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## Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl nuclear power plants aspect in Russian warfare in Ukraine

**SUMMARY** In the eyes of the democratic world, Russia is an aggressor state. This has been confirmed by the events concerning and surrounding Ukraine since 2014. From the theoretical point of view, the world can also be divided into two opposite poles, or, in other words, liberal and realist wings. The aggressor state has shown that the most important in hostilities is to win at any cost and that it uses nuclear sites to achieve their objectives. All nuclear sites are internationally protected. The goal of the present article is to analyze the issue of nuclear power plants that Russia uses in the framework of hostilities in Ukraine based on the theoretical assumptions of liberalism and realism. The article uses Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl nuclear power plants as examples. The qualitative research methods used in this article are document analysis, and interviews conducted with experts.

**KEYWORDS** defense, security, Russia's aggression, war in Ukraine, nuclear power plants

### Introduction

Since 24 February 2022, there has been no doubt about the aggressive manipulative manifestations of Russia's existing power elite in international politics. In history, there is a widely rooted claim concerning diplomacy, i.e., war is diplomacy through other means. Only when the whole world reaches warfare, it becomes apparent that war cannot be a form of diplomacy. It is solely aggression that comprises brutality, lethal consequences, the suffering of civilians and damaging of the infrastructure, etc. War, or any form of aggression against another country,

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cannot be any of the methods of a country's survival, it is rather a weakness and incapability. Since Russia's conventional invasion of Ukraine in 2022, various means that are not only incompatible with diplomacy in its western civilized world's understanding but have also created and can lead to large-scale suffering and destruction have been implemented. The world has as if split into two classic opposite poles, i.e., into the liberal and realist wings. At the same time, an essential part is benefits and losses acquired at any cost.

Based on the theoretical assumptions of liberalism and realism, the goal of the present article is to analyze the issue of nuclear power plants that Russia uses in the war in Ukraine. Thus, the article uses Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl nuclear power plants (NPP) as examples. The qualitative research methods used in this article are document analysis, and interviews conducted with experts from the field of international relations. The new global security architecture demonstrates that the methods concerned with nuclear questions used during Russian warfare are threats to the world as a whole and cannot be referred to as diplomacy.

The aspect of nuclear usage, especially Ukrainian NNP, is closely linked to Russia's inability to achieve military objectives and has a comprehensive effect. Thus, with individual points of influence in Ukraine, not only the whole territory of the country is manipulatively influenced, but also the Western world in particular.

## **Theoretical framework: basics of realism, liberalism and data of state-based conflicts**

The research in international relations is based on the four major discussions. The foundation of them is the matter concerning the origins of international relations theories, or, in other words, the classical wings, i.e., the tradition of liberalism and realism. Upon the occurrence of the new reality, on 24 February 2022, the two directions mentioned above are of a greater presence. The origins of realism can be found in the world's preliminary stage. Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and the Greek historian Thucydides, along with his view of the Peloponnesian War, are the members of the realism wing that ought to be specifically highlighted. The concept of realism also explains the functioning of the international policy actors, which is also the foundation that is considered in the development of foreign policy. Thus, Hans J. Morgenthau, Edward H. Carr and George F. Kennan are the most well-known contemporary

representatives of realism. Nation-state or also referred to as national interests, as well as its self-interest comprise the foundation of realism. Hence, a country is a principal actor in the international realm. There are other actors as well as, for example, individuals and organizations, but their manifestation of power is limited. According to the realist assumptions, the international environment is anarchic, meaning, the main purpose of the state is to survive and, in the international realm, there is no one above the state. There is no one to call, no established hierarchy (Antunes & Camisao, 2017, p. 15). Without superior authority, the central principle for states is to survive and achieve their goals. Main realist premise is state centrism (Casin, 2018, p. 28). The international environment is an expression of power. After Cold War, we have an assumption that it is an old thinking theory. As it stems from realism, by their nature people are egoists and aspire to power by any means. The organizational form of the society, i.e., the state's and individual's or people's behavior, lies at the heart of state behavior. In the view of Hans J. Morgenthau, power is greater than morality and the most important is preservation, augmentation and display of power (Antunes & Camisao, 2017, p. 15). The weakness of the state means its destruction. The basis of realism can be found in the four following assumptions: states are the international system actors without central power above it; state is an unitary actor; states are rational; and national and international security is the most important challenge for states (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012, p. 39–40). Morgenthau, being the most remarkable representative of realism, discusses human nature and objective world laws, interests and power, whilst also listing six principles of political realism and stating that the political and cultural context is important for the formation of foreign policy (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012, p. 51). In the context of the war, Carl von Clausewitz is one of the most well-known and prominent supporters of the idea of the concept of realism. His best-known phrase is “war is a continuation of political activity by other means” (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012, p. 49). The officials in power may choose any means at their disposal to achieve their national objectives when formulating national policy. It is a rational choice, including, where necessary, the use of military means and methods for survival and exercise of power. It was forwarded from the classical outlines of realism by the insights of Kenneth Waltz and, thus, transformed into neorealism or structural realism. Without emphasizing human nature and abstracting it to national behaviour in the international environment, neorealism places emphasis on the limitations of the anarchic system, i.e., structure, as well

