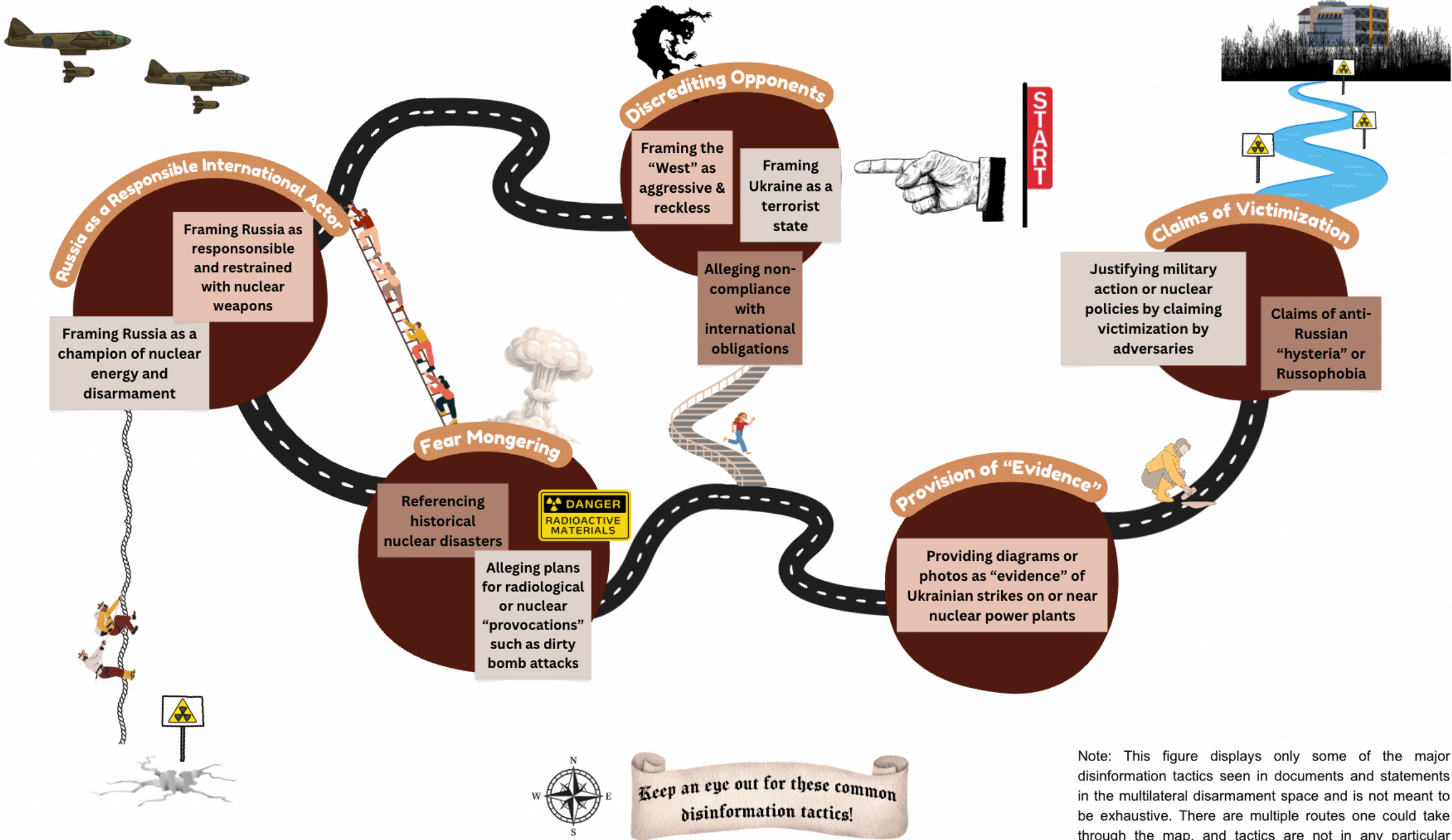


# Roadmap of a Radiological/Nuclear Disinformation Campaign



Note: This figure displays only some of the major disinformation tactics seen in documents and statements in the multilateral disarmament space and is not meant to be exhaustive. There are multiple routes one could take through the map, and tactics are not in any particular order, reflecting the reality that any number of these tactics could be used at any time and in any sequence.

