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The Risk of Russia Using Nuclear Weapons Due to the War in Ukraine from the American Perspective

Abstract: The paper's subject is the risk of using nuclear weapons by Russia in the context of the war in Ukraine. The aim is to analyze and evaluate such a possibility from the American perspective. The main research problem is whether, according to American scholars and experts, is it realistic for Russia to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine or NATO countries? From the perspective of the West, such a possibility cannot be ruled out, but the great majority of researchers and analysts believe that the risk is very small. If this happens, it will likely be the use of tactical nuclear weapons against military targets in Ukraine. It is less likely that tactical nuclear weapons will be launched against elements of the infrastructure used to transport weapons from the West to Ukraine, located in the countries of NATO's eastern flank. The research used interviews conducted by the author in Washington and New York and the expertise of American think tanks. The analysis was carried out from the perspective of the paradigm of offensive neorealism.

Key words: nuclear weapons, war in Ukraine, the United States, nuclear blackmail, Russian military aggression

Introduction

Under the presidential decree of 2 June 2020, the “Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence”, Russia: “considers nuclear weapons exclusively as a means of deterrence, their use being an extreme and compelled measure, and takes all necessary efforts to reduce nuclear threat”. The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons: “in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy” (The President of the Russian Federation, 2020). The basic assumptions are similar to those of the 2014 Military Doctrine and their

earlier versions from 2010 and 2000, which means consistency in the approach to this issue over the last two decades. These documents define nuclear deterrence as a defensive policy, and nuclear weapons can be used to counter aggression. According to the decree of June 2020, however, the use of nuclear weapons may occur not only in a large-scale nuclear/WMD attack but also in a conventional attack that Russia will not be able to counter with conventional forces (Sokov, 2020). It is in line with the concept promoted by Russian strategists since the beginning of the 21st century, known in the literature as “from escalation to de-escalation”. It consists of the fact that in the event of a large-scale conventional attack against Russia, which exceeded its conventional defence capabilities, it could respond with a limited nuclear strike. Subsequent control of the escalation of the nuclear conflict would force the aggressor to surrender on Moscow’s terms (Banasik, 2022, p. 199). However, the rhetoric used by the Russian authorities in the context of the war in Ukraine goes beyond the purely defensive nature of nuclear deterrence.

The paper aims to analyse and assess the possibility of Russia using nuclear weapons due to the war in Ukraine and due to the support of its enemy by the West from the American perspective. The main research problem is whether, according to American scholars and experts, is the threat of Russia using nuclear weapons against Ukraine or NATO countries real? Researchers and analysts do not wholeheartedly dismiss this possibility, but most of them estimate that the risk of using nuclear weapons is very small, especially strategic nuclear weapons. However, given the dramatic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, Ukraine, the United States and NATO must be prepared for such an eventuality and must not be intimidated by Russia’s nuclear blackmail. As part of the research, the author interviewed scholars and experts in international security from universities and think tanks based in Washington and New York. He also used the expertise of key American think tanks dealing with this issue. The article is based on the paradigm of offensive neorealism (structural realism).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of offensive-type structural realism can be used to explain Russia’s approach to nuclear deterrence and its American perception. John J. Mearsheimer outlines five main assumptions on which is

based on offensive realism: (1) the international system is anarchic; (2) great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability; (3) states can never be sure about the intentions of other states; (4) survival is the primary goal of great powers; (5) great powers are rational actors (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 30–31). From these core assumptions, Mearsheimer argues three general patterns of behaviour result: fear of others, self-help (egoism), and power maximisation (seeking dominance) (Johnson, Thayer, 2016, pp. 8–11).

