D<sub>2</sub>EHPA-TOPO in kerosene. This phase was brought into contact with oxalic acid solution. The scrubbing experiments were based on high dispersionin a separating funnel by mechanical shaking. Unless otherwise stated, the two phases were brought into contact at a temperature of  $\approx 25^{\circ}$ C using organic to aqueous volume ratio (R org/aq) equal 1. The concentrations of iron and uranium in the aqueous phase were determined as per the procedure described by Basset and Nagle, respectively (Basset et al., 1985; Nagle and Murthy, 1972). The results were evaluated in terms of the iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency and iron scrubbing distribution coefficient (SD), given by the relation;

Uranium scrubbing efficiency, $\% =$		Concentration of uranium in aqueous phase Total uranium concentration X		
Iron scrubbing efficiency, $\%=$		Concentration of iron in aqueous phase Total iron concentration		X 100
Iron $S_D =$	Concentration of iron Concentration of iron	in aqueous phase n in organic phase X	Volume of organic phase Volume of aqueous phase	

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The following is a discussion for the results obtained from the iron scrubbing from loaded organic solvent D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & TOPO mixture using oxalic acid during the uranium extraction from phosphoric acid. The different factors affecting the scrubbing process were studied in terms of high efficiency for iron scrubbing with minimum uranium. Here, the effects of shaking time, oxalic acid concentration, Aqueous/organic ( $R_{aq}/_{org}$ ) phase ratio and scrubbing temperature, on the iron scrubbing process have been investigated. The obtained results were mathematically treated to model the scrubbing reaction and to calculate the thermodynamic parameters.

#### Effect of Shaking Time

To study the effect of shaking time for the iron and uranium scrubbing from 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO mixture loaded by 12.2 g/l iron and 11 g/l uranium, several experiments were carried at different times ranges from 1.0 to 60.0 min using 0.6 M oxalic acid, aqueous/ organic phase ratio  $(R_{aq}/_{org})$  equal 1 at  $25 \pm 1^{\circ}$ C temperature. The experimental results are given on Fig. (1) as a relation between scrubbing efficiency % and Time. From the Figure it is clear that, as the shaking time increases from 1.0 to 15.0 min, the scrubbing efficiency % increased from



Fig.1 :Effect of time on iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency % from 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO mixtureusing 0.8 M oxalic acid with fixed phase ratio ( $R_{aq}/_{ore}$ ) equal 1 at 25 ±





30.3 to 68.5 % for iron and from 0.3 to 1.9 for uranium. Further increase in time than 15 min has slight effect on both of iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency, which means that the scrubbing process tended to equilibrium. Therefore, 15 min represents the preferred time to maximize iron scrubbing from 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA and 0.075 M TOPO mixture.

#### Effect of Oxalic Acid Concentration

The effect of oxalic acid concentration ranging from 0.2 to 0.8 M on the scrubbing of iron and uranium from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, was investigated using aqueous/ organic phase ratio  $(R_{aq/org})$ equal 1 at a temperature of  $25\pm 1$  °C. The results were plotted on Fig. (2) as a relation between scrubbing efficiency % and oxalic acid concentration. The obtained results indicate that, as the oxalic acid concentration increases from 0.2 to 0.8 M the scrubbing efficiency increased from 17.4 to 73.4 % for iron and from 0.4 to 1.6 % for uranium. Therefore, 0.8 M oxalic acid is the choice acid concentration used for the other experiments of the iron scrubbing from organic mixture, 0.3 M D, EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO.

