PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

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US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) is tasked by the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan to provide specific support to geographic combatant commanders (CCDRs) for their nuclear planning. Planning for nuclear operations differs in one important aspect from other forms of operations 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 action scenario. 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, 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 geographic commands may collaborate on matters of weapon system capabilities and regional issues.

Planners may integrate nuclear options with conventional or non-kinetic operations to enhance effectiveness and minimize collateral effects. In some scenarios, the delivery of a single or a few nuclear weapons may require conventional support in the form of air superiority, suppression of enemy air defenses, 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 or submarine-launched cruise or ballistic missiles 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 to combine 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 destruction of one weapon by another, will 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.

The significant destructive power and other related effects from nuclear weapons demands 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 strategy involving use of nuclear weapons, especially whether there is a declared "first use" strategy and when it is most likely for nuclear weapon employment 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 grasping 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 may lead commanders to wrongly believe that an adversary would be unwilling to use nuclear weapons during the course of an engagement-even if US or allied actions are non-nuclear. Additionally, escalation control relies heavily on each side of a conflict understanding the intent of the other. For example, what one commander believes is implemented as an operational example showing restraint, may actually be received as an escalatory action by the adversary. Rational behavior must be determined through the lens of cultural and historical context to properly predict an adversary's response to US nuclear operations.

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.

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 (CBRN) defense—avoidance, protection, and decontamination—will help preserve the fighting capability of forces. Annex 3-40, *Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)*

Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-11, *Operations in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Environments*, and JP 3-41, *Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives Consequence Management*, provide additional guidance.