



## RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

# Resource Security Watch: No. 12

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**Related Categories:** Energy Security; Africa; China; Iran

### HOW CHINESE MEDICINE DEPLETES DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

Donkeys are a vital component of many developing economies, transporting all manner of goods including food, water, and firewood. But China's rising demand for *ejiao*, a traditional medicine derived from boiling donkey skins, has decimated the Chinese donkey population. *Ejiao* currently sells for approximately \$400 per pound. China has begun importing donkey skins from around the world, particularly from African nations, leading to a booming black market in stolen donkey skins. The theft and slaughter of donkeys is extremely difficult to track, given the illicit nature of the enterprise, but experts say that African donkey populations have declined severely in the past several years, depriving local populations of a vital source of support. (*New York Times*, January 2, 2018)

### WARMER OCEANS CAUSE MORE LOW-OXYGEN ZONES

Rising sea temperatures have increased the number of low-oxygen zones in the open ocean by over 4.5 million square kilometers since the mid 20th century. Low-oxygen zones far outstrip coastal dead zones in size, and severely impact ocean ecosystems. Over the past fifty years, the world's oceans have lost two percent of their oxygen, and the amount of water that has no oxygen at all has quadrupled. These changes have a major impact on fish that are significant to the global economy, such as tuna, mackerel, and cod, weakening their immune systems and shortening lifespans. These oxygen "dead-zones" can span up to thousands of miles; one such spot near the Atlantic coast in Africa is larger than the entire territory of the continental United States. (*National Geographic*, January 4, 2018)

### WATER HELPS FUEL IRAN'S PROTESTS

Lack of access to fresh water may have been a significant contributing factor to the anti-government protests that swept over the Islamic Republic earlier this year. Water shortages have incited civil unrest around the world, including in India and Nigeria - and Iran appears to be no different. Iran's current water crisis is a result of a 14-year drought, combined with the Iranian regime's poor water resource management policies of the past several decades. While the water shortages are by no means the sole cause for the recent unrest in Iran, the lack of fresh water is a clear and visible sign of the government's inability to provide for the Iranian people - one of the main grievances animating the protests. (*New York Times*, January 18, 2018)

### THIRSTY IN CAPE TOWN

Residents of Cape Town, South Africa, are being forced to observe strict water rationing to forestall "Day Zero," when the city will run out of most of its water resources. The city already employs strict rationing for its four million inhabitants, with residents allowed only 50 liters per day. But a years-long drought, combined with a rapidly growing population, threatens even more severe conditions to come. Rationing will not be enforced in business and tourist areas, but residents and visitors alike in these areas are encouraged to conserve as much as possible. (*Associated Press*, January 26, 2018)

### VIETNAM'S FARMERS SEEK GREENER PASTURES

The Mekong Delta of Vietnam is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. It is also an area suffering pronounced negative population flow. In the past decade, approximately 700,000 people have moved to the region, while around 1.7 million have left. The rate of egress from the Delta is more than twice Vietnam's national average. The Delta usually boasts a substantial production of rice, shrimp, and fruit, but environmental disasters are destroying crops and leaving many families impoverished. One particularly common problem is the incursion of salt water into farmland, which happens during severe droughts. Once salt water contaminates land, it can wipe out farmers' entire crops for the year. (*Quartz*, January 29, 2018)