

Peaceful or Military? Retrospective on Soviet and Post-Soviet Nuclear Programs on the 40th Anniversary of Chernobyl

Like its glorious victories in the space race, Soviet achievements in nuclear power convinced citizens at home and observers abroad that the still young nation – founded in 1917 – was the rightful rival to the capitalist world. Contributing to the development of nuclear physics in the 1930s; building an atomic bomb by the late 1940s; and embarking on peaceful applications from the 1950s, the USSR pursued an extensive civilian nuclear power program that spread to Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania and elsewhere. Of course, the Chernobyl disaster led to a reevaluation of the program – and contributed to the collapse of the USSR. This talk will provide a brief history of the Soviet nuclear program, then turn [to] nuclear energy in Russia and Ukraine since the turn of the century, including Russia's military attacks on nuclear power plants in Ukraine during the ongoing war.