



8/17/2022

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station Ukraine, Another Chernobyl?



Russian Occupation Soldier standing guard over Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Plant in South Central Ukraine: Reuters.

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Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station Ukraine, Another Chernobyl Waiting to Happen?

Captured by Putin's Army which has little disregard for Safety or Security.



The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is the largest nuclear power complex in Europe, it has six power units, Photo Credit Dmytro Smolyenko, Ukrinform/IMAGO

The ongoing War in Ukraine threatens to spiral further out of control as rocket and artillery fire continues to land around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station. Located in southern Ukraine near the city of Enerhodar on the Dniepro river, the station is Europe's largest and one of the ten largest nuclear power plants in the world. Ukraine's nuclear reactors, numbering 15 in total with six at Zaporizhzhia are critical to supplying Ukraine's energy, as they together produce 54% of country's electricity. Zaporizhzhia alone provides 20% of that total. Russian forces seized the plant in the early days of their invasion, transferring control of the plant from Energoatom, the Ukrainian state energy company, to Rosatom, a Russian state corporation. Currently the plant is operated by Ukrainian staff under supervision from the occupying Russian forces.

Both sides accuse the other of carrying out dangerous attacks against the plant, but given the fog of war, it has been difficult to verify the details of the attacks. Fighting around the plant has been a

point of contention since the start of the war as Russian forces made their initial assault in the south via Crimea. In early March, as Russian forces attempted to seize the plant, Energoatom reported damage to the plant as a result of Russian shelling. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that the plant was undamaged, but only one of the six reactors at the plant was working at just 60% capacity as of March 4th when Russia finally took control. With its location near the front lines, it now occupies an increasingly dangerous position as Ukraine begins its counter offensive. "Under the cover of the plant, the occupiers are shelling nearby cities and communities," Ukraine's President Zelensky said in his evening address. "Any radiation incident at the Zaporizhzhia NPP can affect the countries of the European Union, Turkey, Georgia and countries from more distant regions. Everything depends solely on the direction and speed of the wind."



Via: GraphicNews

Status of the War in Ukraine. Photo Credit: Irish Examiner

Tensions have begun anew, as shelling on August 5th forced one of the reactors to stop operating and damaged a high-voltage power line. The joint auxiliary building and nitrogen-oxygen station were also damaged. Energoatom stated that there were “still risks of hydrogen leakage and sputtering of radioactive substances and the fire hazard is also high.” Radiation monitoring equipment has also been damaged meaning that it would be nearly impossible to quickly detect and respond to any radiation leakage. Chairman of Energoatom, Petro Kotin warned that if strikes hit the processed fuel storage area the ensuing accident could contaminate land beyond the plant. He continued to say that the plant only has one line of communication with the Ukrainian energy system and that if the last line of communication were disrupted that the plant would become de-energized making it difficult to safeguard the fuel in the nuclear reactors. Kotin said that it was Russia’s intention to sever the plant from Ukraine’s power grid and connect it to Russia’s. IAEA director general Rafael Mariano Grossi has warned that the plant must be inspected and repaired and said that the shelling of the plant “underlines the very real risk of a nuclear disaster that could threaten public health and the environment in Ukraine and beyond.”



IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi. Photo Credit: The Hill.

Accusations of blame for the attacks have rushed in from both sides. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of using the plant to commit “nuclear terror” and has urged the international community to sanction Russia’s nuclear industry. Ukrainian Ambassador to

the IAEA Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk said that personnel at the plant were “working under the barrels of Russian guns,” and warned that any potential disaster caused by continued shelling would be “absolutely not comparable even to Chernobyl.” Tsymbaliuk said the Russians intended to cause blackouts in southern Ukraine with their attacks.

American Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukrainian officials have also accused the Russians of using the plant as a base to store troops and weapons from which they can attack Ukrainian forces. Secretary Blinken referred to the plant as a “nuclear shield” for the Russians because the Ukrainians “cannot fire back unless there will be a terrible accident involving the nuclear plant.” Russian forces have been using positions surrounding the plant to fire upon nearby Ukrainian controlled territory. The usage of a nuclear plant for military purposes has previously been considered off limits in conflicts according to CEO of Chernobyl Children’s Project International Adi Roche, but the Russians breached that norm first with their movement through the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and now through their presence at Zaporizhzhia. Russian soldiers were very careless in Chernobyl and may have contaminated themselves as well.

The Russians meanwhile have deflected blame back at the Ukrainians. Spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova has accused Ukraine of “taking Europe hostage” by attacking the plant while the pro-Russian authorities in nearby occupied Enerhodar have said a Ukrainian missile landed close to one of the reactors.



IAEA Headquarters in Vienna, Austria. Photo Credit: IAEA

Given the potential for catastrophe, it is imperative that the IAEA lead a mission to ensure the safety of the plant. Mr. Grossi has insisted that a mission be allowed access to the plant in order to “provide technical support for nuclear safety and security.” He has been attempting to organize such a mission for several months now, but Energoatom as recently as June has denied access, saying that such a mission would legitimize the Russian presence at the plant. Any inspection by the IAEA would need cooperation from both the Russians and Ukrainians as well as the UN given the security situation. Thankfully, there does now seem to be a willingness from both sides to allow in an IAEA inspection team. Tsymbaliuk has now called for an international mission to visit Zaporizhzhia and said that Ukraine is utilizing all available diplomatic channels to make such a visit possible. Russia has now indicated that they will assist an IAEA inspection, and Tysmbaliuk’s Russian counterpart Mikhail Ulyanov has said that Russia has begun the process to coordinate such an inspection.

While the willingness of the Russians to commit to an IAEA inspection may not be sincere, as a Russian installed official in the region, Yevgeny Balitsky, has said that Russia is prepared to show the IAEA how Ukraine is allegedly attacking the plant and how Russia is keeping it safe, the IAEA inspection is an important step toward preventing a nuclear disaster. While ultimate blame for this situation does lay with Russia for being the aggressors in invading Ukraine, it is important that both sides recognize the incredible danger presented by Zaporizhzhia’s position and its status as a base and a military target. It is in neither Russia or Ukraine’s interest that conflict stops the plant from being inspected and repaired as any disaster would have catastrophic consequences for both sides and countries beyond. Ideally the IAEA mission could be safeguarded by peacekeepers, perhaps from a neutral third party to ensure that the inspection is unimpeded. Additionally, both sides should negotiate to agree upon acceptable rules of conduct surrounding nuclear facilities, and the broader international community should also discuss how best to avoid such situations in current and future conflicts. In a war so devoid of humanity it is imperative that some is found to stop a disaster worse even than Chernobyl. It is imperative that Putin’s Russian and his Axis forces withdraw from Ukraine and stop this special military operation of genocide and barbarism or face the consequences.

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