#### Effect of Aqueous/Organic Phase Ratio

The effect of aqueous/ organic ( $R_{aq}/_{org}$ ) phase ratio ranging from 0.5/1 to 4/1 on the scrubbing of iron and from organic mixture, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, loaded by 12.2 g/ L iron and 11 g/l uranium was studies using 0.8 M oxalic acid at 25 ± 1°C temperature and shaking time is 15 min. The results shown on Fig. (3) as a relation between scrubbing efficiency % and aqueous/ organic ( $R_{aq}/_{org}$ ) phase ratio clear that, iron scrubbing efficiency increases from 47.9 to 89.6 % and uranium scrubbing efficiency increases from 0.6 to 1.9 % as aqueous/ organic phase ratio ( $R_{aq}/_{org}$ ) phase ratio more than 2 has nearly no effect on both of iron and uranium scrubbing process. Aqueous/ organic phase ratio was kept at ( $R_{aq}/_{org}$ ) equals1 for



Fig.2 : Effect of oxalic acid concentration on iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency % from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, with fixed phase ratio (R  $_{aq}/_{org}$ ) equal 1 and shaking time is15 min at 25  $\pm$  1 °C temperature



Fig.3: Effect of (aq/ org) phase ratio on iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency % from 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO mixture using 0.8 M oxalic acid with temperature  $25\pm 1^{\circ}$ C and



er parameters were fixed at 15 min shaking

time and aqueous/organic phase ratio ( $R_{aq/org}$ ) equal 1. The experimental results are given on Fig. (4) as a relationbetween scrubbing efficiency % and temperature. From the Figure it is obtained that, as the temperature increases from 20 to 50 °C, the iron scrubbing efficiency increases from 73.5 to 84.1 while the uranium scrubbing efficiency slightly increased from 1.6 to 1.8 %. This behavior indicates that the scrubbing of iron from 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO mixture using oxalic acid is an endothermic process. Room temperature considered the preferred temperature for the further work.

### **Iron Scrubbing Isotherm**



min and aqueous/ organic phase ratio (R  $_{aq/org}$ ) equal 1. These preferred conditions represent the high efficiency for iron scrubbing ( $\approx$  75 %) with minimum uranium efficiency less than 2 %.

The results are given on Fig. (5) as a relation between concentration of iron in aqueous and organic phases. From the obtained results, it is found that two stagesare sufficient for scrubbing about 96.0 % of the total iron in loaded organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, at phase ratio (R aq/ org) equal 1. This result disagrees with the data obtained from the stripping of iron (III) from organic phase: 1.5 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA + 0.2 M TBP using 7.5 % (w/v) oxalic acid where four stages are required for about 99 % stripping of iron (III) (Singh et al., 2006).

From the loaded organic phase, uranium was stripped and the strip solution was filtered to remove traces of iron precipitate. Finally, uranium is precipitated from the filtered strip medium by using  $H_2O_2$  followed by neutralization using sulfuric acid with pH maintained in the range of 3-4 to thereby precipitate the uranium (Singh et al., 2003). The iron concentration in the precipitated yellow uranium peroxide (UO<sub>4</sub>,xH<sub>2</sub>O) was in the per-



Fig.4: Effect of temperature on iron and uranium scrubbing efficiency % from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, loaded by 12.2 g/L iron using 0.8 M oxalic acid with fixed phase ratio (R  $_{aq}/_{org}$ ) equal 1and shaking time is 15 min.



Fig.5: The Mac-Cab Thiele diagram for iron scrubbing from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, loaded by 12.2 g/l iron and 11 g/l uranium using 0.8 M oxalic acid, and at



missible limits of the international standard yellow cake (Elshafeea et al., 2014).

#### **Proposed Chemical Equilibrium**

This part aims to study iron scrubbing mechanism from loaded organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, using oxalic acid and propos a chemical equilibrium for the iron scrubbing process. The main equilibrium involved is based on the different iron species in D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & TOPO mixture. In a critical review on iron thermodynamic and species in the organic phase during the uranium extraction from phosphoric acid, it is found that, Iron forms different complexes with D<sub>2</sub>EHPA, (HD)<sub>2</sub>, such as Fe (OH) D<sub>2</sub>(HD)<sub>2</sub> and Fe(HD<sub>2</sub>)<sub>3</sub> (Singh et al., 2003; Singh et al., 2013; Shuqiuand Chen, 1989). In addition, it is found that, during the uranium extraction, one molecule of TOPO or TBP involved in the extracted species of iron in the organic phase when the extraction was performed with the mixtures of D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & TOPO or D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & TBP. Therefore, extracted species may be as  $[Fe_2(OH)_2D_4TOPO]$  (org).

