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Green Power Integration Framework for Mission-Critical Facilities using Hybrid AC/DC Microgrid Architectures

Manambedu Vijayakumar Raja
Westcliff University, USA

Ramyadevi Prakasam
P.E.

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ABSTRACT: Critical facilities such as data centers, healthcare facilities, and military bases are challenged to become more green while maintaining a very high level of power resilience and availability. The conventional approach based solely on AC with grid power, UPS systems, and diesel generators isn't optimized for a large amount of renewable power and energy storage and typically experiences power losses associated with several conversions and doesn't leverage fully available backup power resources. This article proposes a Green Power Integration Framework based on a hybrid DC and AC microgrid architecture tailored for critical power. The proposed architecture consists of four levels: physical infrastructure level, control and protection level, energy management & optimization level, and policy level. This article illustrates how a DC and AC power buses, distributed energy resources, energy storage, critical and non-critical loads can be effectively integrated and coordinated to enable more renewables without compromising power resilience.

KEYWORDS: Hybrid AC/DC Microgrid, Mission-Critical Facilities, Green Power Integration, Renewable Energy, Energy Management, Reliability Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Mission-critical sites such as data centers, healthcare facilities, finance districts, airport control centers, and defense installations require a power supply that is extremely dependable and of a high quality. Any power outage lasting a few seconds may lead to severe consequences such as lost data, penalties for downtime, or threats to human and national security. Conventionally, such critical hubs rely on robust power grids, uninterruptible power supplies (UPS), and backup power systems utilizing diesel and/or gasoline power generators. They are proven solutions for power uninterruptible but are designed neither for absorbing a large amount of renewable power nor for being radically decarbonization-oriented [1].

Today, a number of major operators are dealing with sustainability pressure. Net-zero targets, carbon disclosure requirements, and rising energy prices are driving interest in solar energy, energy storage, and other low-carbon technologies. At the same time, individuals may be apprehensive about potential effects of increasing quantities of renewables and power electronics. So, a pressing need arises for system concepts capable of fully addressing demanding requirements for reliability while providing a visible reduction in carbon emissions [2].

Hybrid AC/DC micro-grids represent a good means for addressing such requirements. In such configurations, power in the old equipment and rotating machines is distributed via an AC bus, while a DC bus simplifies integration of photovoltaic panels and batteries with a DC power demand represented by servers, telecommunications equipment, and LED lighting. Converters based on power electronics support managing energy transfer between the AC and DC sectors and the power grid. Despite much research performed in the field of micro-grids and hybrids, today there remains no specific organized approach developed to address particular requirements in mission-critical facilities [3].

The aim of this article is to build a Green Power Integration Framework for mission-critical sites based on hybrid architectures of AC and DC micro-grids. This study consists entirely of theory without making use of any measurements and data. This article instead focuses on breaking down elements such as architectural pieces, control elements, management strategies for energy, and issues pertaining to policies. The Green Power Integration Framework would presumably be used for simulations and optimization studies for better resilience and cleaner energy in mission-critical sites.

2. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM CONTEXT

The traditional power architecture for mission critical sites involved a strong connection with the power grid and lots of protection equipment. Typically involved were medium voltage power feeders, step-down transformers, low voltage power panels, UPS systems for critical equipment

Corresponding Author's : Manambedu Vijayakumar Raja , Ramyadevi Prakasam

protection, and diesel and gas generators for extended outages. All were built with a level of redundancy such as 2N or N+1 to prevent a critical failure affecting critical power. They were extremely redundant but were essentially based on unidirectional power flow. They were meant for power going out and for a stable power grid environment. They were definitely not based primarily on lots of renewable energy [4].

In recent years, hybrid AC/DC micro-grids have brought novel design possibilities. In a hybrid configuration, the AC side continues to supply typical loads such as chillers, pumps, fans, and other equipment that uses alternating current. Conversely, the DC side brings together those resources and loads that use natural direct current. Devices such as sun power systems, batteries, fuel cells, and most information and telecommunications equipment use DC current efficiently with no additional conversion. The use of bidirectional converters and inverters bridges the connection of power between the AC side and DC side as well as with the external power grid. This ensures the power plant can operate in either grid-connected and/or islanded modes [3].