as on each activity being based on relative power (Antunes & Camisao, 2017, p. 17).

From the liberal perspective, however, which will be looked at further in the paper, arises the following question: ought the world reach warfare for it to understand that war cannot be a form of diplomacy? It is solely aggression that comprises brutality, lethal consequences, the suffering of civilians and damaging of the infrastructure, etc. It is a question of democracy, humanism and human rights, etc. A conditional equal sign can be drawn between democracy and liberalism. The tradition of liberalism includes a broad range of concepts or assumptions aimed at limiting national violence. Hence, the basic postulates of liberalism are found in the works of John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Woodrow T. Wilson and Joseph A. Schumpeter. Liberalism's assumptions stem from democratic liberalism, interdependence liberalism, liberal institutionalism and interest group liberalism. Michael W. Doyle, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Robert O. Keohane, Ernst B. Haas and Richard C. Snyder are respectively the most well-known authors of the concepts mentioned above. Due to the fact that in liberalism an important question is regarded toward limiting military capabilities, as they can be used against any other country or its citizens, civilian control over the military environment is being exercised (Meiser, 2017, p. 22). Democratic liberalism is characterized by the assumption that democratic states do not enter into a war with one another. In the foundation of interdependence liberalism is a belief that military conflict is reduced under the influence of interdependence and globalization. In liberal institutionalism, international bodies reduce the barriers between countries and, thus, the international environment becomes safer and more stable. In the interest group liberalism, psychological factors in decision-making are at the forefront. As one of the ways of restricting a state in its use of military force is the power of the institutions, norms and law. Four basic assumptions are allocated to liberalism: countries, non-state actors and transnational actors are important in the global policy arena; interdependence plays an important role in national policy; in the international arena, the range of questions concerning state cooperation and action is much wider than military and security issues, thus, the inside-out approach is applied; it is important to identify the conditions and methods with which national cooperation and peace can be achieved (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012, p. 130).

Liberal tendencies, as opposed to the world of realism, are seen through the prism of conflicts, inclusively. Since Clausewitz's time, the world has changed significantly and has become more complicated in a wide variety of aspects. The understanding of war or armed aggression between states has evolved and

changed significantly. The majority of countries in the world do not support the war or armed aggression – attack in any of its forms (in conventional or hybrid manifestation). The First World War and the Second World War were the primary contributors to the changes in the world where the conflicts are independently occurring. According to the data concerning war and peace, from 1946 to 2020, the total number of conflicts increased from 17 to 56 (civil conflicts with foreign state intervention, civil conflicts without foreign state intervention, conflicts between states and colonial or imperial conflicts) (Roser et al., 2016). From 1945 till 2014, the number of conflicts between states and the victims of thereof has decreased (Roser et al., 2016). But in period from 2014 till 2020 the number of conflicts between states increased till three (Roser et al., 2016). The data in question does not include statistics until 2022, which are currently sufficiently extensive (*Global Conflict Tracker*, 2023), and most of which occur on the African continent and the Middle East (Figure 1). Of all the currently relevant conflicts, the greatest focus is on the events concerning and surrounding Ukraine. Meaning, Russia's armed aggression.