Based on the results obtained from the effect of oxalic acid concentration on the scrubbing of iron (III) Figure 2, an average positive slope of 2 obtained from the plot between log oxalic acid concentration and log iron scrubbing distribution coefficient (log  $S_D$ ) Fig. (6) which indicated that 2 moles of the oxalic acid shared in the iron (III) scrubbing process. Based on the average positive slope of 2 for the scrubbing dependence on oxalic acid concentration Fig. (6) and the expectable scrubbed iron species [Fe<sub>2</sub> (OH)<sub>2</sub>D<sub>4</sub>TOPO] the following equilibrium can be proposed.

$$2 C_2 O_4 H_{2(aq)} + Fe_2 (OH)_2 D_4 T_{(org)} \leftrightarrow 2 C_2 O_4 Fe OH_{(aq)} + 2 (HD)_{2(org)} + T_{(org)}$$
 (2)

Where  $(HD)_2$  is D<sub>2</sub>EHPA and T is TOPO. From equation (2), the apparent scrubbing equilibrium constant K was calculated by the relation;

 $K = [C_2O_4Fe OH]^2_{(aq)}[(HD)_2]^2_{(org)}[T]_{(org)}/[Fe_2(OH)_2D_4T]_{(org)}[C_2O_4H_2]^2_{(aq)}$ (3)

Since  $S_D = [C_2O_4Fe OH]_{(aq)}^2 / [Fe_2 (OH)_2D_4T]_{(org)}$ then  $K = S_1 (HD)_1^2 [T1] / [C_1O_1H_1^2]^2$ 







Fig.6: The relation between log oxalic acid concentration and log  $S_{\rm D}$  based on the data obtained from Fig. 2

Table 1: Average K and calculated corresponding distribution ratio based on proposed scrubbing equilibrium for iron scrubbing from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO, using 0.8 M oxalic acid

Log [C <sub>2</sub> O <sub>4</sub> H <sub>2</sub> ], M	Log S <sub>D</sub> (exp.)*	Log K	Log S <sub>D</sub> (cal.)**
-0.70	-0.67	-1.44	-0.78
-0.40	-0.16	-1.53	-0.18
-0.22	0.33	-1.62	0.18
-0.10	0.44	-1.63	0.42
$Log K = -1.55 \pm 0.09$	9		

\* Experimental distribution ratio; \*\* Calculated based on the value of K obtained

concentration, 0.8 M. Therefore, this can justify our proposed scrubbing equilibrium in high oxalic acid concentration.

#### **Thermodynamic Parameters**

Chemical thermodynamics can be used to ascertain the feasibility of a given chemical reaction. It permits quantitative calculation of the state of equilibrium of a system. Conversely, the concepts of chemical equilibrium can be used to find out conditions for making a desired reaction feasible. In this concern, the thermodynamic parameters of iron scrubbing from organic phase, 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO were calculated based on the data obtained on Fig. (4).

The enthalpy changes associated with iron scrubbing from D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & TOPO mix-



Fig.7: Relation between log S<sub>D</sub> and 1/T for iron scrubbing from,0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO mixture, using 0.8 M oxalic acid with fixed phase ratio (R  $_{aq}$   $_{org}$ ) equal land shaking time is 15 min

(1/T). From this Figure, an enthalpy change of 20.17 KJ/mol was obtained in the given range of temperature, which indicates that the scrubbing is an endothermic process.

The magnitude and sign of the enthalpy change ( $\Delta$ H) associated with the scrubbing process will consist of (1) enthalpy change for dehydration ( $\Delta$ H<sub>d</sub>) which can be expected to be positive because energy is required to break the ion–water and water–water bonding of the hydrated metal ions, and (2) enthalpy change for complexing ( $\Delta$ H<sub>d</sub>) which will make  $\Delta$ H more negative due to the formation of metal complex (Masterton et al., 2012). The positive  $\Delta$ H value obtained for the scrubbing of iron (III) indicates that dehydration seems to be more significant than complexation in the scrubbing system.