Mission-critical power systems involve several demanding requirements beyond mere reliability. The operator requires a very high level of availability and a low limit for voltage and frequency variations. They also require a low level of harmonic distortion. They have to be protected for various types of events such as a power outage, internal faults, and increasingly challenging cyber incidents. This requires a predictive and preventive strategy capable of identifying issues before affecting customer service. However, for power system operators today, reductions in carbon emissions and energy expenditures are mandatory. This forms a multi-objective problem with a goal to reduce carbon emissions and expenses while maintaining other requirements [4].

Starting with a simple perspective, we have a large optimization problem where we have to optimize architecture decisions, control strategies, and operation strategies. We have decisions regarding where to locate renewable elements, energy storage systems, converters, and backup power plants. Issues such as sustainability and energy resilience are directly dependent on such decisions. Most current research focuses only on a particular part of this larger puzzle, like a particular strategy for controlling a particular example and does not provide a comprehensive model toward integration. This leads us to this paper where we would outline this larger structure to establish a basis for future quantitative analysis [5].

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE

There has been a great amount of research about micro-grids in recent years. This has included systems where energy creation, storage, and controllable demand are integrated within a compact network. Within this field specifically, hybrid DC and AC micro-grids are considered to be very pertinent because they are compatible with existing AC appliances and other DC power supplies such as sun-power panels and other batteries and electronics. This type of research typically addresses the configuration of such grids, management techniques for such grids, and how such grids function when connected to a larger overall power grid or when standalone. All of this research affirms that a hybrid system consumes fewer transformation losses, possesses more flexibility within power flow routing, and allows for easier integration with larger amounts of renewable power when compared to DC or purely AC power grids [6].

There is increasing literature about green power for mission-critical sites such as data centers, healthcare facilities, and telecom facilities. This literature indicates a role for rooftop and ground-mount solar panels, onsite wind where feasible, and fuel cells as alternatives to diesel generators. Battery energy storage systems, typically lithium-ion batteries, are frequently mentioned because of their fast response time, efficiency, and capability for a short-term ride-through and then a prolonged outage with sufficient design. Some literature reviews also propose a role for supercapacitors for a very short-term ride-through and conceptual designs for a prolonged one using hydrogen or other forms of energy storage. This literature clearly indicates that mission-critical sites can significantly reduce fossil fuel backup power use when renewables and energy storage are functionally integrated with their power infrastructure [7].

Additionally, another focus of research would be to explore control strategies and energy management for micro-grids. A typical approach would involve layered controls where primary controls would be responsible for voltage and frequency regulation within a smaller region, with secondary controls managing multiple energy sources and then using tertiary controls for purposes of optimization such as economic dispatch and trading with the main power grid. Energy management systems would further extend this framework with the inclusion of forecasting, selection of priority loads to be managed based on importance, and a response strategy with changes in a larger power grid. While addressing critical conditions for power delivery, EMS would typically involve a systematic approach towards classification and prioritization of critical services for continued power supply in a broad range of contingencies [8].

Despite progress made in this direction, a number of gaps exist when considering mission-critical facilities using hybrid AC/DC microgrid architectures. Indeed, existing literature encompasses either a technical design for converter and controller architectures or a performance analysis of a particular installation. However, no broader integration concept exists. Specifically, regarding this matter: issues concerning mission-critical facility reliability parameters along with renewable energy content requirements and/or carbon emissions standards exist. Additionally, cost considerations span life cycle assessments. This paper bridges this gap with a distinct multi-tiered concept merging this specified array of concepts. Unlike other submissions providing a new solution for a particular installation for this complex integration challenge, this manuscript develops a straightforward concept utilizing existing elements [9].

4. PROPOSED GREEN POWER INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

The Green Power Integration Framework describes a multi-tiered design. This framework illustrates the physical, management, and inter/institutional layers involved in connecting green power to critical buildings with a hybrid microgrid that uses both AC and DC power. This model is not bound to a single installation and use of data. This model presents a broad design to which other types of facilities may adapt. This model focuses on and balances equally among three objectives: reliability, sustainability, and economic feasibility.

