



Germany to Abandon Use of Nuclear Power

The crisis at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant in the aftermath of the magnitude 9 earthquake on March 11 has had aftershocks of its own around the globe. Predictably, whenever there is an incident involving a nuclear power plant, politicians will scramble to call for new safety measures, new inspections, and call into question the entire role of nuclear power in meeting the energy needs of a burgeoning global population. Such posturing will undoubtedly delay efforts to meet power consumption needs throughout the developed world, but for the Germans, the fallout from Fukushima will now include the nation's abandonment of nuclear power altogether.



According to press reports, the coalition government in Germany has agreed to a plan which will end the use of nuclear power plants in that country by 2022. [According to a recent Time article](#), Germany had already taken nearly half of its plants offline following the Fukushima crisis; now the rest of the nation's modest nuclear program will be scrapped in a little over a decade from now:

The country's seven oldest reactors already taken off the grid pending safety inspections following the catastrophe at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant in March will remain offline permanently, Norbert Roettgen added. The country has 17 reactors total. ...

Chancellor Angela Merkel pushed through measures in 2010 to extend the lifespan of the country's 17 reactors, with the last one scheduled to go offline in 2036, but she reversed her policy in the wake of the Japanese disaster. "We want the electricity of the future to be safe, reliable and economically viable," Merkel told reporters on Monday.

Germany's energy supply chain "needs a new architecture," necessitating huge efforts in boosting renewable energies, efficiency gains and overhauling the electricity grid, she added. "We have to follow a new path," Merkel said.

How Germany will attain Merkel's goal of a "safe, reliable and economically viable" future without nuclear power remains uncertain, since the frequent invocation of alternative energy technologies has consistently produced expectations which greatly exceed the actual capacity of such technologies to reliably deliver cheap and abundant power. For example, the thousands of wind turbines build across the United Kingdom failed to deliver electricity when it was most desperately needed during the brutally cold temperatures this past winter. [As reported previously for The New American](#), "the absurd inefficiencies of wind power resulted in the UK's 3,153 turbines producing a mere .2 percent — yes, that's one-fifth of one percent — of the needed power during the bitter cold which blanketed the nation this past December. (Operating at peak efficiency, the turbines should have been able to provide almost ten percent of the needed power, but unreliable winds had the turbines functioning at less than 2.5



Written by [James Heiser](#) on June 2, 2011

percent of their capacity.)” Furthermore, the extraction processes needed to provide the “rare earths” needed to manufacture the magnets utilized in such wind turbines [have brought environmental devastation to China](#); at best, “alternative energies” such as wind power may be viewed by the educated public as simply shifting the environmental problems from one nation to another, without providing much usable power in the process.

The [decision by the nations of the European Union](#) to meet 20 percent of their energy needs through renewable sources (“including biomass, hydro, wind and solar power”) by 2020 is no doubt a significant motivation behind the action undertaken by the German government. The planned reduction is the triumph of “global warming” alarmism over the realistic energy needs of modern civilization. Eliminating a politically-unpopular form of power, nuclear energy, may give the German government a temporary improvement in its standing in public opinion polls, but seems far less wise when examined on the basis of the actual needs of the people for affordable and abundant energy.

As noted above, Germany has only 17 nuclear power plants, and seven of those plants were taken offline for inspection after the Fukushima crisis. That “temporary” action will now become permanent, and Germany will need to come up with a long-term alternative to the energy produced by those seven plants — and an alternative to the other 10 which will leave service in the next decade.

One result of the decision made by the Merkel government has been a significant increase in the cost for natural gas *next* winter in the United Kingdom. According to Bloomberg Businessweek,

U.K. natural gas for delivery this winter rose to the highest in more than five weeks after Germany said eight nuclear reactors will remain shut and all its atomic power stations will close by 2022.

Gas for winter, the six months from October, rose as much as 1.1 pence, or 1.6 percent, to 72.25 pence a therm. It was at 72 pence as of 11:30 a.m. in London, according to broker prices compiled by Bloomberg. That’s equal to \$11.88 a million British thermal units and the highest price since April 21. A therm is 100,000 Btu. The contract has advanced 0.6 percent this month.

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s shift away from nuclear power in the wake of the meltdown at Japan’s Fukushima Dai-Ichi plant is likely to make Germany and other countries more reliant on natural gas.

Increased competition for the available natural gas is simply leading to a result which is easy to anticipate. Prices will rise as demand for a limited resource increases. Ironically, Germany’s increasing its use of natural gas will do nothing to meet the EU targets for reduction in the use of nonrenewable energy — unless they are counting on shortages to force a reduction in consumption.

The shortsighted course chosen by the Merkel government promises a short-term rise in public opinion at the long-term cost of the energy needs of the German people. Nuclear power may not be “popular” in Germany, but one would imagine that power blackouts during the winter and rising energy costs will prove just as unpopular over the long term. With few viable inexpensive alternatives to nuclear on the horizon, Europeans may face the choice of a lower standard of living on account of increasing energy costs or retreating from their ideological commitment to alternative energies which have yet to prove their ability to take the place of coal, natural gas, oil, and nuclear energy.



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