

US nuclear could 'light a path to a cleaner future', says CNN host

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President Joe Biden's pledge for the USA to cut its CO2 emissions by 50-52% below 2005 levels by the end of this decade will be "virtually impossible" without nuclear power, Fareed Zakaria, the host of US network CNN's *Global Public Square* programme, said last week. America is "going in the wrong direction" in reducing the contribution nuclear power makes to its electricity supply, said Zakaria, who is also a *Washington Post* columnist.



Fareed Zakaria (Image: CNN)

According to recent estimates from the Rhodium Group, he noted, the country is on track to shut down so many nuclear plants over the next decade that nuclear will drop from supplying 21% of the grid's electricity to just 7%.

"I know you've heard about the amazing rise of wind and solar farms. It's all true, but those have an Achilles heel: the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine," he said. "An electric utility has to have some power sources that run at all times. When nuclear plants are

shuttered, that role has typically been filled by fossil fuels. Look at what happened in Germany, which began rapidly retiring reactors after the 2011 Fukushima disaster. That fed Germany's addiction to coal. In the US, states like California and New York have begun taking reactors offline and then turning to natural gas. Coal is the worst option; the dirtiest source of energy and one that produces massive amounts of CO₂. Natural gas is better than coal but it doesn't hold a candle to nuclear, which has essentially zero emissions."

Two things are driving nuclear's "decline" in the USA, he said.

"The first is economics. Natural gas, which is more versatile and less heavily regulated, is beating nuclear on cost. The second is public opinion. The rare accidents throughout history have been seared into people's memories and environmentalists have long worried about radioactive waste. But the dangers of nuclear are massively overstated. Americans might fear a repeat of Three Mile Island, but do they know that not one person died from that accident or even got sick? By contrast, more than 100 Americans are killed in the production of fossil fuels every year, and hundreds of thousands more die from the pollution."

Climate change is a "much bigger" risk to the environment than radioactive waste, he said.

"If you piled up all the spent nuclear fuel that the United States has ever generated, it would cover a football field without reaching the height of the field goal. This is a vast country; we can easily store that safely."

Advanced nuclear reactor technologies will create a "walkaway safe" reactor that, in the event of a problem, simply shuts down automatically with no risk of meltdown, and could recycle fuel.

"If we fund research, streamline the regulatory process and provide the right financial incentives, we can build a new generation of clean nuclear reactors that helps America actually slash its emissions. And that could also spawn a new export industry because the whole world will need nuclear to bring emissions down.

"Americans have lost the ability to think seriously about risks and rewards. Nuclear energy is one more example of the problem and one that is crucial to overcome because it could light a path to a cleaner future."

Zakaria's report is on [Twitter](#).

Researched and written by World Nuclear News