As part of classical realism, Hans Morgenthau argues that a desire for power is a psychological constant and motivates humans. Seeking, maintaining and demonstrating power are the three basic forms of political behaviour. This political desire for power has a marked tendency to trespass all rational limitations (Guzzini, 2018, p. 10). However, neorealism emphasises the need to conduct rational politics, even if individual activities are risky. According to Kenneth Waltz, an anarchic order in the international environment influences the motives of states in foreign policy and shapes their actions taken outside. The main goal of states in this anarchic system is survival (Waltz, 1979, pp. 91–92). As Mearsheimer believes, the means to achieve this is power, and the greater the power in relation to other countries, the greater the guarantee of security. Therefore, power maximisation is the best way to ensure security in an anarchic international system. States try to accumulate more power than others because of uncertainty about their intentions. The most comfortable situation for a state is to achieve the status of a hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 1–6). States strive to equip weapons that would give them the greatest advantage over others, thus giving them security (Lamy, 2008, pp. 253–254). According to offensive realists, the goal of state policy is not a balance of power but domination. Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction that have enormous deterrent potential, and if used, they could instantly change the fate of the war and the balance of power. Offensive realists believe that cooperation is difficult in the world of selfish states because the relations between states are governed by a security dilemma, and states always adopt the worst-case scenarios. Revisionist states, like hegemonistic states, tend to take risks to increase their power at the expense of other participants in the international system. The development of the strike capabilities of the armed forces and the demonstration of strength are of great importance. The stronger state is always more aggressive towards the weaker state because it can do so (Kmieciak, 2013).

Russia is striving for regional hegemony in the post-Soviet area. According to Mearsheimer, countries striving for hegemony have four strategies for gaining power. The first is war, which may be efficient but expensive. Choosing it makes sense if the benefits outweigh the cost, especially if a victorious war increases the power and security of the aggressor. War especially makes sense if the opponent is weak and there is a certainty of victory. The second is blackmail, which is cost-efficient but ineffective against great powers. Blackmail is only effective against minor states as major states can resist. The third is bait-and-bleed, leading to a war in which participants suffer heavy losses. It is cost-efficient, but it is difficult to bait rivals into conflict. The fourth is bloodletting, i.e., extending an existing conflict from the outside, which is cost-efficient but makes the risk of exposure (Toft, 2005, p. 385). Putin's Russia, to a greater or lesser extent, implemented all of the strategies in Ukraine. Initially, it was blackmailing Ukraine in the energy-economic and military sectors. Currently, it implements nuclear blackmail directed against Ukraine and NATO, which supports it. In line with the paradigm of offensive neorealism, blackmailing Ukraine may prove effective because it is a weaker state than Russia. However, it should not work towards NATO, but it will depend on its cohesion and determination to defend all member states and maintain support for Ukraine. The bait-and-bleed and bloodletting strategies had been implemented by supporting the separatists in the Donbas since 2014 and extending the conflict, which hampered the possibility of Ukraine's integration with NATO and the European Union. Russia joined the conflict militarily to a limited extent, pretending on the international forum that it did not send its own forces there. These strategies were unsuccessful, leading to the West's first economic sanctions against Russia and military aid to Ukraine. Since 2022, Russia has pursued a strategy of full-scale war against Ukraine. It decided to attack, believing in the Russian army's strength and the Ukrainian army's weakness. Russia also counted on the weakness of the entire Ukrainian state and the disloyalty of its citizens, who were to massively show their support for Russia. At the same time, Russia counted on the weakness and division in NATO, which was not to dare to help Ukraine to a greater extent. As these calculations turned out to be incorrect, now Russia is again resorting to nuclear blackmail, and it is uncertain whether it can decide to use tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. The rhetoric of the Russian authorities regarding the use of nuclear weapons is becoming increasingly confrontational, while the Russian army engages in very risky behaviour, including oc-

cupying the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, using it as a military base and periodically firing at it, blaming the Ukrainian army. A particular risk results from the possibility of disconnecting the plant from the power supply because the reactors must be constantly cooled.

American Think-Tanks on the Risk of Russia Using Nuclear Weapons

For decades there had been a taboo that made the actual application of nuclear force unthinkable, but it has been verbally discarded by President Putin (Pszczel, 2022). He has repeatedly threatened the West with nuclear alerts and readiness to use nuclear weapons. He was throwing around the term loosely, including during the 2014 and 2022 attacks on Ukraine (Pifer, 2022). In the period between these aggressions, Washington was not engaged on a large scale in increasing Ukraine's military potential and defending it against Russia. America's risk calculus was framed by overestimating the military capabilities of the Russian army and the fear of nuclear escalation (Hoffman, 2022). After the aggression in February 2022, President Joe Biden also made it clear that the US would not directly join Ukraine's military operations. Behind this decision was the belief that there was a huge risk related to the war between nuclear powers. For this reason, he decided not to introduce a no-fly zone in Ukraine, which was considered too escalating (Hooker, 2022). Restraint in this respect does not mean, however, that the risk of Russia using nuclear weapons has been wholly averted, as the US and its allies are gradually increasing the supply of weapons to Ukraine, which causes enormous problems for the Russian army at the front. Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence in the Biden administration, said that President Putin would view the prospect of defeat in Ukraine as an existential threat to his regime. That, in turn, would lead to an escalation of the conflict by Russia, including the possible use of nuclear weapons (Harding, 2022).

