

Russia destroys Kakhovka Dam on the Dnipro



Location of the Nova Kakhovka dam and power plant on the Dnipro River in Ukraine.

Today Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that an explosion at 2:50 a.m. had destroyed the Nova Kakhovka dam on the Dnipro River northeast of the city of Kherson. The dam, which is more than three kilometers long and is part of a large hydroelectric power station, holds behind it a reservoir many miles in length that, among other things, provides the water used in the cooling systems of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Enerhodar 90 miles to the northeast and located at the nuclear symbol in the map above. A press release from Ukrhydroenergo said the dam had been “completely destroyed” and the power station “cannot be restored.”

Russia took control of the dam soon after the war began last year. It blew up because explosives had been installed inside it at some point and were detonated, presumably remotely, last night. Oleksiy Danilov, a presidential adviser, said Ukrainian military intelligence had identified Russia’s 205th Motor Rifle Brigade as the unit most likely to have installed the explosives, and Andriy Yusov, a spokesman for Ukraine’s military intelligence, said the intelligence services had been tracking Russian activity at the dam since it was taken last year and were certain Russian officials gave the order for the explosives to be detonated.

There are at least three important consequences of the destruction of the dam. First, and most immediately, the destruction has caused considerable flooding downstream. The interior ministry reported that two dozen villages were flooded and almost 20,000 people had to be evacuated. The city of Nova Kakhovka itself was reported to be underwater and evacuating its residents. In addition, at least 150 tons of engine oil

spilled into the river from the dam's machinery, adding a further risk to plants, animals, and humans. A second consequence, related to the flooding, is the likelihood that, if any military action related to the counteroffensive had been planned in the area downstream from the dam, that action may have to be delayed and perhaps even be relocated. A third consequence may be the impact of the continuing outflow from the reservoir of the water available for the cooling system of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. But even if the reservoir continues to have sufficient water for the Zaporizhzhia cooling system, the fact that Russia was willing to destroy the dam suggests that it might actually consider at some point – perhaps if it finds itself losing the war – arranging for an “accident” at Zaporizhzhia that would result in a meltdown. After all, if, as Ukrainian intelligence concluded, Russia positioned explosives in the dam that could at some point be detonated, why should anyone believe that Russia has not already done the same at Zaporizhzhia? And why should anyone believe that, if Russia has in fact already placed explosives in the Zaporizhzhia plant, it would not, at some point, do what it did last night in the Kakhovka dam?

Zelensky today said the "world must react" to Russia's destruction of the Kakhovka dam attack: "This is just one Russian act of terrorism. This is just one Russian war crime...Russia must leave Ukrainian land and must be held fully accountable for its terror." European Council President Charles Michel said he was "shocked by the unprecedented attack of the Nova Kakhovka dam. The destruction of civilian infrastructure clearly qualifies as a war crime – and we will hold Russia and its proxies accountable." NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the destruction of the dam was "outrageous" and "puts thousands of civilians at risk and causes severe environmental damage." United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the destruction of the dam was “another devastating consequence” of Russia's invasion of its neighbor: "Today's tragedy is yet another example of the horrific price of war on people...The floodgates of suffering have been overflowing for more than a year. That must stop."

June 6 is an especially appropriate day to ask: When will the European Union, and NATO, and the UN decide enough is enough?

David R. Cameron
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