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Russia Building Power Lines to Restart Occupied Ukrainian Nuclear Plant

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Several new pylons and a power transmission line in the Zaporizhzhia region of occupied Ukraine. **Planet Labs, via Greenpeace**

Russia is building new power lines to connect and restart the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which it seized from Ukraine in 2022, the New York Times reported Tuesday, citing Greenpeace.

Russian troops captured the facility, Europe's largest, in the early days of the full-scale invasion and gradually shut down all six of its reactors by 2023.

President Vladimir Putin reportedly told the head of the UN's atomic watchdog last year that Russia would "definitely" restart the plant. Last week, Rosatom chief Alexei Likhachev said replacing the power grid was one of four key steps needed before resuming operations.

Satellite images obtained by Greenpeace and analyzed by NYT show Russia building about 80 kilometers (50 miles) of new electricity lines and pylons from the occupied port city of Berdyansk to Mariupol, where a large substation has been connected to the Zaporizhzhia

plant farther west.

“This is the first physical evidence of… Putin’s plan for restarting the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant,” said Shaun Burnie, a nuclear specialist at Greenpeace Ukraine.

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Before the war, the 6-gigawatt plant was connected to Ukraine’s grid by four 750-kilovolt lines — two passing through Ukrainian-controlled territory and two through occupied areas. The latter have been damaged in fighting.

Experts told NYT that at least one of the lines may have been repaired, but full integration would “take time.”

Burnie said that Russia could eventually connect the plant to its own grid in the southern Rostov region, which borders Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Meanwhile, Russian-installed administrators are retraining the plant’s staff in preparation for returning the facility to full capacity.

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