



Questions on Shortfalls in Electricity Generation in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian authorities have long justified their nuclear program in the need to meet domestic energy needs. On its face, this explanation does not make sense. While Iran mines natural uranium, this cannot provide more than 15 years' fuel for the eight nuclear reactors Iranian authorities have said they hope to build. In comparison, the cost of upgrading Iran's existing refinery and pipeline network could be accomplished at a fraction of the cost and enable enough electricity generation to power the country for more than a century. Either way, the accompanying excerpt from *Mardom Salari*, a newspaper affiliated with the Islamic Republic's reformist movement, suggests that the Iranian government is falling well behind its needs in generation. For all the billions of dollars Tehran has spent in its ostensibly civilian nuclear industry, its nuclear reactors account for less than 1.5 percent of Iran's power portfolio.

Politically, the excerpt spells trouble for the country. Iran is theoretically oil-rich; its population can rightly ask why with so much potential energy, their government has failed to generate sufficient electricity, especially in comparison to rival, oil-rich Arab states across the Persian Gulf. This, in turn, raises basic questions among ordinary Iranians about the competence of government authorities. As the article explains,

at issue is a loss of production in industry, food spoilage due to lack of refrigeration, and “an overall decrease in the welfare of citizens.” That the Energy Ministry, according to the article, seeks to regulate consumption rather than increase capacity to meet increasing demand, promises growing popular frustration, especially during the summer months.

In sporadic demonstrations, the Iranian public has been increasingly voicing frustration at regime spending choices—for example, its provision of aid to Hezbollah or militant Palestinian factions—at the expense of investment in the Iranian public and infrastructure. That Iran appears to be utilizing a portion of its already insufficient generating capacity to supply and create influence in Iraq and Afghanistan may also not rest well with the Iranian people as their deprivations increase. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“After ten years, again, Iranian citizens have such blackouts.”



Shazand thermal power plant in Iran's Markazi province.

Source: Mohsan Dabiri-e Vaziri, Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic, <https://goo.gl/iHxWkt>.

Source: “Mosaraf-e Barq Cheqader az Tawlid Bishtar Shodeh Ast? (How Much is Electricity Production Greater than Consumption?),” *Mardom Salari*, 4 July 2018. <https://goo.gl/dZoLbi>

In recent days, cities such as Tehran, Karaj, Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, Semnan, Ahvaz, Hamedan, Kermanshah, and Kerman have suffered sporadic and irregular electricity outages. These outages have been as a result of insufficient electricity generation in the country as well as damage suffered by some equipment during the peak of usage. According to Mardom Salari Online, in the past they said it was a good spring for rain, but this good thing did not last long into the summer, and a 60 percent shortage of electricity generated hydroelectrically has led to dispersed blackouts in a number of provinces. In today's civilization, electricity has become an integral part of our day-to-day life; without electricity, there is neither productive industry nor the mechanisms of comfort. In the meantime, the lack of electricity has always been one of the most fundamental issues in Iran. In the summer of 2008, there were extensive outages along the borders of Iran and now, after ten years, again, Iranian citizens have such blackouts....

Although the nominal capacity of hydroelectric power plants is 11,000 megawatts, with the reduction in water supplies behind dams, only about 5,000 megawatts of electricity are being produced. The thermal power plants, with a nominal capacity of 63,000 megawatts, have produced only 44,000 megawatts of electricity. The dispersed and renewable sectors are also about 1,400 megawatts, the nuclear sector is also about 1,000 megawatts, and small diesel power plants generate about 400 megawatts of electricity....

Meanwhile, the Energy Ministry, which has not increased the country's electricity production capacity in relation with consumption (about 5 percent per year) and has not stored sufficient amount of electricity, sees the only solution as being management of electricity consumption by consumers through methods such as reducing their consumption in peak hours, changing working hours in offices, and increasing electricity tariffs.