

Zaporizhzhia Dangers Should End Nuclear Power Pursuit

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In a press release today, Beyond Nuclear called for the alarms around potential detonations at Ukraine's six-reactor Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to serve as a clear signal that it is time to end our use of nuclear power and pursuit of new reactors. The press release begins:

Amidst accusations from both the Russian and Ukrainian sides that the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southeastern Ukraine has been wired for detonation or could be deliberately attacked during the current war there, one absolute truth remains: nuclear power plants are inherently dangerous.

In a time of national crises in multiple countries, increasing natural disasters and a worsening climate emergency, nuclear power is demonstrating that it is a liability rather than an asset.

Each nuclear reactor contains a lethal radioactive inventory, in the reactor core and also in the fuel pools into which the irradiated fuel is offloaded and, over time, densely packed. Casks also house nuclear waste offloaded from the fuel pools. Zaporizhzhia is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe with at least 2,204 tons of highly radioactive waste within the reactors and the irradiated fuel pools.

Depending on the severity of what transpires, any or all of this radioactive fuel could be ignited.

Amidst the unpredictability caused by the "fog of war", there remain many unanswered questions that have led to rumor and speculation:

Has the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in fact been wired for detonation and whose interests would be served by blowing up the plant?

Why is there an exodus of both Russian and Ukrainian plant personnel?

Will the sabotage of the downstream Kakhovka dam that resulted in catastrophic flooding, also lead to an equally catastrophic loss of available cooling water supplies for the reactors and fuel pools?

Will the backup diesel generators, frequently turned to for powering the essential cooling each time the plant has lost connection to the electricity grid, last through each crisis, given their fuel must also be replenished, potentially not possible under war conditions?

None of these threats would make headlines if Zaporizhzhia was instead home to a wind farm or utility scale solar array. This perhaps explains the rush now to downplay the gravity of the situation, with claims in the press that a major attack on the plant would “not be as bad as Chernobyl” and that radioactive releases would be minimal and barely travel beyond the fence line.

This is an irresponsible dismissal of the real dangers.

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