

# German politicians split as last nuclear plants close

Germany's last three nuclear power plants – Isar 2 in Bavaria, Emsland in Lower Saxony, and Neckarwestheim 2 in Baden-Württemberg – went offline Saturday after six decades of operation, according to energy companies operating the reactors.

Hours before the shutdown of Germany's three remaining nuclear power stations, several leftist and center-left lawmakers and environmental activists applauded the move, while pro-business and conservative politicians warned that the risk to the country's energy security remained, DW reported.

The closure of the nuclear plants was delayed for several months by the energy crisis sparked by Russia's "military operation" in Ukraine in February last year.

Ricarda Lang, head of the climate-friendly Greens' parliamentary group, wrote on Twitter that the end of nuclear power "marks a definitive entry into the age of renewable energies" that would allow the current generations to "ultimately leave to our children with a clear conscience."

Her party tweeted that Germany already generates around half of its electricity from renewable sources and "we want to break 80% by 2030."

The Greens said affordable renewable energies "would secure the energy supply,

protect the climate, make Germany independent of autocrats and lay the foundation for a strong economy and good jobs."

The parliamentary group of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Chancellor Olaf Scholz tweeted: "Goodbye nuclear power! Goodbye insecure, unclean, uneconomical energy policy!"

A separate tweet showed an image of a collapsing nuclear power plant cooling tower.

On the other hand, the business-focused Free Democratic Party (FDP) parliamentary group, which is in coalition with the SPD and Greens, made clear on Twitter that it is not happy with the exit.

Party leader Christian Lindner, who is Germany's finance minister, wrote on Twitter that while the future is renewable energy, "in the meantime, we have to secure our supply until we have sufficient capacity."

Lindner said if it was up to him, Germany would retain the last three power plants in reserve.

Opposition conservative politicians were also disappointed, including Markus Söder, premier of the southern state of Bavaria, who told the Focus Online website on Thursday that he wanted the plants to stay online and three more to be kept "in reserve."



Söder accused the coalition government's decision of being "purely ideological," adding that it was a "serious mistake to exit nuclear energy at this point in time."

His party, the Christian Social Union (CSU) tweeted of a "black day for citizens, industry and climate protection in Germany" as a result of the shutdown. Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chief Friedrich Merz on Friday insisted that the last three nuclear plants "are the safest in the world." Business leaders, including Peter Adrian, president of the Association of German Chambers of

Commerce and Industry (DIHK), called on the government to "expand the supply of energy and not restrict it any further" in light of potential shortages and high prices.

The shutdown of Germany's nuclear reactors was agreed to more than a decade ago by then-Chancellor Angela Merkel, stoked by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan and the 1986 Chernobyl accident in Ukraine. Defenders of nuclear energy argue that it produces far fewer greenhouse gas emissions and be used to help Germany meet its goal of being carbon neutral by 2045.

The German government has acknowledged that in the short term, the country will have to rely more heavily on polluting coal and gas to meet its energy needs, even as it continues to invest in renewables.

But Economy Minister Robert Habeck insisted that the energy supply would remain secure even after the last nuclear plant is wound down.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of Germans favor extending the lifespan of nuclear reactors or connecting old plants back to the grid, with only 28% backing the phase-out, a survey by the Forsa Institute showed earlier this week.



A general view shows the Neckarwestheim nuclear power plant, as Germany shuts down its last nuclear power plants in Neckarwestheim, Germany, on April 14, 2023.

REUTERS

## Yemeni prisoner swap brings hope for end to war

The recent prisoner swap and truce negotiations come a month after Persian Gulf heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties, sparking a wave of rapprochement across the troubled region.

The exchange of prisoners is an important first step toward resolving the conflict in Yemen, and it holds the promise of resolving other regional contentions and dissensions.

The restoration of Tehran-Riyadh ties could lead to the closure of a number of regional cases including the gradual return of Syria to the Arab League. It could also lead to greater convergence among Iran, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as the resumption of diplomatic relations between Iran and Bahrain after a hiatus of seven years.

