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Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine

Method Report and Codebook

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Introduction

General Information

The Working Paper "One year of nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine: A chronology" produced the research data described below. The research period was between 24 February 2022 and 3 February 2023. The publication was under the leadership of Dr Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt.

The project was financed through the Strategic Threat Analysis and Nuclear (Dis-)Order (STAND) project at SWP, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Defence.

Content and Objective of the Project

Research objectives and research questions were:
-   tracing Russian and Western political interactions with a nuclear dimension after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022;
-   How did nuclear interactions unfold in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022?

In doing so, the project builds on the current state of research in International Relation / deterrence theory and seeks to address the question of how to interpret nuclear rhetoric.

As a starting point, the following research design was chosen: time series, exploratory.

Data Generation and Data Collection

Sample Selection

Understanding Russian-Western nuclear interactions throughout the year of 2022 is the focal point of the research project. In particular, the following aspects have been brought to the fore: what statements and actions with a nuclear dimension did Russia and the West make in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine? What reactions did Russia's nuclear rhetoric trigger? In turn, how did Russia react to Western rejoinders, warnings and counter-threats?

To address the research question, all politically significant statements and actions with a nuclear dimension by the Russian Federation and Western states,

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notably the United States and NATO allies, were collected. A brief description of the data collection follows.

Concerns regarding data protection and research ethics were not relevant to the research project.

Methods and Instruments

Description and justification of the methodology for data collection:
- Russian and Western nuclear statements and actions were collected from a broad range of media outlets, official websites, and Twitter accounts.
- The data collection process relied heavily on Politico's National Security Daily newsletter[1] and the New York Times' Russia-Ukraine War[2] live updates. However, it also included reporting and statements from numerous other official[3] as well as media and social media[4] sources.
- Due to resource constraints, data collection focused on politically significant statements and actions, which garnered media or public attention, particularly in the English, German, and Russian linguistic contexts.

Development and testing of the instruments:
- We collected statements and actions by Russian or Western officials with a nuclear dimension. This includes statements and actions that allude to nuclear use, nuclear capabilities or a potential conventional escalation; that retract previous such nuclear actions and statements; or that forego an escalatory action.
- To ensure consistency the data was collected and regularly reviewed by two researchers.

Personnel aspects of data collection:
- Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt collected the data.

Processing, Evaluation and Potential for Re-use of Data

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[1] "National Security Daily," *Politico*, available at: https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily.
[2] "Russia-Ukraine War," *The New York Times*, available at: https://www.ny-times.com/live/2023/02/13/world/russia-ukraine-news?name=styln-russia-ukraine&region=TOP_BANNER&block=storyline_menu_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection&variant=undefined&is_new=false.
[3] For instance: Website of the White House, Website of the US Department of Defense, Website of the US Department of State, Website of the Kremlin, Website of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
[4] For instance: AP News, CNN, Interfax, Reuters, TASS, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Twitter.

Processing/Evaluation of "Raw Data":
- The raw data, for instance media reporting, was shortened, sorted into two categories–Russian and Western statements, and coded as "escalatory," "warning," or "de-escalatory."
- Statements were coded as "escalatory" when they could be considered at least an implicit threat of nuclear use; as "warning" when they could be interpreted as at least an allusion to nuclear capabilities or a possible conventional escalation, but without the threat of nuclear use being directly derived from it; and as "de-escalatory" when they questioned or retracted previous statements or actions linked to possible nuclear use, or when they included steps through which actors forewent an escalatory action.

Evaluation organization, instruments and quality criteria:
- Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt evaluated, coded, and reviewed the coding of the collected statements and actions.

Key Findings:
- Key findings were identified in the following publication: Horovitz, L., and Arndt, A., 2022, "Russia's Catch-all Nuclear Rhetoric in Its War against Ukraine," *SWP Comment*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/russias-catch-all-nuclear-rhetoric-in-its-war-against-ukraine, doi: 10.18449/2022C60.

Description of Variables fort he data:

VARIABLE NAME	DESCRIPTION	DATATYPE
id	Unique identifier for statement / action; number counting statements / actions since January 2022.	numeric
date	Date of statement / action or, where this was unavailable, date of reports on statement / action. Statements that lasted for multiple days were comma separated.	date
category	Origin of statement / action. **RU** = Russia **W** = Western states	character
level_of_escalation	Level of escalation of statement / action. **1** = de-escalatory **2** = warning **3** = escalatory	numeric

text	Abridged text of statement / text describing action, or of media reporting on statement / action.	character
source	References and URLs to sources of statement / action / media reporting.	character

Notes on the re-use of the data

Re-use potential:
- This data is particularly suited for re-use in the discipline of International Relations.
- It is especially suitable for qualitative methods of analysis, including congruence analysis.
- While this dataset aims to be as comprehensive as possible, it does not claim to be exhaustive. Thus, it is not especially suitable for quantitative methods of analysis, but could serve as a foundation for additional data collection.

Supplementary materials

Documents on the research project:
- Website of the project "Strategic Threat Analysis and Nuclear (Dis-)Order"(STAND), 2023, *SWP*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/swp/about-us/organization/swp-projects/strategic-threat-analysis-and-nuclear-dis-order-stand.

Veröffentlichungen zum Projekt
- Arndt, A., and Horovitz, L., 2022, "Eine Chronologie der nuklearen Anspielungen Moskaus im Krieg gegen die Ukraine," *SWP Working Paper*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Chronologie_der_Nukleardrohungen_Russlands_im_Krieg_gegen_die_Ukraine_-_Arbeitspapier.pdf, doi: 10.18449/2022AP03.
- Arndt, A., and Horovitz, L., 2022, "Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine: A Chronology," *SWP Working Paper*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Arndt-Horovitz_Working-Paper_Nuclear_rhetoric_and_escalation_management_in_Russia_s_war_against_Ukraine.pdf, doi: 10.18449/2022WP08.
- Horovitz, L., and Arndt, A., 2022, "Russia's Catch-all Nuclear Rhetoric in Its War against Ukraine," *SWP Comment*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/russias-catch-all-nuclear-rhetoric-in-its-war-against-ukraine, doi: 10.18449/2022C60.
- Horovitz, L., and Arndt, A., 2023, "One year of nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine: A chronology,"

SWP Working Paper, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/one-year-of-nuclear-rhetoric-and-escalation-management-in-russias-war-against-ukraine-an-updated-chronology.

- Presented *inter alia* at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

Regional, cultural, contemporary historical context of the project
- Askew, J., 2023, "Ukraine war: A month-by-month timeline of the conflict 2022-23," *Euronews*, https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/30/ukraine-war-a-month-by-month-timeline-of-the-conflict-in-2022.
- Horovitz, L., and Wachs, L., 2022, "Russia's Nuclear Threats in the War against Ukraine,"" *SWP Comment*, available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C29/, doi: 10.18449/2022C29.