

Turkey and Tactical Nuclear Weapons: A Political Love Affair

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Introduction

As part of its commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Turkey is one of five¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries currently hosting an estimated 200 American tactical nuclear weapons at six European air bases. The weapons are deployed as part of NATO's collective security posture and during the Cold War were meant to deter a Warsaw Pact invasion. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rationale for the B-61's deployment disappeared, raising questions about their military value, and whether or not the forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons continue to have a place in the Alliance's collective security posture. Despite growing opposition from other countries hosting NATO nuclear weapons, Turkey quietly supports maintaining the estimated 60-70 weapons deployed on its territory. Ankara also expects other NATO countries to continue their nuclear stewardship as part of the Alliance's burden sharing principle.

Turkey: A Nuclear Cold Warrior

The United States first deployed fifteen nuclear tipped medium range Jupiter ballistic missiles (MRBMs) at Çiğil air base near the southwestern coastal town of Izmir in 1961.² The missiles were withdrawn after the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to reciprocal MRBM redeployments during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Turkey, which found itself in the middle of a near nuclear exchange, vehemently opposed the agreement, arguing that the American willingness to trade the missiles put the security of the NATO alliance at risk. The weapons were obsolete to begin with and were eventually replaced with the B-61 nuclear bomb. Nevertheless, the John F. Kennedy Administration's decision has stained the Turkish perception of the American security commitment ever since.

¹ The other four are the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Currently, the United States has 200 B-61 gravity deployed in Europe. Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, "US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2011," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 6 January 2012, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/67/1/64.full.pdf+html>.

² "Jupiter," Global Security.org, accessed 27 February 2012, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/systems/jupiter.htm>.

The Turkish doubts about NATO's commitment to its Article V obligation stems from the initial European reservations about Turkey's NATO membership. Many of the original NATO countries argued that Turkey and Europe had different security priorities. While Western Europe was obsessed with the threat of a Soviet invasion, the European powers argued that Ankara's security threats ranged from Russia to the Middle East. There were concerns that this would eventually entangle the Alliance in an unwanted Middle Eastern war and distract from efforts to defend against the Warsaw Pact. Despite European reluctance, the American commitment to include Turkey into the trans-Atlantic security framework prevailed and Ankara joined the Alliance in 1952.

Turkish suspicions were reignited when the United States imposed an arms embargo after the 1974 invasion of Cyprus. The decision further fueled Turkish concerns about the NATO alliance's commitment to collective defense.³ These lingering concerns were heightened after the end of the Cold War because officials believed that the lack of a common enemy would lead to NATO's disintegration. These factors have led Ankara to take a more pro-active stance in NATO's decision making. This includes continued support for the forward deployment of nuclear weapons,⁴ which many policymakers believe symbolize the American commitment to European defense and NATO's burden sharing principle.

Ankara was an active participant during the discussion for NATO's new 2010 Strategic Concept. The new Concept committed NATO to "the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons," while also reaffirming "that, as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance."⁵ Ankara supports disarmament and a robust commitment to nonproliferation instruments, but believes that the goal of total disarmament is not likely to be realized any time soon.⁶ Consequently, Turkey remains firmly committed to the maintenance of a strong NATO deterrent, so long as other countries possess nuclear weapons.

Turkey's position also neatly coincides with the American position on NATO tactical nuclear weapons. According to the April 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR):

The presence of U.S. nuclear weapons – combined with NATO's unique nuclear sharing arrangements under which non-nuclear members participate in nuclear planning and possess specially configured aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons – contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners who feel exposed to regional threats . . . Any changes in NATO's nuclear posture should only be taken after a thorough review within – and decision by – the Alliance.⁷

³ "House Rejects Efforts to Lift Arms Embargo," The Associated Press, 25 July 1975.

⁴ Sinan Ülgen, "NATO and the New Turkey," *Project Syndicate*, 14 June 2011, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ulgen1/English>.

⁵ "Strategic Concept For the Defense and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

⁶ "Obama Prague Speech On Nuclear Weapons: Full Text," *The Huffington Post*, 6 May 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html.

⁷ Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010 pp xii - xiii. Available at <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>.

