



ANNEX 3-70 STRATEGIC ATTACK

**CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL, AND NUCLEAR  
WEAPONS CONSIDERATIONS**

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The employment of nuclear weapons is a form of [strategic attack](#) (SA), which can produce [political and psychological effects](#) well beyond their actual physical effects. Only the president may authorize the employment of nuclear weapons. See Annex 3-72, *Nuclear Operations*, for a more complete discussion of nuclear operations doctrine.

It is stated US policy not to employ biological or chemical weapons. [Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear](#) (CBRN) weapons have great potential for any foe who seeks to induce [strategic](#) effects. For example, such weapons may be used to induce terror or mass dislocation, to deter a course of action (e.g., intervention), to deny access, to blackmail, or to enhance international prestige. Air and space forces should be prepared to deter CBRN use and respond against any adversary that threatens to use or uses CBRN. Preemptive SA against an adversary's CBRN capability before it can be weaponized, relocated, exported, hidden, or used may be a commander's best option against those threats. The growing danger from proliferation of such weapons requires that air and space forces be capable of locating and attacking them with a high degree of accuracy, in order to ensure their destruction while minimizing collateral damage.

The potential for catastrophic collateral damage is a particularly important concern when attacking such weapons directly. If an enemy relocates CBRN weapons systems close to civilian population centers with the intent of shielding them from attack (a violation of Article 58 of Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions), it may be politically, legally, or morally difficult to target them unless their use is certain and imminent. In such cases, an indirect approach may be better. Directly attacking production or supporting infrastructure, such as plants where nontoxic chemical precursors are made or key means of transportation used to move them may have the desired effects and achieve the [objectives](#). It may be necessary to use nonlethal means to force an adversary to move the weapons to locations where they can be safely attacked. It may also be safest to degrade or destroy some production facilities before they begin production, as the Israelis did against Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor in 1981. Close coordination of SA with information and diplomatic efforts are especially important when preemptive strikes against CBRN capabilities are considered, since strategies to

publicly justify the strikes or mitigate the undesired effects of collateral damage are likely to play a central role in both deterring the adversary and sustaining political will for subsequent attacks. Targeting decisions against potential CBRN threats involve significant issues under the law of war and should be assessed for compliance with international law, including the law of armed conflict, and relevant US treaty obligations.

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