



KHARG ISLAND III. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE 1950S

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iii. Developments since the 1950s

In the years following World War II, Kharg was sparsely populated and Kārgu was uninhabited, though the latter had served as a quarantine station (Seltzer, p. 937). In mid-1950s the island housed 120 political prisoners along with a population of common criminals, who were transferred to Kharg from points on the Iranian mainland and other islands such as [Qeshm](#) and Hangām, each group living in a separate barrack under the watchful eyes of a military base (Kešāvarz, *passim*).

Kharg's preeminence as Iran's principal oil export terminal, handling 90 percent of Iran's exports, began in the early 1950s when the island was connected by a submarine pipeline to the Gačsārān oilfield on the mainland by way of the coastal town of [Ganāva](#). Previously, the island was counted as a village of Ḥayāt-Dāwud, a rural district of Ganāva, but its current administration is under the nearby port city of [Bušehr](#) on the Persian Gulf. Soon other pipelines were laid from other inland fields to Kharg Island. Naturally, multiple storage tanks, jetties, berths, and piers came about to



handle the island's export capacity of 3,000,000 barrels a day. With the arrival of tankers of 270,000-plus tons, an artificial island and loading terminal (platform) was constructed in 1973 at more than a kilometer off the southeastern shore of the island; it could accommodate supertankers of up to 500,000 tons to a maximum depth of 32 meters (Nurbakš, pp. 387, 406-11; cf. Sāzmān-e joḡrāfiā'i, pp. 91-106). The platform is more than a mile long and 40 meters wide; a similar installation/platform off the western shore of the island handles the smaller carriers (Payvand [online]).

By the late 1970's, Kharg's crude oil infrastructure (for collection and exportation) was second to the Ra's Tanura complex of Saudi Arabia. The processing, storage, and export facilities serviced three main grades of oil: the "light crude" that was produced in areas such as Āḡājāri and other inland fields; the "heavy crude" from places like Gačsārān and Bibi Ḥakim; and the offshore oil from fields close to Kharg, such as Faridun, Darius, Cyrus, and Ardašir fields, all connected to Kharg by submarine pipelines (McLachlan, pp. 206-07).

Kharg's petrochemical exports include sulfate fertilizers, liquid gas, and other petroleum products. Established in 1969 as a joint venture of the National Iranian Oil Company and American Oil Company (AMOCO), the Kharg petrochemical facility could produce annually 186,000 tons of sulfur from crude oil and about 1.85 million tons of liquid gas, equivalent to approximately 2 million barrels (Smith et al., p. 439). In 2006, the refinery was reported to produce daily some 200,000 barrels of refined oil for export (Payvand [online]; cf. Sāzmān-e joḡrāfiā'i, pp. 109-14).

Testament to a different era in Persian Gulf affairs, in 1965, Iran and Saudi Arabia initialed a draft agreement on the delimitation of their continental shelf area, even though a few unresolved issues would plague its approval by the two governments. On 24 October 1968, the two countries signed a revised agreement on the basis of a modified equidistant line, and the instrument went into effect on 29 January 1969. One of the modifications to the otherwise equidistant line occurred in respect to the area off Kharg Island. Iran wanted Kharg to be counted as part of the Iranian mainland when it came to measuring the equidistant line between the Iranian and Saudi Arabian coasts, thus giving Kharg Island "full effect" in the delimitation exercise. Finally, the parties agreed to give Kharg "half effect," meaning that the boundary would be the line that divided equally the area between a line equidistant from the Saudi Arabian mainland and the island of Kharg (full effect), and a line



equidistant from both the mainland of Iran and Saudi Arabia (no effect; U.S. Department of State [online]).

During the [Iran-Iraq War](#) (1980-88), the Iraqi air strikes from 1982 through 1986 “had all but destroyed most of the terminal facilities” (Globalsecurity, “Iran-Iraq War” [online]). Even with the damage, the island played an important role as a base for the naval wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard “operations during the Tanker War, mostly because of its prime position at the head of the Persian Gulf” (ibid.). Between August and November 1985, Iraq raided Kharg forty-four times, “in a futile attempt to destroy its installations” (ibid.). In July 1986, Iraq intensified its aerial attacks on Iranian civilian and industrial sites. In the face of heavy attacks on Kharg, Iran relied on makeshift installations farther east into the Persian Gulf at Serri and [Lārak](#) islands, but Iraqi jets, “refueling in midair or using a Saudi military base, hit Sirri and Larak” (ibid.). By the fall of 1986, the Kharg Island facilities were effectively out of commission.

In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, repairs to Kharg were slow in coming; however, Kharg’s current state of operations reflects its strategic and economic importance to Iran, as the facilities are in full repair, improved, and expanded (Globalsecurity, “Khark” [online]). In 2010, Kharg was, and still is, home to extensive oil loading facilities on its western and eastern shores, a large refinery, and military bases (Sameni [online]; Sāzmān-e joḡrāfiā’i, pp. pp. 105-07; [Figure 1](#)). Serving as a base for the Imperial Iranian Navy prior to 1979, Kharg now serves the Islamic Republic Navy and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Naval Corps (Globalsecurity, “Khark” [online]).

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