According to the Atlantic Council analysts, if President Putin believes he is facing defeat or a costly stalemate or has a chance of success through sharp escalation, there is a 1–2 percent risk he will carry out his nuclear threats. In the above circumstances, it is much more likely to intensify conventional attacks than to break the nuclear taboo, which may lead to uncontrolled escalation. However, if this very unlikely scenario were to be realised: “nuclear weapons would be used in Ukraine rather than on

NATO territory, and they would be used against military, not civilian, targets”. The possibility of a nuclear attack on a high-value target such as Kyiv or a facility in Poland, which is used to supply Ukraine with Western weapons, cannot be completely ruled out (Atlantic Council experts, 2022). It means that the risk of using nuclear weapons is very small, but given the potential consequences, including the outbreak of a nuclear conflict between nuclear powers, even such a minor risk must be taken seriously by the American authorities.

Atlantic Council experts believe that the United States could respond differently if Putin were to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. To avoid escalating nuclear war, it could negotiate a resolution in which all parties could declare *Potemkin* victories. If that were not possible, the US could conduct a “major strike with conventional weapons against high-value Russian military targets involved in the war against Ukraine” or a “strike tailored to the scale and character of the Russian one”. Another solution would be to deploy conventional weapons to quickly defeat Putin’s military in Ukraine (Atlantic Council experts, 2022). Two key and contradictory arguments would emerge in preparing a response to the Russian use of nuclear weapons. On the one hand, it would be considered whether it would be worthwhile to continue supporting Ukraine, risking nuclear escalation. On the other hand, it would be necessary to consider whether the failure of the US to react with nuclear weapons would completely undermine US nuclear deterrence.

Analysts at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPA) assume in one of the seven scenarios concerning the development of the situation in Ukraine that the conflict will turn into a “wider European war”. There would then be many options for an escalation of the war, from low-level skirmishes in and around NATO frontline members to a major European or even transcontinental war involving both conventional and nuclear weapons (Polyakova, Lucas, 2022). According to RAND Corporation analysts, the highest probability of Russia’s kinetic attack on NATO countries in the context of the war in Ukraine would be if Moscow recognised that large-scale, direct NATO attacks on Russian military forces in Ukraine are imminent. Then Russia could begin escalation with an immediate move to kinetic strikes on NATO forces or territory. Given that Russia’s conventional long-range missile resource has been significantly depleted in Ukraine, Russia might have to resort to nonstrategic nuclear weapons to be able to destroy key NATO targets in Europe (Frederick, Charap, 2022). As noted by Evija Djatkoviča from the Foreign Policy

Research Institute (FPRI), Russia has short-range nuclear weapons located in Kaliningrad, which directly threatens Poland and Lithuania. The significant support of these countries for Ukraine irritates President Putin, which turns into nuclear blackmail against these countries and the entire NATO (Djatkoviča, 2022). According to Anthony H. Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the war in Ukraine may prevent modernising and strengthening a nuclear arms control system. Russia may deploy all of its advanced nuclear weapon systems, which would make it necessary for the nuclear forces of the US, France, and Great Britain to focus on the threat coming from Russia (Cordesman, 2022a). In such a situation, the risk of a nuclear conflict would increase.

In NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, attention was drawn to the modernisation of Russia's nuclear arsenal and its use for destabilisation purposes: "The Russian Federation is modernising its nuclear forces and expanding its novel and disruptive dual-capable delivery systems while employing coercive nuclear signalling. It aims to destabilise countries to our East and South" (*NATO 2022 Strategic...*, 2022). The United States and NATO must be prepared for any form of Russian threat to NATO, including the use of tactical and even strategic nuclear weapons. Therefore, nuclear deterrence plays a very important role in the Alliance (Cordesman, 2022b, pp. 2–3). It should be emphasised that the threats of a nuclear attack formulated by President Putin have resulted in a reaffirmation of the Alliance's nuclear nature and the importance of the nuclear arsenal in ensuring the security of member states under Article 5 on collective defence (Tardy, 2022, p. 6). A practical manifestation of this is, among others, the flights over Europe of the American strategic bombers Boeing B-52.

