

China aims to build floating nuclear power plants, the first by 2018

25 April 2016, by Nancy Owano



Credit: Tiago Fioreze / Wikipedia

(Tech Xplore)—China has plans to build a floating nuclear power plant in South China Sea and may build a total of about 19 more. China's intentions were emphasized as civilian in nature; the goal is to provide stable power for offshore projects.

Duncan Hewitt, Shanghai correspondent for Newsweek/IBT Media, referred to Chinese experts saying that the power station could be used to power construction work and defense facilities on islands controlled by China in the South China [Sea](#)

The plan as reported is not to stop at one platform, however. Hewitt wrote, "state media said Friday that the nation planned to build some 20 in total, with the first of these 'about to start the final assembly' in northeastern Liaoning province." *China.org.cn* headlined "China mulls 20 floating reactor platforms to aid oil drilling."

A floating [nuclear power plant](#) can supply electricity to industrial facilities such as seawater desalination plants and offshore oilfield exploration rigs.

The China General Nuclear Power group (CGN)

said the project had a wide range of civilian applications in providing energy for maritime resources exploration and [development](#).

Specifically, according to *Global Times*, the platforms could provide reliable power "for lighthouses, seawater desalination, rescue and relief equipment, defensive weapons and airports and harbors on islands in the South China Sea."

Li Jie, a Beijing-based naval expert, said in *Global Times* that "Normally we have to burn oil or coal for power. Given the long distance between the Nansha Islands and the Chinese mainland and the changing weather and oceanic conditions, transporting fuel could be an issue, which is why developing the maritime nuclear power platform is of great significance."

In a phone interview with the *Global Times*, Liu Zhengguo, director of the general office of the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC), said the company was "pushing forward the work." As for the number 20 as a total of platforms planned, he said the exact number of plants to be built [by CSIC] depended on market demand. "Judging by various factors ... the demand is pretty strong." He emphasized the plants were mainly for civilian use, such as providing electricity for oil drilling [platforms](#).

Whether the talk was about one or 20, several news sites reflected on the fact that this was the South China Sea region of political tensions and news of a nuclear floating platform could heighten concerns over intentions, whether peaceful or not.

Reuters commented on Sunday that "the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have rival claims to parts of the South China [Sea](#) with China, which says virtually the entire sea belongs to it."

What is more, *International Business Times* said:

"China's President Xi Jinping is seen to have pushed for a more assertive line on the South China Sea issue since he took office some three years ago. He has stressed on a number of occasions that islands in the region historically belong to China, and has warned that Beijing will not hesitate to defend its sovereignty if [necessary](#)."

In that context, the news of floating reactor plans could worry those already trying to assess China's next moves regarding the South China Sea.

How soon could this floating platform be a reality? Said *Global Times*: China Securities Journal reported in January that construction of the first maritime [nuclear power](#) platform, serving as a demonstration project, was expected to be completed by 2018 and put into use by 2019.

Beyond political comment, news of the floating reactor also drew environmental concerns. The *Times of India* carried a NYT News Service report on Saturday by Michael Forsythe: He wrote that David Lochbaum, a nuclear engineer and director of the Nuclear Safety Project for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said in the event of a major nuclear accident at a floating barge, such as a meltdown of the reactor core, winds could carry radioactivity to large population centers.

"The floating nuke accident scenario also carries with it the potential for molten parts of the reactor core burning through the bottom of the barge to reach the water below," Lochbaum wrote in an email. "The water is good for cooling, but not good for [containment](#)."

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