

# Kazbek: A thought experiment about nuclear weapon use.

## Introduction

You are the Supreme Leader of a powerful nuclear armed state, referred to as “The State” (It is the only state with small tactical nuclear weapons), and you have called a meeting. For this meeting you should surround yourself with your closest advisors (as many as you think useful, but a minimum of 3, one of who is the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Commander of Long-Range Aviation Command, and the commander of Naval Forces. The Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces might also want to be included, but they only have the really big nukes). Point out to them that if they tell you something isn’t possible, or show any signs of defeatism, this could lead to them accidentally falling out of a high window; but a good plan, with high confidence, will gain them awards, plaudits, and the unwavering admiration of the working classes (and the Supreme Leader).

## The Current Situation

Things are not going well with the Special Police Action taking place in a neighbouring state. You have just ordered mobilisation, but it will take a long time to generate anything useful, and industry is at full capacity just trying to keep up with current losses. If something isn’t done to generate some breathing space you will be humiliated and generations of work will be undone. It is time to consider escalation to persuade the Fascists and their Imperialist supporters to cease their attacks.

Carrying out spontaneous referendums in support of your regime and declaring those regions as part of The State will allow additional freedom of action. The use of nuclear weapons in support of the defence of The State is then justified and something even the tone-deaf Imperialists understand.

## The Report

The Chairman of Military Scientific Committee of the Armed Forces has produced a report in support of this meeting about the reliability of the current nuclear arsenal. As all parties are aware, properly constructed nuclear material is reliable<sup>1</sup>, it is the non-explosive elements that are not. Ionizing radiation has a deleterious effect on electronic components -which means that it is necessary to inspect and test nuclear weapon components on a regular basis. Any items that show any reduction in working efficiency (even by a small margin) must be replaced with alternative parts that exactly match the original. Any attempt at substituting alternatives will inevitably degrade reliability. The Imperialists currently test *all* their warheads over a period of about 10 years and have revealed that any substitutions have had mixed results and are to be robustly resisted. Of course, given the superiority of The State technology and manufacturing, this is merely Imperialist paranoia, but it was felt that this should be brought to your attention.

## The Task

The task to be solved in this meeting is to determine what to do.

Based on your experience over the past 6 months, promises from corrupt and incompetent subordinates have proved valueless. Reading between the lines you have no real idea as to the chances that a tactical Nuke will work at all, let alone as it is supposed to. Long Range Ballistic Missiles are supposed to be roughly 70% reliable, and Cruise Missiles (Air or Sea launched) about 50% reliable, as a baseline. Given this, you will need to grill your loyal and trusty subordinates as to the most appropriate course of action.

What should be the target? Enemy forces? Decapitation strike on the enemy capital? Destroy a key logistic node? In what way should it be attacked? Long range missile? By air? What happens if a bomb is dropped and it doesn’t go off? Would it be best to drop one and then see what happens, before trying again with another one? Or three of them? How far do we go?

It might be worth considering what sort of plan we would need if we think the weapons have a reliability of less than 30%, 50%, 70% or higher. Are those plans different? Do we take the risk? You only have an hour or so in your busy schedule to consider this – you need answers by then or heads will roll.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessment-us-military-power/us-nuclear-weapons-capability>