However, there are still many challenges to overcome before a lasting peace can be achieved in Yemen. The UN-brokered cease-fire that started in April 2022 has sharply reduced casualties, but it expired in October and fighting has largely remained on hold. There are also concerns that the cease-fire could break down at any moment, as it has been prone to minute-by-minute violations in the past.

Moreover, the Houthis generally object to Saudi mediation, insisting the neighboring kingdom has played a central role in the war. The Houthis seized Sana'a in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led intervention the following year. The conflict has been complicated by the involvement of other regional and international actors.

Despite these challenges, the recent prisoner exchange and the diplomatic efforts to end the war offer a glimmer of hope for Yemen. The swap represents a degree of mutual trust that could be deepened through negotiations and outcomes. If successful, these efforts could address the lack of faith that has given rise to frequent breaches of the cease-fire over the past year.

The willingness of both sides to participate in the peace process and their commitment to continuing negotiations is a promising sign. It is important for the international community to continue supporting efforts to end the Yemeni crisis and to work toward a peaceful resolution that prioritizes the well-being of the Yemeni people.

### An analyst of regional affairs:

## China's presence in the Middle East is a win-win equation

### EXCLUSIVE

Ebrahim Behnam

China has gained a more serious presence in West Asia. From the long-term 25-year cooperation with Iran to various contracts with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, there are signs of the expanding presence of the world's second largest economy in the region.

The Middle East has not had a good history of the presence of Western countries. Will China follow the same path as the West, especially the United States?

Iran Daily had a discussion on this issue with Amir Mousavi, an analyst of strategic issues and a former diplomat.

IRAN DAILY: What does China seek in its expanded regional presence? Do

you think it will follow the same path as the United States?

**AMIR MOUSAVI:** China follows an economic diplomacy approach in its relations with most of the world. Beijing is competing fiercely with the U.S. and the West to gain greater markets in the world. Until now, due to the strong presence of the U.S. and Israel, China had not had much desire for entering West Asia, and was taking a cautious approach.

Now, with the declining power of the U.S. in the region, and with Israel being caught in the middle of internal and external pressures, the Chinese have entered the region with more confidence. During his visit to Saudi Arabia, President Xi Jinping of China signed a \$350-billion contract with Riyadh and inked many

other contracts with the Arab countries of the region. Before that, he had signed a long-term cooperation agreement with Iran.

It is logical that the Chinese are seeking their economic interests, such as easier and cheaper access to energy, and providing markets for their goods and investments. But what is clear is that the Chinese will not go the way of the U.S. That is, they do not have the spirit of colonialism.

Based on what evidence do you claim that China will not follow the path of the U.S.?

I used to be in African countries such as Sudan, Uganda, and Algeria, and I understood the nature of Chinese activities in these countries. In terms of the construction and provision of public services, such as the con-

struction of hospitals and universities, the Chinese have had constructive activities in these countries without wanting to interfere in the internal and sovereign affairs of the countries. Therefore, it is easier for governments to work with the Chinese without security concerns. Of course, the presence of a powerful country in another country can also have negative aspects. But the difference between China and America is that, unlike Washington, Beijing does not influence all areas of the destination country and respects internal sovereignty.

Do you believe that China's presence in West Asia is constructive for the regional countries, while having economic benefits for China?

Yes, I think China's presence in the region is a win-win equation for

both sides. China has various capacities in terms of technology, capital, and industries that can be useful for the development of the regional countries. The governments and people of the region have gradually realized the difference between China and the United States, and have turned to Beijing. Until now, the U.S. considered itself the undisputed power in the region and, therefore, did not have a constructive and respectful relation with nations and governments.

I think that, with China's positive role in the region, such as mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the West Asian region is on the path of positive developments, which would strengthen regional cooperation and ensure stability. Unlike the U.S., which intends to dominate, China seeks a win-win equation.



Amir Mousavi