



PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

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[US Strategic Command](#) (USSTRATCOM) is tasked by the Joint Strategic Campaign Plan to provide specific support to [combatant commanders](#) (CCDRs) for their nuclear planning. Planning for nuclear operations differs in one important aspect from other forms of joint planning: USSTRATCOM performs detailed planning down to the individual sortie level, and as a result there is no separate supporting Service component [operation plan](#). (Note: While Airmen should understand planning considerations, the following discussion does not imply this is an Air Force component task. Also note that most of the specific details regarding nuclear planning are classified.)

Nuclear operations can either be preplanned against specific targets or adaptively planned against emerging targets. Preplanning provides the opportunity to conduct detailed planning and analysis against targets without the time pressures normally associated with a crisis. Preplanned options maintain [centralized control](#) while minimizing response time. Plans provide a variety of targeting options, which allow national leadership the flexibility to achieve objectives. As circumstances change during a conflict, adaptive planning allows leadership to retarget and strike emerging, mobile, or previously unknown targets.

Planning for theater nuclear operations should be integrated into the supported CCDR's plans. This will maximize the desired effects; identify and prioritize intelligence, planning, and force requirements; identify conventional and nuclear acceptable levels of risk; and ensure proper levels of coordination and support necessary for successful mission operations. Liaison teams are assigned to work with the [joint force commander](#) and components in the development of nuclear options. Airmen within theater commands may collaborate on matters of weapon system capabilities and regional issues. Additionally, planners should coordinate with joint and coalition forces to deconflict nuclear weapons effects and prevent friendly fire. Planners and support staffs should continually update senior leaders and inform representatives of coalition forces while maintaining the proper balance of operational security and cohesiveness.

Air Force nuclear capabilities require robust integration with full spectrum operations to ensure effective employment within a particular region, account for larger political ramifications, and allow effective operations in a nuclear environment. Planners may

integrate nuclear options with conventional or other non-nuclear operations to enhance effectiveness and minimize collateral effects. In some scenarios, the delivery of nuclear weapons may require conventional support in the form of [counterair operations](#), [air refueling](#), and post-strike [assessment](#). In other scenarios, theater nuclear weapons may be integrated within a larger strike that also includes delivery of conventional ordnance. In yet other scenarios, continental US-based bombers may support theater operations. All scenarios require careful planning to ensure integration of all capabilities, beyond simple deconfliction of weapons effects.

Nuclear employment is closely coordinated with combined targeting, mutual support, and defense, as well as national strategies and objectives. The options contained therein provide sufficient detail to ensure mutual support and defense suppression. Of particular concern is the timing and deconfliction of weapons. Fratricide, a term of art in nuclear force planning used to denote the diminishment of one weapon's effects by detonation of another, may reduce the effectiveness of the nuclear strike. Planners coordinate between different weapons to ensure they do not conflict. Air Force planners and USSTRATCOM liaison teams in a theater of operations must also ensure that weapons are deconflicted before being employed to prevent fratricide and friendly fire incidents.

The significant destructive power and other related effects from nuclear weapons demand that Air Force planners take special precautions. Plans should address possible adversary nuclear employment scenarios. Every conceivable situation needs to be considered such as electromagnetic pulse and dispersal of forces versus mass formation. Planners should place a premium on intelligence to understand an adversary's doctrine and strategy for use of nuclear weapons, especially whether there is a declared "first use" strategy and when adversary employment of nuclear weapons is most likely to occur. Perhaps the most difficult task for planners is to devise a plan for escalation control. Understanding adversary interpretation of US actions and similarly accurate receipt of adversary messaging is crucial to managing escalation control.

Planning efforts should also be reviewed to ensure that friendly force commanders do not make the mistake of mirror imaging. Applying US values and culture to planning assumptions when anticipating other countries' actions may lead commanders to wrongly believe that an adversary would be willing or even unwilling to use nuclear weapons in a given scenario. Additionally, escalation control relies heavily on each side of a conflict understanding the intent of the other. For example, what one commander believes is an example showing restraint, may actually be perceived as an escalatory action by the adversary. Rational behavior should be determined through the lens of cultural and historical context to properly anticipate an adversary's response to US nuclear operations.

Finally, commanders of nuclear forces should take coalition perceptions of nuclear operations into account to not risk failure to achieve national strategic objectives when providing national leadership recommendations.

POST-STRIKE ENVIRONMENT

Commanders and planners should consider that the operating environment after a nuclear exchange can be equally inhospitable for friendly forces. Movement through an area that has experienced a nuclear detonation may be slow because significant protective measures are required. Plans for post-attack recovery and reconstitution should not only include assessment of the success of US strikes, but also assessment of adversary strikes against US military and civilian facilities. The most important factor in mitigating damage from a nuclear detonation is advanced warning. Advanced warning allows friendly forces and civilians the best chance of getting to shelter and surviving.

US nuclear systems and facilities both in the homeland and overseas are lucrative targets. Air Force forces should be capable of responding to and executing operations in a contaminated environment with minimal degradation of force effectiveness. Implementing the principles of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense—avoidance, protection, and decontamination—will help preserve the fighting capability of forces. AFDP 3-40, [Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction \(WMD\) Operations](#), Joint Publication (JP) 3-40, [Joint Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction](#), JP 3-11, [Operations in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Environments](#), and JP 3-41, [Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Response](#), provide additional guidance.