> result disagrees with the data obom the stripping of iron from organic .5 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA+0.2 M TBP using ox-, where the changein enthalpy for the g process has been evaluated and the  $\Delta$ has been found to be - 123.69 kJ/ mole t al., 2013) this may be as a result of perence in the organic phase composiconcentration.

Gibbs free energy change,  $\Delta$  G of the ubbing process was also calculated the logarithmic value of the proposed equilibrium Log K at 25± 1°C according to the Equation (6):

$$-\Delta G = 2.303 RT \log K \tag{6}$$

Also, the entropy change,  $\Delta S$  was obtained from  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta H$  with the Equation (7):

$$\Delta G = \Delta H - T \Delta S \tag{7}$$

The thermodynamic parameters of the iron scrubbing from  $D_2$ EHPA & TOPO mixture using oxalic acid were given in Table 2.

The positive values of  $\Delta G$  indicated that the iron scrubbing process is a non-spontaneous reaction. The positive value of  $\Delta S$ cleared the increase in the system. Table 2 : Thermodynamic parameters for iron scrubbing from  $D_2EHPA$  & TOPO mixture using 0.8 M oxalic acid

ΔH (KJ/ mol)	∆G (KJ/ mol)	ΔS (J/ mol K)
20.17	8.84	38.02

#### **CONCLUSION**

Iron scrubbing from organic mixture 0.3 M D<sub>2</sub>EHPA & 0.075 M TOPO using oxalic acid during second cycle uranium extraction from phosphoric acid has been achieved. According to the maximum iron scrubbing efficiency and the minimum uranium scrubbing efficiency, the preferred scrubbing conditions were shaking time 15 min, oxalic acid concentration 0.8 M, temperature at 25 °C, aqueous/ organic phase ratio equal 1. Based on the preferred conditions, one stage is sufficient for scrubbing about 96.0 % of the total iron and the iron concentration in the precipitated yellow cake was with in the permissible limits of the yellow cake international standard. The thermodynamics analysis for the iron scrubbing results showed that the endothermic behavior of the process and the thermodynamics parameters ( $\Delta H$ ,  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta S$ ) were 20.17 KJ/mol, 8.84 KJ/mol and 38.02 J/mol K respectively. Logarithm of the apparent scrubbing equilibrium constant K was calculated and found to equal -  $1.55 \pm 0.09$ .

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## MOHAMED H. TAHA

## إزالة الحديد من خليط المذيبات العضوية (ثنائي2- إيثيل هكسيل حمض الفوسفوريك & ثلاثي أوكتيل أوكسيد الفوسفين) المحملة -أثناء المرحلة الثانية لعملية إستخلاص اليورانيوم من حمض الفوسفوريك-بإستخدام حمض الأوكساليك

محمد حلمی طه

تم إز الة الحديد من خليط المذيبات العضوية (٣, • عياري ثنائي-٢ إيثيل هكسيل حمض الفوسفوريك و ٠,٠٧٥ عياري ثلاثي أوكتيل أوكتيل أوكسيد الفوسفين) بإستخدام حمض الأوكساليك. لقد تم در اسة تأثير العوامل المختلفة علي عملية إز الة الحديد بهدف الوصول الي اعلي نسبة لإز الة الحديد مع أقل نسبة إز الة لليور انيوم. ولقد وجد ان التفاعل ماص للحرارة وتم حساب معاملات الديناميكا الحرارية للتفاعل. وايضا تم عمل معالجة رياضية للنتائج التي تم التوصل اليها بهدف إفر ان موذج لعملية إز الة الحديد. تم حساب لوغاريتم ثابت الاتزان الافتراضي لعملية إز الة الحديد ووجد ان مياوي . ... وبتطبيق الظروف المفضلة لعملية إز الة الحديد وجد انة يمكن إز الة من معلية إز الة الحديد ووجد انه يساوي - ... علي مرحلتين. ولقد وجد أن نسبة الحديد في العجينة الصفراء الناتجة متوافقة مع المعاير العجاية.