



ANOTHER CHERNOBYL-SCALE DISASTER IN THE MAKING: THE BUSHEHR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN IRAN

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH – The latest news reports regarding the indefinite suspension of operations at the Bushehr nuclear power plant due to another "technical problem" raises serious concerns about Iran's capacity to competently operate this facility. According to [the November 2012 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#), Russian engineers were forced to remove 163 fuel rods and shut down the plant in October 2012. Other reports have indicated that there were serious safety concerns with [possible explosions at the plant](#).

This is not the first time we are witnessing "technical problems" with this project. The Bushehr plant has been plagued with technical, financial, and political problems since its inception. In August of 2010, after nine years of delay, the partially Russian-constructed plant became officially operational by transporting enriched uranium fuel rods to the reactor. After no more than six months of operation, the reactor had to be shut down due to cooling system problems which were blamed on German made components. According to Gholamreza Aghazadeh, former head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, the problems were design anomalies. He stated that 24% of the parts and equipment used at the Bushehr power plant are German, 36% Iranian and 40% Russian. Sergei Kiriyyenko the chief of Russia's *Rosatom* agreed and said that "Until now, no one has succeeded in operationalizing such a plant, and, actually completing the Bushehr nuclear plant is not the same as constructing a new plant but rather it is completing a plant that has been constructed by a company from another company and consequently, we have had to make **extremely important technical decisions about it.**"

In our report, [The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble: The Human Costs of Military Strikes against Iran's Nuclear Facilities](#), we documented the safety issues and the risks of a catastrophic accident similar to the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Our study has raised serious questions about the Iranian regime's capability to respond to a major nuclear disaster with significant environmental consequences for the region (PP 37-39). While international attention is focusing on Iranian nuclear intentions and the nature of its program, lack of attention to safety concerns at the Bushehr nuclear plant risk creating another Chernobyl- scale disaster in Iran that could devastate the Persian Gulf region. Casualties in the region could easily exceed tens of thousands and the financial damages in the range of 200-300 billions of US dollars (P. 43). With the wind direction blowing from east to west in the Persian Gulf and coastal currents that circle counterclockwise, these risks include the contamination of oil fields and, more importantly, the contamination of desalination plants that provide fresh water for local inhabitants.

We urge Iran to sign the 1996 [Convention on Nuclear Safety \(CNS\)](#), a treaty that engages signatories to help improve safeguards in the wake of the 1986 Chernobyl accident, and the [Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management](#). Iran is the only country operating a nuclear power plant that hasn't signed onto the treaty. Israel, India, and Pakistan, all outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, have signed the CNS. India and Pakistan have both ratified. The international community should also urge Russia to use its influence with Iran to join these conventions.

Only through a greater adherence to treaties and international safety standards that encourage transparency on important safety issues can we prevent another major nuclear disaster like Chernobyl from happening again.

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