

Iraq oil pipeline comes with major environmental costs. By Adnan Abu Zeed*



People gather to discuss a gas pipeline that's said to be damaging farmland and archaeological sites in this video still uploaded May 22, 2017. (photo by YouTube/Alsumaria)

BAGHDAD — On July 21, [farmers complained](#) about a gas pipeline dredging their farmlands. The pipeline carries gas from Iran to Baghdad through Bismayah, which is located in southeast Baghdad. Meanwhile, [reports](#) on May 22 revealed that the pipeline caused [damage to an archaeological site](#) under which it passes.

On March 17, 2016, Iran [announced the completion](#) of a 100-kilometer (62-mile) Iranian gas pipeline. It starts at the South Pars gas field and continues to Baghdad to provide fuel for the electricity stations. As part of the project, the Oil and Energy Committee of the Iraq Council of Ministers decided to extend the pipeline through Bismayah to provide gas for electricity stations there.

Many residents in Bismayah were happy at first. However, their happiness did not last as they were forced to vacate parts of their land for the project. According to testimonies documented in a [video report](#) broadcast by an Iraqi channel on May 22, a farmer said that a military force stormed onto his land and forced him to accept the extension of the pipeline into his land without providing any documents, which he considered a violation of his rights and of applicable laws.

On July 12, Al-Monitor contacted the Nahrawan police directorate, which said, “The security force securing the site has orders to protect the project of extending the Bismayah gas pipeline and remove any constraints that may hinder its accomplishment.”

In a country like Iraq, [environmental awareness](#) is still weak and procedures of environmental safety do not apply. The phenomenon of dredging farmlands and causing damage to archaeological sites has become quite familiar. In July 2016, an [Al-Monitor report](#) stated that UNESCO would not name Babylon a World Heritage site as long as an oil pipeline crossed the historical site.

In a phone interview with Al-Monitor, Hussein Fleih, Babylon’s director of antiquities and a member of the Babylon provincial council, insisted, “Procedures of moving the pipeline have already started after the Babylon Directorate of Antiquities won a lawsuit against the Ministry of Oil in 2016.”

Following the same pattern of conflict between the projects and the environment, the head of the provincial council of the district of Zubair in south Basra [announced](#) on May 18 that environmental pollution caused by extracting oil in the oil fields of Rumaila and Zubair is still ongoing.

On Nov. 3, 2016, a [governmental source](#) in Basra said, “There are more than 3,000 agricultural contracts that have been taken over by oil extraction companies.”

Torki al-Ghoneimawi, the vice president of the provincial council of Wasit, spoke to Al-Monitor, as the [Bismayah project](#) is located within the administrative borders of his province. He said, “Wasit is among governorates producing oil and gas, and it needs more networks of energy pipelines to feed the projects, especially after the capacity of the Badra gas field increased, reaching 150,000 barrels a day, as well as the gas from the fields of al-Ahdab and the gas imported from Iran.”

“Pipelines have harmed agriculture. The government intends to compensate farmers whose lands were dredged,” Ghoneimawi added.

Ghoneimawi continued, “Archaeological areas in Bismayah are among the protected areas that were reported by some channels and media agencies to have been dredged. As a result, the local government is about to launch investigations into this matter and file lawsuits against those responsible for the destruction of [Baghdad archaeological sites](#).”

“We will sue the Ministry of Oil and the implementing company,” he added.

Al-Monitor called the office of the Minister of Oil, which confirmed that the pipeline runs through long distances in desert and agricultural lands. However, the office denied causing any damages to archaeological or agricultural lands. “The pipeline and its approaches only occupy narrow spaces of the land it passes through. The media exaggeration was caused by farmers who unrightfully sought large compensations. They still resort to the media to raise the topic again,” the office said.

Farmers’ losses caused by oil projects is not a new story. On May 28, the local administration in Dhi Qar in the south [compensated 900 farmers](#) for damages caused by oil companies working in Garraf oil field.

Environmental problems were also caused by the oil [licensing rounds](#), which have transformed farmlands and marshes to areas affiliated with oil companies without proper inspection or accuracy concerning the condition of the environment.

Levels of environmental [pollution increased](#) due to terrorist operations against oil pipelines, resulting in clouds of smoke and oil deposited in the soil, which affects its fertility and endangers the lives of people, animals and plants.

Zaher al-Abadi, a member of parliament’s oil committee, admitted that projects of energy transmission and exploration in Iraq have caused environmental problems. He told Al-Monitor, “It is not possible to find alternatives to laying pipelines other than farmlands.”

“The Ministry of Oil confiscates about 75 meters (246 feet) [of land] on each side of all pipelines, which is a space that does not affect the rest of the farmlands through which the pipes pass,” Abadi added. He explained that the ministry compensates farmers for the parts confiscated and allows them to use the rest of the lands they own freely.

Abadi also revealed a project that aims at compensating those affected by allocating new farmlands “for those who want.”

Abadi considers that the best solution is when the ministries of Justice, Agriculture, Electricity, Finance and Oil cooperate to come out with a new strategy to invest in lands through energy transmission and exploration companies. “Work on putting a new cooperation approach is well underway. The permanent solution lies in applying a coexistence strategy between agriculture and oil as well as legislating laws that protect people’s rights and prevent causing damage to agriculture and archaeological sites,” he added.



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<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/bismayah-gas-pipeline-iraq-baghdad.html>