

Iran's Pollution Problems Peak



Iran Route 96 East, near Asaluyeh.

Source: Tasnim News, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1396/09/26/1396092615040427412810824.jpg>

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Pollution is a longstanding problem in the Iran because of increasing urbanization. Iranians from the countryside began flocking to the city during the shah's reign. According to World Bank data, a decade before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, 40 percent of Iranians lived in cities. When the shah fell, nearly half of Iranians lived in cities. Today, three-quarters of Iran's population are urban dwellers. The population of the greater Tehran metropolitan area has swelled from 2 million at the time of the Revolution to just over 16 million today. Pollution has increased alongside urbanization for two reasons: first, urban infrastructure has been unable to overcome the strain of population; and, second, the Iranian leadership's efforts to industrialize have often come at the expense of pollution controls. Often, only Tehran's air pollution struggle hits the press (see: "Tehran's Losing Battle with Air Pollution," OE Watch, May 2012) because most foreign businessmen, journalists, and diplomats who visit Iran limit themselves to the capital.

The excerpted article from Fars News Agency, an outlet affiliated with more hardline elements within Iran, comes from its new provincial service and so provides some insight into areas outside Tehran normally off-limits to foreign visitors. It reports on extreme pollution in Asaluyeh, an industrial town outside Bushehr that sits alongside Route 96, the main Iranian road connecting the southern Iranian cities of Abadan and Bandar Abbas. Asaluyeh is a major manufacturing center and is the location of land-based facilities in the Pars Special Energy Economic Zone. Such pollutants as sulfur dioxide and hydrogen sulfide are readily detectable by smell—they are not easy for the government to deny—and cause a number of respiratory ailments such as asthma, headaches, and vision problems.

Extreme levels of such pollutants show lax standards in Iran's hydrocarbon industry. That the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps owns many such factories and remains aloof to legal remedy complicates, if not makes impossible, local efforts to resolve the situation. This may impact regional security as wildcat strikes increasingly impact the region as workers organize to improve local conditions. From an operational standpoint, Iran's pollution is important because of the sensitivity of the Iranian leadership and security forces to the country's nascent environmental movement. More than ethnicity or politics, environmentalism has shown that it can unite Iranians across region and class (see: "Iranian Environmentalists Arrested as Spies," OE Watch, April 2018).

“Such hazardous gases should not be present in a residential area.”

Source: “Hava-ye Asaluyeh Sad dar Sad Alludeh Ast (Asaluyeh's Air is 100% Polluted),” *Fars News Agency* (news outlet affiliated with hardline regime elements), 3 June 2021. <https://www.farsnews.ir/my/i/70712>

Asaluyeh's air pollution has put the health of workers in the area under serious threat. In the Asaluyeh region, due to the lack of equipped high gas burners with gas filters, the air in the area is filled with deadly gases such as sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, and hydrogen sulfide. Such hazardous gases should not be present in a residential area. Why are regional officials and refinery companies not thinking about the people and personnel of Asaluyeh region at all? The air is 100% polluted....