According to Stephen Sestanovich of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the risk of President Putin using nuclear weapons cannot be completely dismissed, especially regarding "all the bizarre things" he has said and done of late. However, there is no reason to overstate that risk, let alone be intimidated and paralysed by it. Putin has wild ideas and makes mistakes, but "he doesn't seem suicidal". Nor are his generals like that, and if a nuclear war threatened the world, they could resist a presidential order. The United States must do whatever it takes to convince policymakers in Russia of the consequences of using nuclear weapons, so they never do so (Sestanovich, 2022). Such an approach is fully justified, as state authorities must act rationally. The guarantee of a strong US and NATO response to Russia's use of nuclear weapons is the most effective factor in preventing state leaders from taking overly escalating measures.

One of the main reasons why Putin decided to attack Ukraine was the belief that the shattered West would not decide to jointly oppose this aggression. According to offensive neorealism, risky moves are possible if there is a high chance of winning, which will increase the power and security of the aggressor. In this case, the West's decisive response may not only significantly weaken Russia but also put an end to the Russian regime, and in the worst-case scenario, even to the entire state.

American Scientific and Expert Debate on the Risk of Russia Using Nuclear Weapons

There is an ongoing debate among American researchers and analysts as to whether Russia may use nuclear weapons against targets in Ukraine or even against NATO countries in connection with the war in Ukraine. Steven Pifer believes President Putin's call for the nuclear alert was just a bluff. It is supported by the fact that the Pentagon has not seen a significant change in the operation of Russia's nuclear forces, including increased activity of nuclear submarines or the movement of mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). However, his attention is drawn to an element of the Russian nuclear deterrence doctrine that one of the circumstances of the use of nuclear weapons is a conventional war in which the existence of the Russian state would be at stake. The problem is that President Putin begins to confuse the existence of the Russian state with the existence of his regime. The Russian state could survive a military defeat in Ukraine, but it is not sure if Putin could survive in the Kremlin with that kind of defeat. However, even in the event of a threat to Putin's regime, a nuclear attack on a NATO state would, in his opinion, be very unlikely to happen. However, it would be possible to use tactical nuclear weapons against targets in Ukraine. It could be used to change the situation on the front and intimidate Ukraine and the Western countries. However, it would still be a severe step, after which Russia could lose what is left of its support in the international arena, even from China (Pifer, 2022).

Despite the continued enthusiasm for supporting Ukraine, there are also voices in the United States that fit in with the strategic approach to Russia called "don't poke the bear" policy. It boils down to the policy of non-antagonising Russia to avoid "enraging the beast" and thus avoid an escalation of tensions, including, in particular, Russia's use of a nuclear

arsenal (Cohen, 2022). After six months of the war, however, these votes are still in the minority, and the US administration is increasing the supply of weapons to the Ukrainian army. Mearsheimer believes that the United States and its allies are being “much too cavalier”, assuming that catastrophic escalation can be avoided and Russia does not dare to use nuclear weapons (Mearsheimer, 2022). The American authorities also take this eventuality into account but assume that they cannot be intimidated by the Russian aggressor because concessions to Moscow may have serious negative consequences for global security and the US position in the international system. According to offensive neorealism, if a revisionist power takes risky actions to increase its power, it is justified that the hegemon, which until recently was the United States, may also take such steps. However, both sides must take into account the consequences of such actions and the purpose of their use, which is to increase power and security.

James H. Lebovic raises the important question, how long will President Putin be willing to tolerate the consistent flow of weapons into Ukraine from the West? This question is particularly important in the context of his conviction that it is in Putin’s interest to escalate the conflict (Lebovic, 2022). As Stephen Biddle noted, many observers were surprised already in the first months of the war that Putin had not escalated the conflict, given how poorly the Russian army operated on land. In his opinion, however, an escalation may take place if it becomes clear that Russia will not win the war by waging it on the scale it currently has. In the case of failure, Putin may even face death, so its risk will force him to reach for a solution that is sometimes referred to as by the political scientist “gambling for resurrection”. He decides to escalate not because it would change the military situation on the ground in Ukraine but because it would change the threat perception in the West of future escalation. Such an escalation will be calculated as the West withdraws from supporting Ukraine to avoid a further, even more severe, escalation. Biddle says: “There’s an escalatory ladder that has multiple rungs on it and the logic of escalation and walking up that ladder is not that you’re destroying a target that’s militarily important. What you’re doing is threatening to keep going. If you Americans and you Germans and you Brits and you Poles don’t stop supporting Ukraine I am demonstrating to you that I am ready to accept the risk more than you are. I want to check how much risk the West is willing to accept in order to keep Ukraine independent”. Biddle believes that if there is an escalation with weapons of mass destruction,