Echoing the latest NPR, Turkish officials have indicated that they would not block an alliance wide consensus on the removal of American nuclear weapons.⁸ However, the Alliance's decision to condition tactical nuclear weapon cuts on similar Russian reductions makes unlikely the prospect of a rapid withdrawal.

Turkey's Political Weapons: The Air Force's Disputed Nuclear Status

Despite its pro-nuclear stance, Turkey's nuclear preparedness has suffered since the end of the Cold War. Turkey is home to an estimated 60-70 B-61 gravity bombs at Incirlik air force base. According to Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, 50 bombs are slated for delivery by U.S. aircraft, but do to basing restrictions American dual capable aircraft (DCA) are not stationed permanently in Turkey. If the order were given for the release of NATO nuclear weapons, American aircraft would first have to be flown to Incirlik from another European base and armed before finally flying on to their targets.⁹

The other bombs are reserved for delivery by Turkish dual capable F-16s. However, there are conflicting reports about the status of Turkey's nuclear fighter-bombers. According to General Ergin Celasin (ret.), the former Commander of the Turkish Air Force, "The Turkish air force's role in NATO's nuclear contingency plans came to an end with the withdrawal of nuclear weapons in the 1990s from the Air Force units that were deployed in several air bases in Turkey."¹⁰ However, Norris and Kristensen cite Pentagon sources who say that Turkey's current fleet of nuclear capable F-16s are receiving a "stop gap" modification to carry the B-61-12.¹¹

Reports indicate that Turkey's nuclear capable combat aircraft no longer train for nuclear missions. In the past, the air force's dual capable aircraft trained for nuclear missions and were certified to carry out nuclear strikes.¹² Turkish aircraft reportedly now only train as non-nuclear escort aircraft for NATO's nuclear fighter wings.¹³ However, NATO has made clear that it does not foresee any scenario that would require the rapid use of nuclear weapons, which raises a number of unanswered questions about Turkey's current nuclear posture. In any future scenario that might call for the use of nuclear weapons, the return of American DCAs and the re-certification of Turkish DCAs would likely be an important signal to a potential adversary.

⁸ Susi Snyder and William van der Zeijden, "Withdrawal Issues: What NATO countries say about the future of tactical nuclear weapon in Europe," IKV PAX Christi, March 2011, <http://www.nonukes.nl/media/files/withdrawal-issues-report-nospread.pdf>.

⁹ Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, "US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2011," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 6 January 2012, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/67/1/64.full.pdf+html>.

¹⁰ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey and shared responsibilities," In: Sagan S et al. Shared "Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament: A Global Debate," American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 24-27, iisdb.stanford.edu/pubs/22905/GlobalDebate.pdf.

¹¹ Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, "US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2011," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 6 January 2012, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/67/1/64.full#xref-ref-9-1>.

¹² Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, "US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 2011," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 6 January 2012, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/67/1/64.full#xref-ref-9-1>.

¹³ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey, NATO & and Nuclear Sharing: Prospects after NATO's Lisbon Summit," British American Security Information Council, Nuclear Policy Paper No. 5, April 2011, http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/Nuclear_Policy_Paper_No5.pdf.

Withdrawal Politics: Domestic Debate Ignores Nuclear Weapons

Ankara's nuclear decision making is made easier by the non-politicization of the nuclear issue. Turkey does not have a strong anti-nuclear movement and the Green political movement is politically insignificant.¹⁴ While there remains low-level political opposition to nuclear power - owing mostly to Turkey's experience in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident¹⁵ - the anti-nuclear movement has not carried over to the tactical nuclear weapons debate.

While awareness about American nuclear weapons in Turkey has increased, their presence has not become a political liability for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). In addition, Turkey is also not facing an imminent decision on its dual capable aircraft. Turkey's F-16s do not have to be renewed until the mid 2030s. Ankara has indicated that it intends to buy 100 F-35 joint strike fighters,¹⁶ which will be capable of carrying the current B-61 mod and the future B-61-12.

The current political realities have spared Turkish policymakers from large scale and politically consequential protests calling for the removal of nuclear weapons. The government, therefore, does not have to account for a strong anti-nuclear movement when making policy. This has led to a general lack of coverage about nuclear issues in the Turkish press and little awareness about arms control and disarmament. External issues relating to the forward deployment of nuclear weapons, like the American Life Extension Program and growing calls for tactical nuclear weapons withdrawal are not widely discussed or covered in the local media.