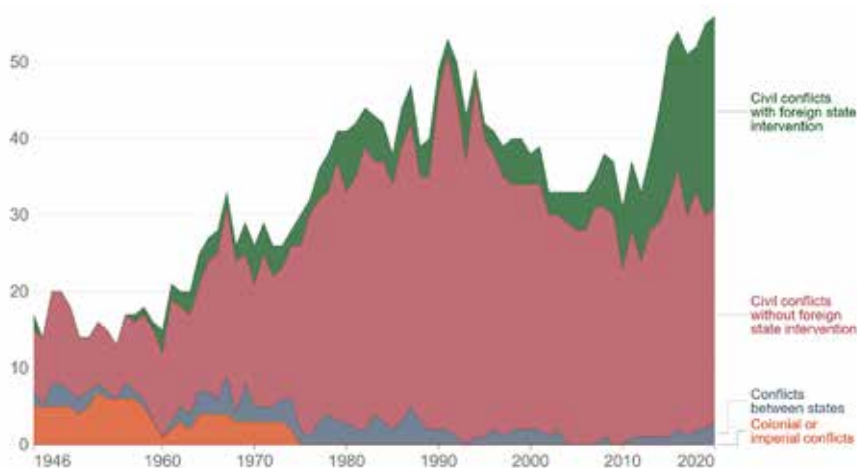


Fig. 1. State-based conflict, World (1946 to 2020)

Source: Roser et al. (2016).

The present metrics confirm that nothing better than liberalism together with democracy has been created and invented. Nevertheless, certain world countries, for instance, Russia, base their foreign and also internal policy on power and its application, or realism, by using different methods and, thus, forming a confrontation with other countries. Moreover, according to the peacefulness index, Russia, along with the countries in which conflicts occur, is the most

unfriendly alongside countries such as Mali, Libya, Sudan, Somalia and North Korea. The greatest peacefulness index has been awarded to the USA, Australia and European countries (*Global Peace Index*, 2022). In fact, according to the statistics, with the Russian aggression of 24 February 2022 in Ukraine, in the subsection conflicts between countries, the world has returned to the periods between 1980 and 1990. The Russian aggression in Ukraine also marks a new trend in the conduct of warfare, or, in other words, any international rules on the pursuit of war have been breached. From Russia's point of view, for countries, there are no rules in the conduct of war. It has manifested itself during the whole process of warfare, despite the fact that, in the view of Russia, it is a "special military operation". The most tragic thing that the world is experiencing with Russian aggression in Ukraine, includes the question regarding the use of nuclear weapons and the takeover, threat and manipulation of Ukrainian nuclear sites. Martins Vargulis refers to it as the blackmailing of critical infrastructure sites to, if necessary, haggle, threaten with different types of their use, as well as the direct form of influence on Ukraine during the time of warfare, moreover, they can serve as a benefit in Russia's long-term game (*Interview*, 2023a). The most familiar and widely spoken nuclear sites are Zaporizhzhia and Chernobyl NPP.

## Legal aspects of Russian armed aggression in Ukraine

On 24 February 2022 with the full-scale invasion Russia continued its crime of aggression against Ukraine. For the country's aggressive tendencies, including those where the use of military means are involved, to be classified as warfare, the state of war should not be formally declared. Each United Nations Member State has the right to individual or collective defense, as covered by Article 51 of the *UN Charter* (*United Nations Charter*, 1945). In addition, whilst performing the armed attack, the principles of the organization set out in Article 2 of the UN Statute, including a prohibition on the use of force against the other country, have been violated. The most important is international peace, its ensuring, and limiting of armed aggression. The special military operation against Ukraine authorized by the Russian president is indeed armed aggression (Reuters, 2022). The issue of states' hostility and armed aggression is not new; hence, extensive discussions about it are particularly sought after WW2. UN Resolution 378 (V) of 17 November 1950 contains recommendations, including also those concerning performing all the possible steps to terminate armed conflict as soon as possible (UN General Assembly Resolution 378 (V), 1950). The issue

of defining aggression was included in the various resolutions of the UN General Assembly, which resulted in UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 of 14 December 1974 adopting the definition of aggression (UN General Assembly Resolution 3314, 1974). Another country's use of military force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of others must be recognized as aggression (UN General Assembly Resolution, 1974). The cases when acts that qualify as an aggression are also acknowledged. Invasion or attack, bombing, use of any weapons, blockade of the port or coasts, attack on the land, sea, air forces, marine and air fleets are considered as acts of aggression performed by one state against another.