At the physical level, such a system employs a two-bus configuration where both the AC and DC components co-exist and are interwoven with power electronic interconnects. The AC side of the system connects with a power grid for power supply. This also serves as a power source for conventional back-up power supplies such as diesel generators for large emergencies in mission-critical environments. Conversely, the DC side aggregates resources and loads that are amenable to DC current. This includes elements such as solar panels for renewable energy generation. This side also includes batteries for energy storage. Additionally, other IT-related equipment such as server racks use DC. The power electronic interconnects between the two buses facilitate DC-to-AC and vice versa power flow. They also facilitate seamless operation of such a system when connected to a power grid and when in a standalone environment. Redundancy techniques such as N+1 and 2N may be employed independently for either side. This confers optimal flexibility regarding system redundancy.

The control and protection layer, above the physical layer, ensures a stable and predictable behavior of such a hybrid system. Local controls within inverters, converters, and energy stores address voltages, currents, and state of charge according to predefined rules. A microgrid controller oversees this local control with coordination among both AC and DC subsystems. This includes transitions between grid following and grid forming. Additionally, this level ensures maximum limits such as maximum load for feeders and converters. Protection strategies assure fast fault detection and isolation. This occurs when power flows in opposite directions. A natural zero crossing does not occur when dealing with DC. This level would be critical when one considers its effect regarding power delivery when facing a disturbed state.

The energy management and optimization level is built upon the stable control and protection level. This level addresses more general decisions such as energy management and directing energy. Here, a managed energy system runs checks continuously for renewable energy available, available energy in the form of energy in the storage system, energy being used for various loads, and energy conditions of the power grid. This information allows a decision for when to charge and when to discharge energy for maximum use of renewable energy available. Here, energy priorities include critical energy requirements, important energy requirements, and other energy requirements. Rules are laid down for directing energy initially towards eliminating other energy requirements in case of a critical energy situation. Additionally, decisions may be based on available price and carbon factors for energy use. However, this effort does not rely on any energy-related equations for optimization. Decision variables and conditions for such energy-related optimization equations are clearly included.

The framework has a policy, standards, and lifecycle management layer. This connects technology design with rules and ensures critical facilities comply with electrical regulations, connection standards, industry rules, and other policies concerning critical facility operation. This layer mentions standards such as backup time requirements, requirements to hold fuel in a critical facility, use of renewable energy, and reporting requirements. Additionally, this layer looks at managing critical infrastructure over time. This considers when to replace batteries and power electronics equipment. How a critical facility needs to expand with a possible future increase in power needs and adding more renewable power. By addressing this layer, a critical facility ensures decisions for equipment redundancy and equipment controls align with business policies.

Information and decision flows interconnect the layers to form a single functional system. Information obtained from sensors and meters as well as status indicators in the physical layer is handled by the control and protection layer that offers fast responses for maintaining everything in a stable state. Information and predictions are then relayed to the energy management layer where slower but more intelligent decisions are made concerning when to operate equipment and how to handle energy. This process ends with directives and rules obtained from the standards and lifecycle layer providing parameters that must be observed by lower layers. This model would facilitate integration with future use of analytics and machine learning techniques once sufficient data has been available.

5. CONCEPTUAL EVALUATION AND MISSION-CRITICAL USE CASES

The Green Power Integration Framework can be illustrated using simple example scenarios that correspond to real-world work in mission-critical facilities. In a conventional grid-connected configuration, a hybrid DC & AC microgrid receives a portion of its power supply via a tie with the power grid, with SPV array outputs providing as much power as possible without exceeding safe thresholds. This DC power requires no conversion for data center & telecom applications. Unlike a purely DC system, this eliminates additional conversion requirements for data processing. This energy management system ensures such a facility keeps a target charge level for its batteries with a sufficient margin for potential power fluctuations. Non-critical facilities can be completely powered using this configuration because this does not pose any current threat.

The second situation would be a grid power failure. This would be identified instantly by the microgrid controller. The grid-forming inverters and DC-to-AC converters would then function to regulate voltage and frequency. This would be instantly followed by energy management system rules for prioritization of critical and essential loads in the AC and DC buses. This means that critical and essential loads would be maintained, while other loads would be scaled back. The secondary source would be backup generators when a power failure would be for a prolonged period when the energy levels in the batteries go low. Business ICT and telecom loads would be least affected. This would be because most ICT/telecom loads would be via DC buses.