chemical weapons will most likely be deployed first. In the next steps, he does not exclude the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons, for example, against an air base in Ukraine. At the same time, escalation may also take place against NATO countries. In this case, the initial escalation would not be nuclear, but for example, it would rely on conventional weapon attacks on train stations or airbases in Poland, which is the main hub for supplying military equipment to Ukraine (Biddle, 2022). If Putin wants to show every time that he is willing to accept a greater risk than the West, it will become a very disturbing scenario. Whether it will take further escalation steps depends on how much they will affect the cohesion and determination of the West in responding to them.

Charles Glaser also believes that Russia's use of nuclear weapons is possible, and the goal would be an escalation that would change the attitude of the opposition bloc: "it is possible that Putin would use nuclear weapons even if Russia is not attacked. If the war in Ukraine is leading to an outcome that Putin considers undesirable/unacceptable, he could use nuclear weapons for a couple of reasons: first, to increase the probability of a larger war, thereby increasing his bargaining leverage in the outcome of the war; second, against military targets with the primary purpose of weakening Ukrainian forces, thereby improving Russia's prospects on the battlefield. Although both are possible, I tend to think the former is the more likely rationale for nuclear use" (Glaser, 2022).

As James Goldgeier emphasises, the United States and the West should react decisively to Russia's actions, including through sanctions, because "we can't afford to have Putin threatening Europe, the way he has in the past" (Goldgeier, 2022). As noted by Michael Doyle, President Putin has always been a "gambler and a pure chess player [...] He was a middleweight boxer boxing way above his weight and doing so extremely well". He outsmarted the Americans in Syria, Georgia, and Ukraine in 2014 (Doyle, 2022). One of the compelling reasons was the West's lack of solidarity, determination, and courage to stop Russia's actions. As Max Hastings writes, the West must not be intimidated by Russia with the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Most likely, it is using a nuclear bluff, but no matter what, we have to "commit our own soldiers, defying the nuclear-armed bullies to do their worst" (Hastings, 2022). It is worth noting that the United States did not want to rely on its nuclear second-strike capability, so it started developing an anti-missile defence system (Toft, 2005). At the present stage of development, however, it cannot neutralise the arsenal of nuclear power such as Russia. Not succumbing to the threat

of using force is one of the essential assumptions of realism, which also penetrates the mainstream of neorealism.

On the other hand, the actions of the West cannot be excessively provocative, and emotions cannot influence the reaction to Russia's escalating actions but as a result of the strategic and military calculation. As Lebovic emphasises, the United States must be extremely cautious about using its nuclear potential because, in practice, it could be a suicidal act. Washington must not succumb to pressure from its allies and partners if they try to persuade it to use this ultimate argument of force (Lebovic, 2022). In the past, US officials have made irresponsible statements about the possibility of moving US nuclear weapons near Russia. For example, during the presidency of Donald Trump, the US ambassador to Poland, Georgette Mosbacher, said about the possibility of transferring such weapons to Poland. It was a reaction to a public debate in Germany in which the legitimacy of the stationing of US nuclear weapons in that country was questioned (Pifer, 2020). Steven Pifer believes that this statement resulted from erroneous information provided to ambassador Mosbacher on the subject. According to him, such action would make the weapons much more vulnerable. In Poland, they would be within the range of missile systems in Kaliningrad, including Iskander, S-300 and S-400. Moreover, it would be very expensive and extremely provocative towards Russia (Pifer, 2022). Also, Glaser expects that tactical weapons will not be shipped to Central and Eastern Europe. If NATO decided to use tactical nuclear weapons, it could launch them from the territory of the countries in which it is currently stationed (Glaser, 2022). Richard K. Betts also doubts that there will be support in the US for moving tactical nuclear weapons eastward. The military doesn't like having to manage tactical nuclear weapons, especially if it could aggravate Russian suspicions (Betts, 2022). In the present situation, such a decision would not only be provocative towards Russia but could give it an argument with which it would try to justify the possible use of nuclear weapons.

