



Russian President Putin and Uzbek President Mirziyoyev shake hands at the Kuksaroy Presidential Palace in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Photo by Kremlin Pool Photo via AP/Sergei Bobylev, Sputnik)

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## Russia and Uzbekistan Sign Agreement to Build First Nuclear Power Plant

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On May 27th, Russia committed \$400 million to a \$500 million joint fund with Uzbekistan to expand natural gas imports while also signing an accord to build a nuclear power plant. The move reflects Russia's continuing investment in Asian energy markets. Uzbekistan will also begin importing more natural gas into the country. The power plant is the first to be built in Central Asia, giving Russia a leg-up as regional powers compete for influence.

### Uzbekistan's Natural Gas

President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev hailed the "historic" visit as marking a new age for the two countries' strategic relationship. Since his re-inauguration, Putin has traveled to China and Belarus before visiting Uzbekistan, perhaps reflecting the region's priority to Russian interests. Uzbekistan, the second-largest producer of natural gas, produced 51.7 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2022, according to the US International Trade Administration. Despite that, the country still imports 9 million cubic meters daily from Russian energy company Gazprom, hoping to import even more in the near future: 32 million cubic meters per day. Uzbekistan used to export gas to Russia before reversing the flow of the pipeline last October. Last year, it sold only \$530 million worth of natural gas, yet imported nearly \$700 million. Most of their natural gas is bought by China. High domestic consumption was reported by Gazprom, the Russian corporation that controls Uzbek gas infrastructure, but diminishing gas reserves are the biggest factor in the need for further importation.



Russian President Putin and Uzbek President Mirziyoyev in a meeting at the Kuksaroy Presidential Palace in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Photo by Kremlin Pool Photo via Reuters/Sergei Bobylev, Sputnik)

### Modernizing the Industry

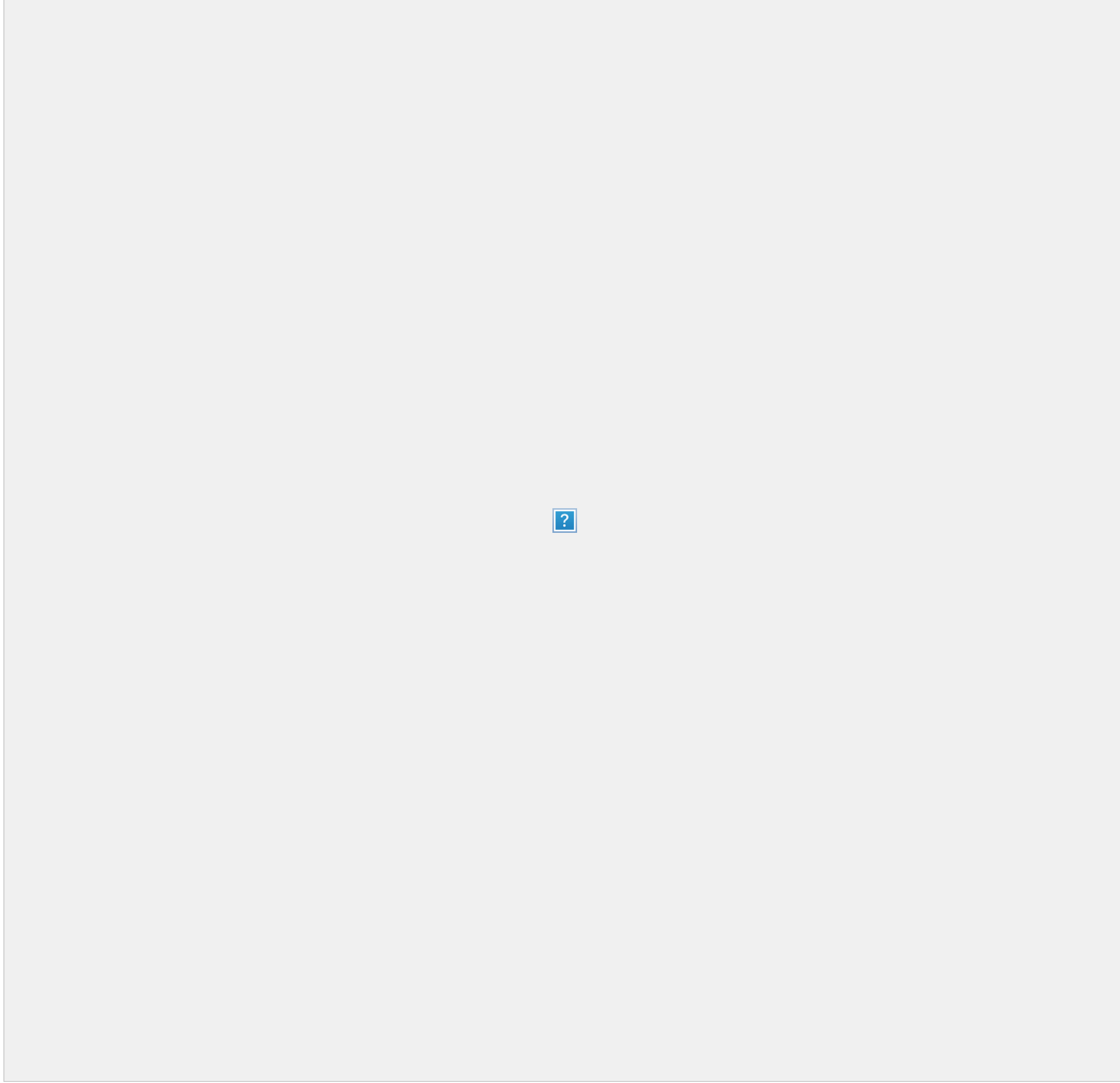
Uzbekistan is also the world's fifth-ranking uranium supplier, according to the World Nuclear Association. President Mirziyoyev set a national uranium production goal of 7,100 tons by 2030, which will double its reported production figure from 2021 of 3,500 tons. The plant that Russian nuclear energy company Rosatom hopes to build will host six reactors for a total capacity of 330 megawatts—this is a modest sum in comparison to the 2.4 gigawatt plant proposed back in 2018. Still, the project would put Uzbekistan ahead of the rest of Central Asia, but specifically Kazakhstan, which has yet to build a nuclear power plant despite significant uranium reserves.

