

COUNTERING RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR (RN) DISINFORMATION:

AN INTRODUCTORY BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

FOR STATE DELEGATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL FORA



RN disinformation is the deliberate spread of false or misleading information about nuclear weapons, peaceful nuclear applications or radiological materials. The *GP WMD Counter Disinfo Initiative* has analysed relevant past disinformation tactics aimed at preparing delegations for disinformation narratives they may encounter. Further information can be found at www.GPWMDCounterDisinfo.com.

WHY IT MATTERS

State delegations articulate national positions, engage in dialogue and shape outcomes through norm-setting and decision-making. Their visibility makes them prime targets for reputational attacks, narrative manipulation and emotionally charged RN disinformation, which is increasingly used as a tool of hybrid warfare.¹ Such disinformation poses a growing risk not only to the perceived credibility of delegations but also to the coherence of diplomatic processes and broader institutional trust.

HOW IT WORKS

RN disinformation strategically undermines state delegations' ability to perform core diplomatic functions by seeking to erode their credibility and trustworthiness. Delegations may be **portrayed as deceptive or irresponsible** (e.g. their state secretly developing or intending to develop nuclear weapons or concealing treaty violations);² **as provoking escalation** (e.g. intentionally escalating tensions by attempting to provoke a nuclear war or drag alliances into direct confrontation);³ or **acting as proxies for external agendas** (e.g. adversaries can use polarising, degrading or vilifying language to present delegations as "puppets of foreign interests").⁴ These tactics seek to weaken delegations' reputations, impede coalition-building and reduce delegations' influence in negotiations, ultimately disrupting their capacity to shape diplomatic outcomes.

ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN DELEGATIONS' RESILIENCE AGAINST RN DISINFORMATION

This foundational best practice guidance is informed by interviews, practitioner engagement and a review of relevant policy and academic literature. It brings together sectoral insights from disciplines focusing on information perception and resulting behaviour, as well as analysis of RN disinformation dynamics in international fora, including stakeholder-specific advantages, constraints and identified practitioner needs.

