



ANNEX 3-72 NUCLEAR OPERATIONS

**STRATEGIC EFFECTS: DETERRENCE, ASSURANCE,  
DISSUASION, AND DEFEAT**

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Air Force nuclear forces consist of delivery systems; [nuclear command, control, and communications](#) (NC3) capabilities; personnel; and the physical infrastructure for sustainment. [Intercontinental ballistic missiles](#) (ICBMs) and dual-capable bombers and fighters are the Air Force's delivery platforms. Combined with the Navy's submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and other assets, these forces form the nuclear triad. Each nuclear-capable system offers distinct advantages. SLBMs offer survivability whereas ICBMs are the most responsive, offering prompt, on-alert capability combined with dispersed fielding; also, attacks on ICBMs are unambiguous attacks against the United States. Dual-capable bomber and fighter aircraft offer mission flexibility and a capability to provide distinct signaling in a crisis through posturing to alert and through [shows of force](#).

[Deterrence](#), [extended deterrence](#), [assurance](#), [dissuasion](#), and [defeat](#) stem from the credibility of our nuclear capabilities in the minds of those we seek to deter, assure, or dissuade. The objectives of deterring adversaries and assuring allies require visible and credible nuclear capabilities. This credibility is attained through focused day-to-day training, periodic exercises, and regular inspections which underpin the credibility of US nuclear capability.

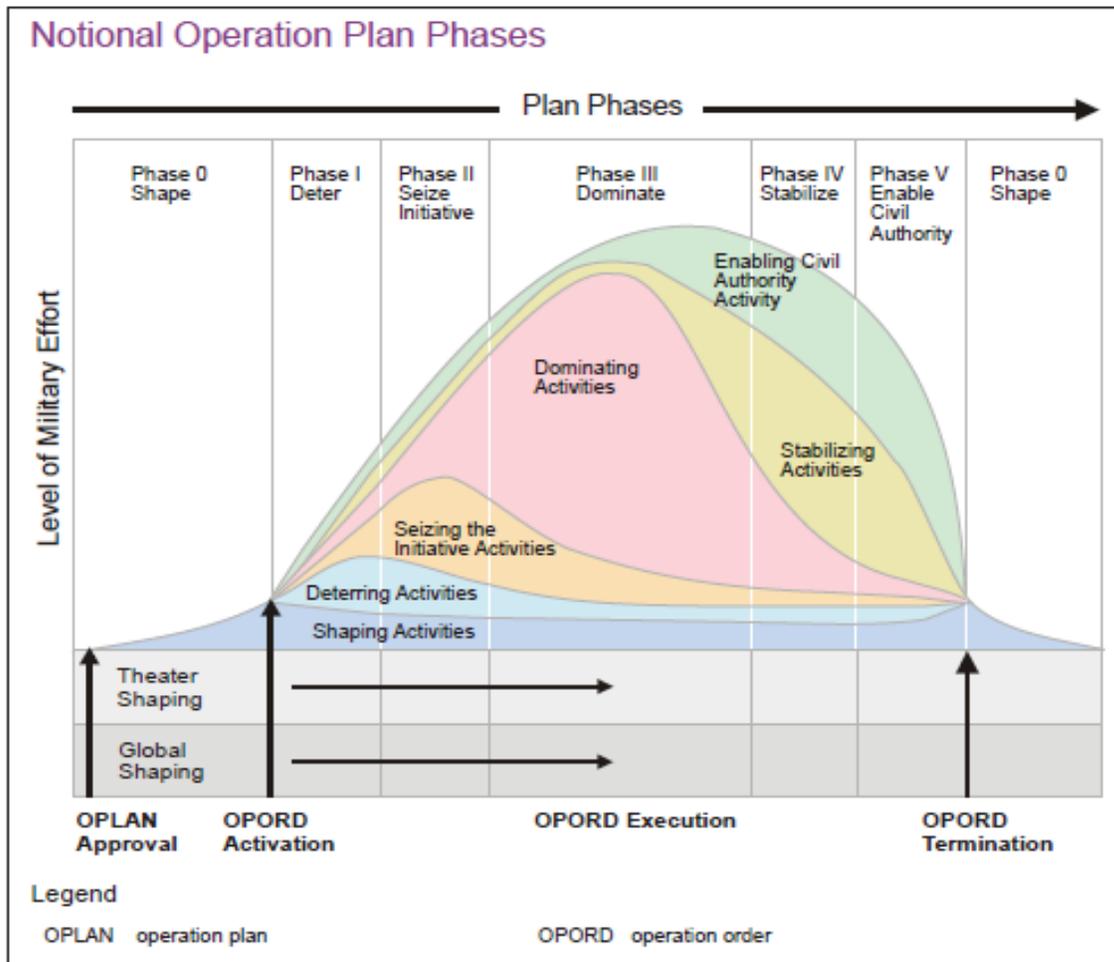
Deterrence, assurance, and dissuasion apply across the [range of military operations](#) and during all phases of planning and execution, most normally as part of global and theater shaping (see following chart). Although deterrence activities are more typically envisioned as occurring mainly in the "shape" and "deter" phases within the joint

**Show of Force**

Show of force is defined as "an **operation designed to demonstrate US resolve that involves increased visibility of US deployed forces in an attempt to defuse a specific situation that, if allowed to continue, may be detrimental to US interests or national objectives.**"

Shows of force are frequently used to deter adversaries and assure allies, frequently in the same stroke. The deployment of an additional number of bombers or fighters to a tense region is one very familiar example using Air Force capabilities. Another is the deployment of additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, such as Predator remotely piloted aircraft, to signal increased US watchfulness in a region.

operational planning construct, deterrence may actually occur in any phase. Influencing an adversary's risk/benefit calculus to reduce their available options -- a form of escalation control -- can take place while other operations (including other nuclear operations) are ongoing.



**Notional Planning Phases vs. Level of Military Effort** (Source: JP 5-0)

Although joint doctrine nominally labels deterrence as a Phase 1 activity within the plan phasing construct, deterring adversaries (especially in [weapon of mass destruction](#)-related actions) and assuring allies continues even after escalation has increased to the point of nuclear or conventional weapons employment. The objective of stability does not cease once other military operations begin. Indeed, deterrence can occur before, during, or after military operations.

For additional discussion on deterrence, assurance, and dissuasion, see also "[Practical Design: The Coercion Continuum](#)" in Annex 3-0, *Operations and Planning*.