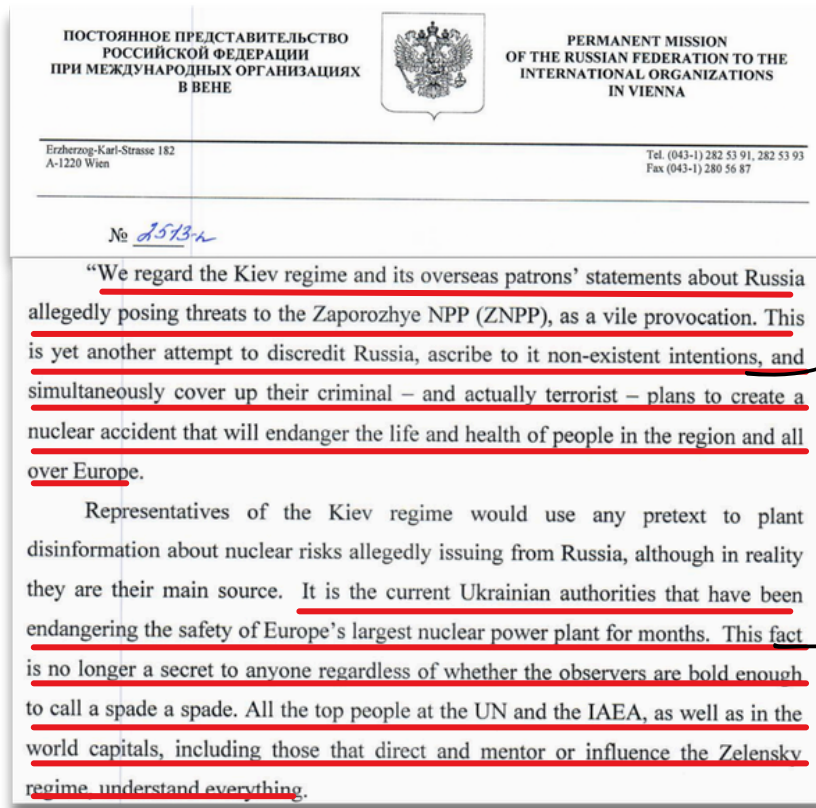
# Discrediting Opponents

*Framing Ukraine, the United States, and the broader “West” as dangerous, destructive, and operating outside of legal or moral bounds*



What does this commonly used tactic look like in official documents and statements?

## Note Verbale #2513, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2023)



Using negatively charged terms like “terrorist” and “criminal” is a commonly used tactic that is designed to delegitimize and disparage Ukraine, framing it as an evil “regime” as opposed to a sovereign state operating within legal bounds. No independent body has reported that Ukraine has deliberately caused or attempted to cause a nuclear safety incident at the ZNPP.

The claim that global officials are all in agreement that Ukraine is endangering the world’s largest nuclear power plant is factually inaccurate. While shelling has occurred at the ZNPP, the IAEA has not (and cannot, given its mandate and technical authority) assign responsibility for the attacks. By attempting to create a false consensus about Ukraine’s alleged recklessness, Russia seeks to take advantage of the bandwagon effect, a cognitive bias that makes individuals more likely to hold beliefs they feel others share.

## Right of Reply by the Russian Federation 2 August 2022, NPT Review Conference

### Statement by the Representative of the Delegation of the Russian Federation in Exercise of the Right of Reply

At the same time, the statements by representatives of Kiev that not only call into question the viability of the Budapest Memorandum but can also be interpreted as an explicit bid to reconsider the non-nuclear status of Ukraine, cannot but cause concern. Such a destabilizing move would run counter to Kiev's NPT commitments, grossly undermine the integrity of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and would pose unacceptable risks to international security.

Kiev itself has not complied with its obligations under the Budapest arrangements for many years. In particular, those that were meant to counter the rise of aggressive nationalism and chauvinism in Ukraine.

This statement is an attempt to frame Ukraine as a state that disregards and even undermines international obligations. While Ukrainian officials have made statements about the dysfunction of the Budapest Memorandum, they have explicitly emphasized that Ukraine does not intend to pursue nuclear weapons. Ukraine’s statements reflect the reality that Russia violated the provisions of the Memorandum when it invaded Ukraine. Additionally, the IAEA has consistently found Ukraine to be in compliance with its nuclear safeguards obligations.

This is another attempt to frame Ukraine as a state that does not comply with international obligations. The claim lacks foundation, as the Budapest Memorandum has no provisions on countering “aggressive nationalism and chauvinism.”