In the event of an international armed conflict, this applies to full or partial occupation of a state, even if there has been no resistance in the case of occupation. In accordance with the 1949 Geneva Convention, it is applicable during the period of declared warfare or armed conflict (ICRC, 1949, p. 35). The term "armed conflict" was adopted in the convention to cover all possible cases and avoid discussions about what is war and the declaration of it. Thus, excluding various interpretations. States avoid recognizing and addressing the matters of them waging warfare, or being in a state of war; however, at the same time, they are in armed conflict. In the case of Russia concerning Ukraine, a special military operation was declared, avoiding the declaration of war (Reuters, 2022). Regardless of the naming conventions and the Russia's terminology play regarding special military operation, it is an armed conflict or armed aggression implemented by Russia. The criminal law of Russia includes Chapter 34, which comprises the responsibility for planning, preparing, starting or conducting aggressive warfare, rehabilitating Nazism, and using prohibited means and methods of warfare (Уголовный кодекс, 1996). There are also norms within the framework of the aggressor state which are sufficient to cover the prosecution of persons of a particular circle.

Since the beginning of the Russian special operation, the issue concerning Russian aggression has been addressed within the UN in various ways. In the UN's view, Russian aggression is a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as it is contrary to the UN statute (The UN and the war in Ukraine, 2022). On the issue of Russian aggression in Ukraine, the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution on Russian reparations for Ukraine (UN News, 2022), and UN General Assembly demanded Russia to reverse illegal annexation (UN News, 2022a). Russia has blocked, for example, UN Security Council resolution condemning attempted of Ukraine regions (*ibid.*) UN deals with the issue

of nuclear accident risk (UN News, 2022b), as well as holds debated regarding the Russian attack on Ukrainian NPP (UN News, 2022c). Russia tests and creates opposition to the entire liberal world and the existing international system with its activities. The greatest risk to global security in the framework of Russian aggression in Ukraine manifested itself in the threat of the usage of nuclear weapons, in the possibility of the use of biological weapons, in the attack on nuclear sites and their use as a direct object of attack and also as means of manipulation. The aspect of nuclear sites within the framework of Russian aggression is the most serious one, demonstrating an expression of the prism of realism.

## **Aspect of nuclear sites in the framework of Russian aggression in Ukraine**

The issue of Ukrainian NPP and their use in the framework of Russian aggression in Ukraine has been raised worldwide. Civilians from the conduct of hostilities are protected by the four Geneva Conventions to the conduct of warfare. Works and installations containing dangerous forces are protected under Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. Special international protection means that

nuclear electrical generating stations shall not be made the objects of attack, even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population. Other military objectives located at or in the vicinity of these works or installations shall not be made the object of attack if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces from the works or installations and consequent severe losses among the civilian population (ICRC, 2010, p. 40).

The international community must require Russia to comply with the rules on the conduct of hostilities without violating humanitarian law, whilst, at the same time, it must be understood that, in the case of Russia, it is utopic (Interview, 2023c). There are five NPP located in Ukraine (Figure 2): Zaporizhzhia NP, Rivno NPP, Khmelnytsky NPP, South-Ukrainian NPP and Chornobyl NPP (*Status of Ukrainian NPP units*, 2023). Hence, they are subjects to the conditions of waging warfare and the specific international legal protection.