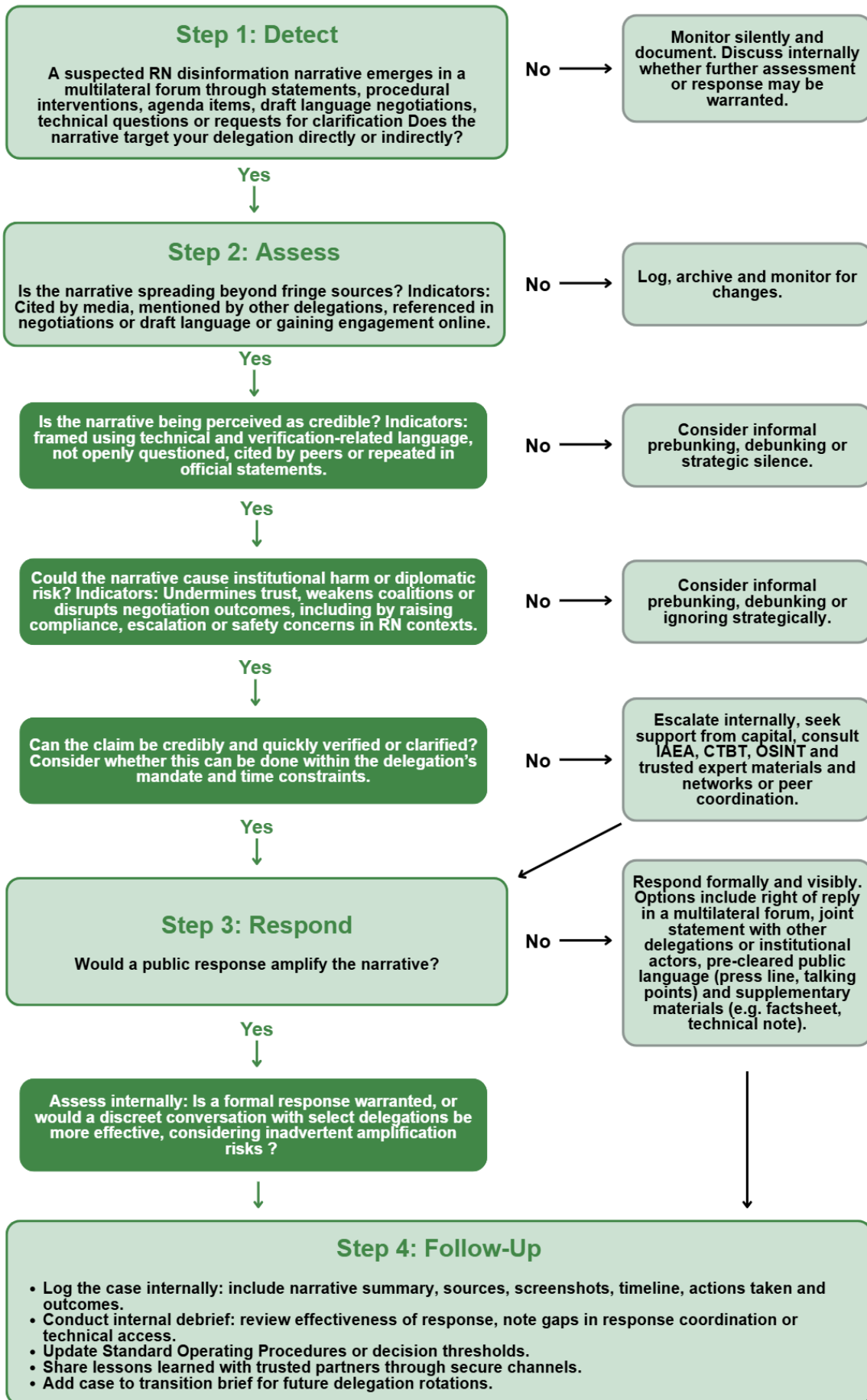
Do

- ✓ **Anticipate narrative risks:** through scenario planning and foresight exercises (e.g. alleged treaty non-compliance, clandestine nuclear activities, safeguards manipulation, nuclear accidents, contamination risks, escalation and deterrence framing).
- ✓ **Establish internal thresholds:** define what level of visibility, credibility and risk merits a response.
- ✓ **Monitor consistently and discreetly:** track formal and informal channels for disinformation indicators before and during events; disinformation often exploits radiophobia, nuclear catastrophe imagery or escalation anxiety.
- ✓ **Log and archive:** keep track of emerging narratives, including media files, before they mutate or disappear.
- ✓ **Verify:** use IAEA, CTBT, OSINT and trusted expert materials and networks to validate emerging narratives.
- ✓ **Coordinate internally:** clarify counter-disinfo roles across the delegation in advance of events.
- ✓ **Use the right channel for audience:** use bilateral or informal settings to clarify low-level falsehoods; use formal tools when institutional credibility is at risk.
- ✓ **Maintain a professional tone but allow for emotional resonance:** stick to facts and avoid speculation, but make speeches resonate emotionally.
- ✓ **Debrief and adapt:** reflect on what worked, what did not and update procedures accordingly.

Don't

- ✗ **Respond reflexively:** a hasty or defensive response can unintentionally validate false claims, politicise safeguards and verification processes, reinforce catastrophic framing or escalate deterrence narratives.
- ✗ **Overestimate fringe content:** not all disinformation warrants a response, which may inadvertently amplify the narrative.
- ✗ **Act outside your mandate:** avoid public statements or clarifications without internal alignment.
- ✗ **Assume silence equals failure:** strategic silence, combined with informal coordination, can be more effective than public rebuttal, especially where verification is ongoing, confidential or delayed by design.
- ✗ **Isolate yourself:** engage peer delegations and institutional actors early.
- ✗ **Break message consistency** across channels.
- ✗ **Ignore emotional resonance:** purely technical corrections are insufficient where RN disinformation exploits radiophobia, nuclear catastrophe imagery or escalation anxiety.
- ✗ **Forget institutional memory:** failing to document cases can lead to repetition of errors and loss of learning during staff turnover.

RN DISINFORMATION DECISION TREE: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE



REFERENCES

1. A set of military, diplomatic, economic and informational actions that are deployed to achieve strategic objectives. See: Yevhen Mahda, *Russia's Hybrid Aggression: Lessons for the World* (2018), https://kalamar.ua/en/product/gibrydna_agresia_rosii_uroki_dlia_evropi/?srsltid=AfmBOoqAfc3MNLnazcso4pB3M_ouGTOfGGFFviKIGAW0FkNfQiZZtLcC#book-9.
2. ТАСС, 'Путин заявил, что угроза Украины создать собственное ядерное оружие не пустая бравада [Putin says Ukraine's Threat to Develop its Own Nuclear Weapons Is Not Empty Bravado]', 21 February 2021, <https://tass.ru/politika/13791761>.
3. МІКРУ, 'Екс-дипломат пояснив бажання Зеленського втягнути НАТО в гарячий конфлікт з Росією [Former diplomat explains Zelensky's desire to drag NATO into a heated conflict with Russia]', 5 August 2024, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2024/08/05/eksdiplomat-obyasnil-zhelanie-zelenskogo-vtyanut-nato-v-goryachiy-konflikt-s-rossiey.html>; Delegation of the Russian Federation, 'Statement by the Representative of the Delegation of the Russian Federation in Exercise of the Right of Reply', 2 August 2022, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/2Aug_Russia_RoR.pdf.
4. GP WMD Counter Disinfo, 'Disinformation Tactic Spotlight: Portraying States and Organizations as Puppets', January 2025, <https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com/policy-briefs/tactic-spotlight-portraying-states-and-organizations-as-puppets/>.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GP WMD COUNTER DISINFO INITIATIVE AT [GPWMDCOUNTERDISINFO.COM](https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com)



**OPEN NUCLEAR
NETWORK**



[GPWMDcounterdisinfo.com](https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com)

✉ @GPctrDisinfo

@GPctrDisinfo

✉ GPWMD.CounterDisinfo@gmail.com

Canada