# Framing Russia as a Responsible International Actor

Framing Russia as a champion of nonproliferation and a guarantor of nuclear energy and security



What does this commonly used tactic look like in official documents and statements?

## Statement by Russia at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the IAEA General Conference (2025)

The Soviet scientists quite literally managed to look into the future. We were not the first to invent and use a nuclear bomb. However, we were the first to build the world's first of a kind industrial nuclear power plant in 1954, and then to set afloat the world's first nuclear icebreaker in 1957. First tokamaks in the world were built in our country in 1950s – 1960s, and in 1973 we commissioned the world's first power unit with the BN-350 fast neutron reactor.

It is with regret that we note that some IAEA Member States keep actively politicizing the issue of the Zaporozhskaya NPP within the Agency. I would emphasize: safety and security of nuclear facilities are our utmost priority. We are doing everything needed to ensure that both the ZNPP itself and its staff are safe and unharmed. We closely cooperate with the IAEA. Starting from September 2022 IAEA experts maintain permanent presence at the ZNPP, and these days the 30<sup>th</sup> team is working at the plant. We create conditions necessary for safe work and rotation of the IAEA staff.


I would like to emphasize that the only real threat to the ZNPP and its staff is posed by reckless actions that are taken by the Kiev armed forces that target the infrastructure of the ZNPP and its satellite city of Energodar on an almost daily basis.

This statement celebrates Russia's achievements in nuclear energy. These achievements are deliberately contrasted with the U.S. development and use of the first nuclear bombs, allowing Russia to construct an image of itself as the peaceful and responsible state while framing the US as an evil actor. This section does not address Russia's current status as a nuclear-weapons state, including the fact it is the country with the most nuclear warheads.

The statement continues by emphasizing that the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Ukraine are Russia's top priority, again framing Russia as a responsible international actor. The statement also alleges that the only "real threat" to the ZNPP comes from Ukraine and its armed forces. This is misleading, as no independent internationally recognized authority has attributed responsibility for shelling near the ZNPP. Importantly, it was Russia's initial military takeover and occupation of the ZNPP that created the current safety and security risks.

## Note Verbale #2513, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2023)

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В ВЕНЕ



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№ 2513-а

It is clear that these irresponsible statements by the Washington hawks are meant for audiences that are ignorant of facts and realities. President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated that there is no need for Russia to use nuclear weapons in the context of the Ukraine crisis.

In this statement, Russia is once again framed as the responsible actor while the US is framed as irresponsible and reckless. However, in reality, President Putin has made signaling statements related to the war that have been reasonably interpreted as nuclear threats. For example, in his address on 24 February 2022, he warned that in the event of outside involvement in defending Ukraine, "the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history."