As Cynthia Roberts notes, Russia is a slowly declining country with a huge and successively modernised nuclear capability. It is meant to deter the United States and others from interfering in what it considers its interests, but that hasn't been working lately. According to her, the West must help ease Russia through its decline, so it happens relatively peacefully. The US and NATO must stop the threat from Russia and strengthen collective defence, but at the same time, interact with Russia and not be provocative towards it so that its actions do not get out of hand. It is

also impossible to disrespect Russia, as it is uncertain what factor may provoke President Putin to use nuclear weapons. Its use is very unlikely, but it's not impossible, especially during the war. The United States must be ready for the worst-case scenario. Therefore, American nuclear missiles must be upgraded from top to bottom because they were neglected for decades (Roberts, 2022). Pierre Morcos also believes that the West cannot humiliate Russia. According to him, a weakened Russia might be more dangerous than we could say because if Russia is cornered, it might try desperate actions. Russia still has critical capabilities and a nuclear posture and could take dramatic actions against NATO (Morcos, 2022).

Conclusions

There is broad consensus among American scholars and experts that the possibility of Russia using nuclear weapons cannot be completely ruled out. However, they estimate that the risk of such action is very small, although they realise it is in Russia's interest to escalate the conflict. With the chances of winning a conventional war against Ukraine diminishing, Russia may decide to use weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. If so, the most likely scenario would be the use of tactical nuclear weapons against important military targets in Ukraine. Some analysts point out that tactical nuclear weapons could also be used against the infrastructure of NATO's eastern flank countries, used to transfer weapons from the West to Ukraine, which is a less likely scenario. The direct goal of using tactical nuclear weapons to destroy military and transport infrastructure would be of secondary importance. The most important thing would be to intimidate Ukraine and NATO to force them to accept Russia's terms for ending the war. Currently, Russia is using nuclear blackmail, raising threats of nuclear weapons and calling nuclear alerts. Activities at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant are also an important element of nuclear blackmail.

Given the theory of offensive neorealism, Russia is trying to increase its power at the expense of Ukraine, wanting to become a regional hegemon. For this purpose, it has used blackmailing, initiating, and fuelling the conflict in Ukraine, and from 2022, full-scale aggression against that country. Russia's calculations for a quick victory turned out to be wrong, so Russia may escalate the conflict, even by taking risky actions. The riskiest would be to use nuclear weapons, but it could be counterproduc-

tive. According to offensive neorealism, this could intimidate Ukraine, but the United States and NATO should not be intimidated and can respond decisively to such action. That, in turn, could lead to weakening Russia, ending the Russian regime, and, in case of full nuclear escalation, even annihilating the state.

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Ryzyko użycia broni jądrowej przez Rosję w związku z wojną na Ukrainie z perspektywy amerykańskiej

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem artykułu jest ryzyko użycia broni jądrowej przez Rosję w kontekście wojny na Ukrainie. Celem artykułu jest analiza i ocena takiej możliwości z perspektywy amerykańskiej. Głównym problemem badawczym jest, czy według amerykańskich naukowców i ekspertów realne jest użycie przez Rosję broni jądrowej przeciwko Ukrainie lub państwom NATO? Z perspektywy Zachodu nie można wykluczyć takiej możliwości, jednak znakomita większość badaczy i analityków uważa, że ryzyko takie jest bardzo niewielkie. Jeśli do tego dojdzie, to prawdopo-

dobnie będzie to wykorzystanie taktycznej broni jądrowej przeciwko celom wojskowym w Ukrainie. Mniej prawdopodobne jest wystrzelenie taktycznej broni jądrowej przeciwko elementom infrastruktury wykorzystywanej do przesyłu z Zachodu broni dla Ukrainy, zlokalizowanej w państwach wschodniej flanki NATO. W ramach badań wykorzystano wywiady przeprowadzone przez autora w Waszyngtonie i Nowym Jorku oraz ekspertyzy amerykańskich think-tanków. Analiza przeprowadzona została w perspektywie paradygmatu neorealizmu ofensywnego.

Słowa kluczowe: broń jądrowa, wojna w Ukrainie, Stany Zjednoczone, szantaż jądrowy, rosyjska agresja zbrojna