A third example would be when grid prices are considered to be high or when the grid has more carbon emissions. By considering data about price as well as emissions, a smart energy management system would be able to schedule charges and discharges to reduce dependence on import power during such challenging periods. This would be achieved by leveraging more charges when there would be ample Photovoltaic power generation and low-cost electricity, and more use of Energy storage when price peaks occur or when carbon emissions would be more in the grid. In mission-critical data centers, such approaches would always need to satisfy requirements for reliability but would have sufficient flexibility with a hybrid configuration and multi-layered management to leverage economics without assuming risk.

Through such cases, the benefits of this framework are more qualitative but still very important. Connecting DC system resources directly to loads cuts down losses associated with conversion and simplifies power paths. This energy management strategy brings together levels of priorities of loads, charge/discharge of storages, and use of renewable energy. This would aid a building in reducing fuel and carbon emissions associated with use of backup generators without affecting critical services. Though this conceptual study does not provide quantitative data, it illustrates how this framework can yield better efficiency levels, resilience capacities, and real gains towards a low-carbon future.

6. IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

But realizing a Green Power Integration Framework as a fully operational, mission-critical station would involve numerous technical challenges. From a technical perspective, a hybrid AC/DC microgrid requires sophisticated management of equipment supplied by multiple manufacturers—converters, inverters, energy storages, and protection systems. Ensuring that such equipment interoperates effectively via optimal communication protocols and control systems requires special attention, particularly for legacy equipment. Protection system design becomes more complex for a hybrid system because conventional protection systems for the AC side cannot be seamlessly integrated with DC components. Additionally, existing power electronics along with unidirectional power flow for DC render protection and isolation more complex. Ensuring smooth transitions during grid-connected and islanded operation without affecting sensitive equipment would be another challenge.

Applying hybrid microgrid concepts in mission-critical environments may face reluctance among those who are familiar with traditional AC backup designs. This may be because managers and operation teams may be apprehensive that newer technology and approaches might end up introducing even more potential problems. To overcome this, a proper procedure and training mechanism help build confidence among employees. Financial investment and policies also come into action. Hybrid designs with abundant use of renewables and energy storages would be more costly in comparison to merely upgrading existing backup power. Uncertainties regarding grid integration, island operation, and trading might reduce investment outflows. Thus, a gradual approach—begin with pilots in smaller areas with DC distribution where energy savings are apparent and then advance towards a better energy management system—is a practical means of deriving benefits without increasing risk.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article describes a Green Power Integration Framework for mission-critical power systems that use a hybrid AC/DC microgrid architecture. The basic thesis for this article is that a dependable, sustainable, and economical solution must be integrated together as a single goal and not treated as distinct objectives. The Green Power Integration Framework has four levels: physical infrastructure level, control and protection level, energy management level, and policy/life cycle level. This makes practical use of how hardware, software, and management interact within critical power systems. By using one DC bus for renewables and energy storage and another AC bus for existing equipment motors and voltage requirements, this integration framework clearly gives a blueprint. This blueprint could be applied to data centers, healthcare facilities, protected defense infrastructure, and critical communications nodes.

This approach brings originality to existing research regarding micro-grids because this model breaks down how pieces fit together for mission-critical environments in terms of a focus beyond a series of differing elements. This model illustrates where hierarchical control systems with advanced protection methods and energy management can be layered atop a Hybrid AC/DC solution in order to facilitate a great number of renewable power integrations without affecting overall power and light delivery. A policy management level has also been added because planning for extended periods of time regarding asset management relies on broader corporate policies concerning sustainability.

The research is theoretical and does not yield any number values; therefore, this thesis also identifies a clear future research agenda. Firstly, perform simulation studies in detail with realistic scenarios concerning a typical facility with regard to renewable energy generation and outages. Secondly, formulate optimization problems with values concerning reliability scores, carbon emissions, and possible costs. This would help us evaluate design parameters such as how much a storage unit needs to be sized for a particular redundancy level and how much of a particular load needs to be assigned to DC and AC buses. Thirdly, establish pilots for a real mission-critical environment.

The Green Power Integration Framework is intended to be a beginning and certainly not a conclusion. As technology, regulatory frameworks, and visions to reduce carbon continue to evolve, this framework can be scaled up to integrate additional elements such as long-term energy storage solutions and more sophisticated solutions such as those based on AI. This gives a roadmap for future innovations to accelerate existing mission-critical operations towards a more sustainable power future.

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Corresponding Author: Manambedu Vijayakumar Raja