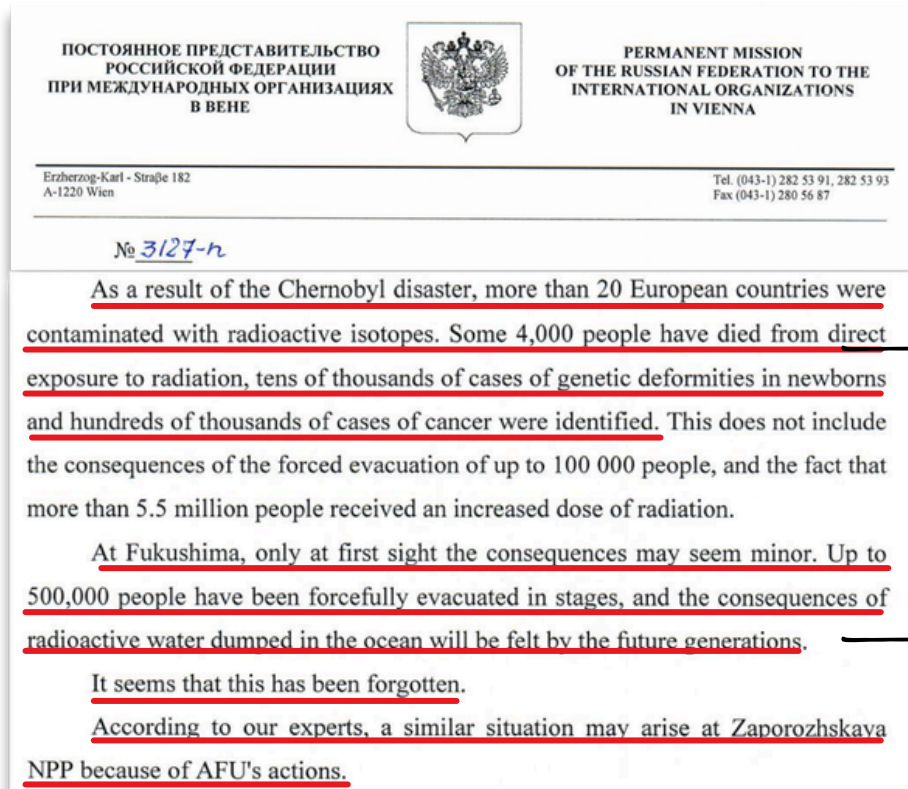
# Fear Mongering

Stoking fears of a nuclear or radiological catastrophe by referencing historical disasters or alleging plans for radiological or nuclear “provocations”



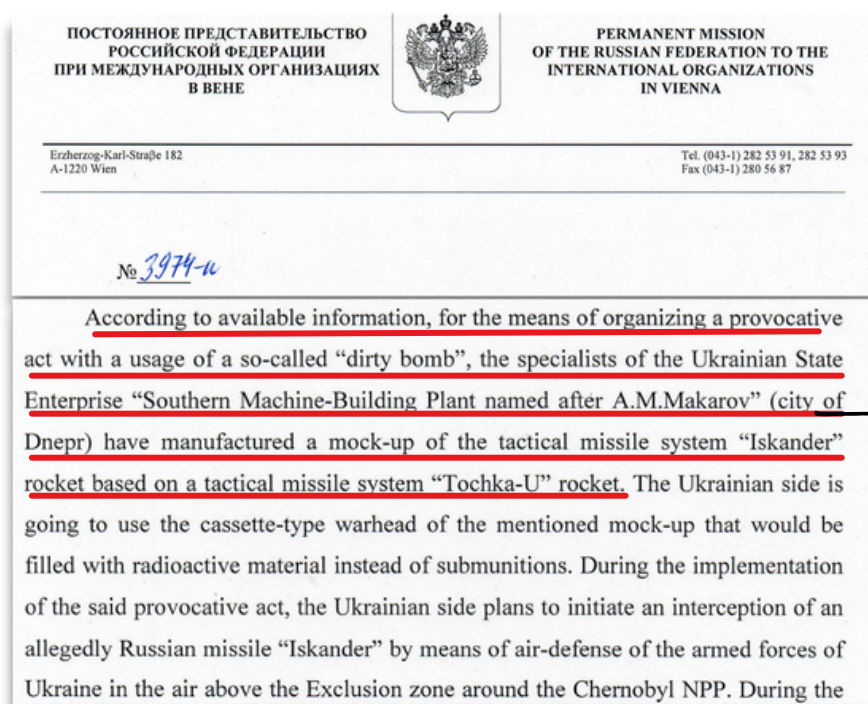
What does this commonly used tactic look like in official documents and statements?

## Note Verbale #3127, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2022)



Referencing historical nuclear disasters is a manipulative tactic designed to evoke fears that a similar catastrophe could occur in Ukraine as a result of actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). Nuclear disasters are inherently anxiety inducing because they are difficult to control. In addition, radiation is an invisible yet highly hazardous threat. The strong emotions elicited from such references may make even misleading or inaccurate claims memorable and believable. While the IAEA has noted the risk of a nuclear accident in Ukraine, experts assess that a Chernobyl-scale event is unlikely to occur due to reactor design and other factors. Since the reactors entered shutdown, Fukushima-type risks have also decreased. Finally, no independent, internationally recognized authority has attributed accident risk to AFU actions.

## Note Verbale #3974, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2022)



Dirty bombs use conventional explosives to spread radioactive material. Hence, portraying an imminent dirty bomb attack can, as noted above, evoke panic and deep fear of radiation exposure. Given the technical complexity of the subject, audiences may also conflate dirty bombs with nuclear weapons, amplifying perceived catastrophic risk. While there is no credible publicly available evidence to suggest that Ukraine is or was planning a dirty bomb attack, Russia is using this narrative to discredit its opponent. For more information on Russia’s “dirty bomb” allegations, please refer to the dirty bomb brief available on our website.

# Provision of "Evidence"

Providing photos or diagrams as "evidence" of Ukraine's alleged illegal or reckless actions near/against nuclear power plants



What does this commonly used tactic look like in official documents and statements?