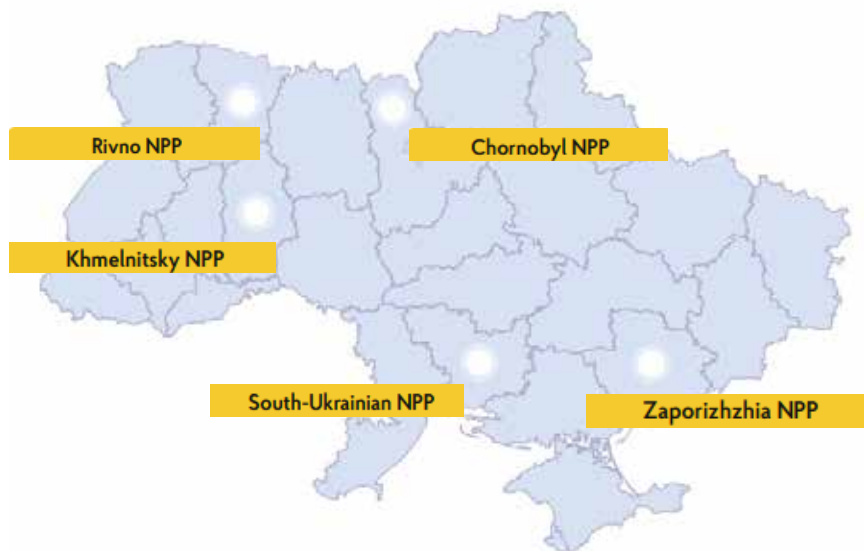


Fig. 2. Ukrainian Nuclear power plants

Source: Own work.

The rules on the protection of nuclear sites, and, therefore, the protection of civilians, refer to the view of the liberal world. M. Vargulis does not exclude that one type of Russian tactic could also be used on other NPP in Ukraine, additionally, this is the story about war directly on Ukrainian territory and of seizing certain regions and maintaining established positions, thereby not creating an equivalent threat to NPP elsewhere in Europe (Interview, 2023a). The military expert states that, speaking from the aspect of military strategy, the most significant to this phase of the war, especially given the support provided to Ukraine, are Rivno and Khmelnytsky NPP, as they are supply routes and can be occluded at the most important stage of the war (Interview, 2023b).

Whilst challenging the existing regulations, in the foundation of its special operation's framework, Russia has drawn its attention or, in other words, used, two of all existing nuclear power plants in Ukraine, i.e., Chornobyl NPP and Zaporizhzhia NPP. The Chernobyl NPP entered history with the disaster of 1986 and as an important element in the early phase of the Russian special operation in 2022 (*Timeline of the disaster*). At the beginning of the special operation, Russia took over Chernobyl NPP with the use of its armed forces (Radio Free Europe. News, 2022). The invasion of Ukrainian territory began from the borders of Belarus near the village of Vilcha and Kamaryn (Kamenev, 2022).

In the understanding and clarification of Russia, it ensured the site, in cooperation with the Ukrainian National Guard, while, at the same time, employees, guards, technical personnel and others were stranded (BBC, 2022). It may be speculated that Chernobyl's potential threat is limited, but it is nevertheless a nuclear power plant and, if taken over, a significant risk, at the foundation of which was a human factor and the inability to fully work in a nuclear sites taken over by soldiers from another country, was present. Russian soldiers committed thefts from Chernobyl's exclusive zone (Kamenev, 2022), thus, as a result of these activities, the levels of radioactive safety were increased, the safety of the power plant itself and the life and health of others were endangered, whilst performing dug trenches (AP News, 2022).

If Chernobyl NPP was one of the original Russian directions under the so-called special operation, the direction concerning Zaporizhzhia NPP was announced a little later, however, the role of Zaporizhzhia NPP is much more important. The takeover of the largest European nuclear power plant occurred on 3 March 2022, transforming it into an essential support point for the Russian special operation and military base. (The Wall Street Journal, 2022). The Chernobyl NPP is a worldwide example as to why higher safety and protection standards are applied to nuclear power plants. Rafael M. Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stated that Russia informed the agency several days prior about its forces moving into the area of Zaporizhzhia NPP (UN News, 2022c). The greatest risk stems from a threat to a nuclear reactor and situations where, for example, Russia's shell lands less than 250 feet from the Unit 2 reactor building or in an area where nuclear waste is stored (UN News, 2022d). It would also be a serious risk to cut off power to the plant, as the reactors must be constantly cooled (Jureńczyk, 2022, p. 53). It was a matter of damaging all six reactors and of major consequences for the whole world, even though the safety of the Zaporizhzhia NPP reactors is much higher than that of the Chernobyl NPP. In 2023, the staff at Zaporizhzhia NPP was recognized as Arms Control Persons of the Year, they are actually heroes who fought for all of Europe's safety (ENERGOATOM, 2023). The threat was the highest and the safety risks were specifically reflected in the second summary of IAEA. It reflects the situation in Zaporizhzhia NPP from a seven-pillar perspective: physical integrity; safety and security systems and equipment; operating staff; off-site power supply; logistical supply chains; radiation monitoring and emergency response; and communications (IAEA, 2022). This is an unprecedented case in the framework of which such extensive nuclear sites have been used in the waging of warfare, thereby