Reportedly, Uzbekistan and Russia will also work together on mining and chemical projects. According to Reuters, the Uzbek economy largely depends on remittances from Uzbek workers in Russia.

### The East and the West

Although this deal reflects Russia's interest in resource-rich Central Asian countries as sources of material and trade partnerships, Uzbekistan has not publicly supported Russia's conflict in Ukraine and still maintains relationships with the West. For example, last November, French President Macron met with Mirziyoyev, also proclaiming a strategic partnership and discussing agricultural investments and possible uranium deals. France, interested in Central Asian uranium resources and relieving their dependence on Russian uranium, could be disappointed by the recent deal.

France is involved in Uzbek power, nonetheless. The French company Voltalia began the development of a solar farm and additional battery storage as part of its "Sarimay Solar Project" last month (the company's solar project in Uzbekistan). An expansion deal for the project was reportedly signed during Macron's visit to Uzbekistan last November. The Uzbek government hopes to produce 12 GW of renewable energy by 2030. The French company will assist in the development of Uzbekistan's power grid, but for the time being, the aversion of a power crisis in Uzbekistan has been and will be with the assistance of Russia, not France.



An Albanian Voltalia project site (Photo via Voltalia)

Uzbekistan and Russia also signed other documents relating to trade, tourism, sciences, and other fields. Bilateral trade between the countries is set to increase to \$30 billion. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is comparatively ignored by Russia. But regional energy-sector cooperation is still strong—Uzbekistan's recent renewable energy pledge, for example, was part of a joint memorandum with Armenia and Kazakhstan; all three countries hope to develop renewable energy together and export it to the European Union. The countries also speculated about building a cable to transport energy between them underneath the Caspian Sea. The memorandum shows the commitment of Central Asian countries to improve connectivity between them, assisting trade and development efforts in the region. With Uzbekistan's power grid looking more secure, the country will be better equipped to continue developing trade relations, not only with the East but also with the West.

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