## Note Verbale #3323, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2022)



Russia frequently incorporates photos into its reports, falsely presenting them as proof of its claims and exploiting cognitive biases. This photo shows damage to the ZNPP allegedly caused by Ukrainian shelling. However, it is impossible to tell from the photo whether the Ukrainian or Russian Armed Forces were responsible for the shelling. The images presented in the note verbale are also not supported by analysis of physical remnants, crater analysis, trajectory reconstruction, or independent verification. In the absence of such information, these visuals function as illustrative speculation rather than legitimate evidence.

## Note Verbale (unnumbered) submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2025)



This diagram allegedly depicts the locations of Ukrainian strikes on the ZNPP and the adjacent town, with accompanying photos showing the associated damage. However, these schematics do not constitute forensic proof of attack origins or trajectories, as the material is presented without sufficient detail to enable independent assessment. Taken together, the diagram and photographs function as pseudo-evidence, creating the impression of technical credibility without forensic substantiation or third-party verification.

It is also unclear which images depict damage at the plant versus in the town. The conflation of attacks on the nuclear power plant with attacks on the town amplifies the perceived threat by portraying incidents as numerous and all directly related to the plant's safety. However, strikes on the town pose very different risks compared to strikes near or on the nuclear power plant.

# Claims of Victimization

*Framing Russia as a victim of Western or Ukrainian hatred and aggression, often as a way to justify military action or nuclear policies*



What does this commonly used tactic look like in official documents and statements?

## Statement by the Russian Federation at 78th Session of UNGA 1st Committee (2023)

**Statement by Konstantin VORONTSOV,  
Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation,  
at the Thematic Debate on “Nuclear Weapons”  
in the First Committee of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly  
(New York, 16 October 2023)**

At this stage, possession of nuclear weapons is the only possible response to specific external threats to our country. The Ukrainian crisis, provoked and spurred on by Western countries, has justified our assessments and concerns. Grossly flouting the principle of equal and indivisible security, the United States-led NATO bloc has put a stake on harmful expansion. The goal is to weaken our country as one of the civilizational poles of the emerging polycentric world order that excludes the hegemony of Washington. Ukraine has been ruthlessly and cynically used against Russia as a battering ram, and, in fact, as expendable material.

In response to our forced actions to protect our external security contour, the West switched over to an openly anti-Russian course and to a reckless increase in stakes, dangerously balancing on the brink of direct military confrontation between nuclear powers. Our sobering warnings about emerging strategic risks are ignored or distorted for propaganda purposes. However, in reality, we continue to be strictly guided solely by the logic of deterrence and its fundamental principles.

In this statement, Russia seeks to justify both its lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and its invasion of Ukraine by portraying itself as a long-standing victim of Western aggression. Claims that the war was “provoked and spurred on by Western countries” misrepresent the sequence of events: Russia initiated the conflict through its military invasion of Ukraine, which is widely assessed as a violation of the UN Charter. Neither Ukraine nor Western states were conducting an armed attack on Russia. This victimization narrative nevertheless serves a political function, providing justification for the use of force and continued resistance to nuclear disarmament.

## Note Verbale #2513, submitted by the Russian Federation to the IAEA (2023)

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There were repeated attempts to convince Kiev that it should refrain from provocations, including attempts mediated by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi. But Ukraine has long opted for an escalation and is unwilling to leave this path. One of the latest cases in point is Ukraine’s refusal to support the recommendations on strengthening the plant’s nuclear and physical safety, which IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi made at his UN Security Council briefing on May 30. It must be added that the Ukrainian authorities have always cold shouldered Mr Grossi’s reasonable initiatives. An anti-Russia hysteria and calls for terrorist attacks against ZNPP is the only thing they project to the international community. The entire unseemly nature of the Zelensky regime surfaced on June 23, when the Russian secret services prevented a group of Ukrainian agents from buying a batch of Caesium-137, which the criminals planned to use in stage-managed radioactive incidents aimed at discrediting Russia.

Claiming anti-Russian sentiment or even “hysteria” is a common tactic designed to reinforce the idea that Russia is a victim (in this instance, of alleged Ukrainian terrorism). The purported radiological smuggling incident described in this section was never confirmed by any independent investigatory body and was reported internationally only as a Russian security-service allegation. There is no public confirmation from neutral bodies (including the IAEA) and no publicly traceable investigative outcome that substantiates the alleged Ukrainian involvement. Rather than being based in reality, these allegations are more likely designed to justify Russia’s aggressive actions towards Ukraine by framing them as a form of self-defense.