creating a potential threat to both anything inside and outside of Ukraine. Ekspert recognizes the paralyzing of critical infrastructure facilities, which can only be countered by supplies of additional weapons, ammunition and equipment, as well as the provision of Western expertise to Ukraine as fundamental objectives for the achievement of the tasks set out in the framework of the Russian warfare (Interview, 2023a). The whole international community need to have Russia cease military operations at or near nuclear sites, by transferring the control of power plants to Ukraine and the competent authorities, hence, it is necessary to establish demilitarized zones around these sites (Interview, 2023c).

In warfare, the use of NPP best reflects the situation in which Russia doesn't respect internationally recognized and approbated regulations and customs. Russia is prepared to walk over others, disregarding any regulatory framework, without looking at any potential risks or losses. It cannot be compiled with liberal values and human perspective. The overall threat is not focused solely on nuclear sites, but on the whole of Ukraine's infrastructure and the viability of the nation, which can potentially lead to changes in the whole current Western civilization.

## Conclusions

Since 24 February 2022, the world has radically changed, a new reality has come, with the understanding that the war and the aggressor are immediately adjacent. Even though it is nothing new, as aggression at the international level has been autonomous, no one could imagine that it would manifest itself to the extent it is now in the 21st century. Along with the changes in the overall trend, the history of the world is re-reviewed, countering liberal ideas and values for the real world with a maximum manifestation of aggression. According to the realist assumptions, international environment is anarchic, the main purpose of state is to survive, and, in the international realm, there is no one above state. The tradition of liberalism includes a broad range of concepts or suppositions aimed at limiting state violence. The suppositions of liberalism stem from democratic liberalism, interdependence liberalism, liberal institutionalism and interest group liberalism.

In fact, according to the statistics, with the Russian aggression of 24 February 2022 in Ukraine, in the subsection conflicts between countries, the world has returned to the periods between 1980 and 1990. Russia with aggression in Ukraine breaches any international standards concerning the conduct of war. There is no doubt that the special operation is an armed attack – aggression,

despite how it is labelled. One of the most manipulative manifestations of Russia during the special operation is concerning and surrounding the Chernobyl NPP and Zaporizhzhia NPP. This is an unprecedented case in the framework of which such extensive nuclear sites have been used in the waging of warfare, thereby creating a potential threat to both anything inside and outside of Ukraine. It is also a blackmailing of critical infrastructure sites to, if necessary, haggle, threaten with different types of their use, as well as the direct form of influence on Ukraine during the time of warfare. Nuclear sites can serve also as a benefit in Russia's long-term game. One type of Russian tactics could also be used on other NPP in Ukraine, additionally, this is the story about war directly on Ukrainian territory and of seizing certain regions and maintaining established positions. The international community must ensure that Russia ceases military operations at or near nuclear sites, by transferring the control of power plants to Ukraine and the competent authorities, hence, it is necessary to establish demilitarized zones around these sites.

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## Aspekt elektrowni atomowych Zaporże i Czarnobyl w rosyjskich działaniach wojennych w Ukrainie

**STRESZCZENIE** W oczach demokratycznego świata Rosja jest państwem agresorem. Potwierdzają to wydarzenia dotyczące Ukrainy od 2014 r. Również z teoretycznego punktu widzenia świat można podzielić na dwa przeciwstawne bieguny, czyli skrzydło liberalne i realistyczne. Państwo agresor pokazało, że w działaniach wojennych najważniejsze jest zwycięstwo za wszelką cenę i wykorzystuje obiekty jądrowe do realizacji swoich celów. Wszystkie obiekty jądrowe są chronione na szczeblu międzynarodowym. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza problematyki elektrowni jądrowych wykorzystywanych przez Rosję w ramach działań wojennych w Ukrainie w oparciu o założenia teoretyczne liberalizmu i realizmu. W artykule jako przykłady wykorzystano elektrownie jądrowe Zaporże i Czarnobyl. Jakościowe metody badawcze zastosowane w artykule to analiza dokumentów oraz wywiady przeprowadzone z ekspertami.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** obronność, bezpieczeństwo, agresja Rosji, wojna w Ukrainie, elektrownie atomowe

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