Mixed Messages: NATO's Future Nuclear Weapons and AKP Foreign Policy

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) are currently studying the military's previous proposals to refurbish the B-61 arsenal. The aim of the Life Extension Program (LEP) is to replace aging components of American nuclear weapons, so as to ensure their continued reliability and safety. The U.S. maintains that the LEP program "will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities . . . [and] will use only nuclear components based on previously tested designs."¹⁷

According to Kristensen and Norris, the United States is estimated to have 760 tactical nuclear weapons, made up of 200 active B-61s stationed in Europe, 300 inactive B-61s in storage in the United States, and 260 W-80 warheads that are currently in the process of being retired for the U.S. Navy's Tomahawk cruise missiles.¹⁸ The 500 B-61s consist of five different weapons designs

¹⁴ See "The Security Dimension of Turkey's Nuclear Program: Nuclear Diplomacy and Non Proliferation Policies", in the "Turkish Model for the Transition to Nuclear Power", Ekonomi ve Dis Politika Arastirma Merkezi (EDAM), 9 December 2011,

http://www.edam.org.tr/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=133&Itemid=220

¹⁵ Isil Egrikavuk, "Chernobyl still haunts Turkey's Black Sea coast," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 18 March 2011. "Turkish anti-nuke protesters take to streets for Chernobyl anniversary," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 27 April 2011.

¹⁶ "Turkey keeps plan to buy 100 F-35 fighter jets," Reuters, 23 February 2012.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁸ Hans Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "US Nuclear Forces, 2012," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, May/June 2012, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/68/3/84.full>.

(mods) - the B-61 3, 4, 7, and 10. The NNSA is planning to consolidate all of the previous mods into a new mod dubbed the B-61-12. The DOD and the NNSA plan to begin re-deploying the newly modified B-61-12 in Europe in 2018.

The new bomb will have a smaller yield, but also an enhanced guidance tail kit to make it more accurate.¹⁹ According to a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, "The new bomb tail section is estimated to cost \$800 million and is designed to increase accuracy, enabling the military to achieve the same effects as the older bomb, but with a lower nuclear yield."²⁰ The weapons' current accuracy is unknown, but the new tail kit is expected to be very similar to that of the Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM), according to Kristensen.²¹

The refurbished weapon's explosive package will be based on the B-61-4, which has a dial a yield capability ranging from .3, 1.3, 10 and 50 kilotons.²² The upgraded guidance kit will allow it to perform the same missions as the B-61-7, which has a yield between 10 and 360 kilotons. Representatives from the United States and NATO agreed on the military characteristics of the soon to be refurbished B-61-12 in April 2010.

Discussion about the B-61 life extension program coincided with the promotion of a new foreign policy aimed at lessening tensions with Turkey's numerous neighbors. Known collectively as "zero problems", Ankara's foreign policy centers on balancing Turkey's relations with the West and its regional allies. The principle aim is to lessen regional tensions, which will enhance security and help create the conditions for more Turkish exports.

Iran has been one focal point of Turkey's foreign policy outreach. Generally, Ankara has worked to facilitate the nuclear talks between the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the security council and Germany) and the Islamic Republic. Turkey seeks to exploit its close relationship with Washington and Tehran to help overcome the current diplomatic stalemate. A critical component of Turkey's robust diplomatic outreach to the Islamic Republic has been its sturdy diplomatic defense of Iran's right to peaceful enrichment. This has been paired with the promotion of an inclusive foreign policy approach, rather than the coercive approach favored by most in Washington. The Turkish approach includes an aversion to American and Europe unilateral sanctions, as well as the promotion of a Middle East nuclear weapons free zone.

¹⁹ "Nuclear Weapons: DOD and NNSA Need to Better Manage Scope of Future Refurbishments and Risks to Maintaining U.S. Commitments to NATO," Report to Congressional Requesters, Government Accountability Office, May 2011, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11387.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ According to the U.S. Air Force, "In its most accurate mode, the JDAM system will provide a weapon circular error probable of 5 meters or less during free flight when GPS data is available. If GPS data is denied, the JDAM will achieve a 30-meter CEP or less for free flight times up to 100 seconds with a GPS quality handoff from the aircraft,"

"U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet, Joint Direct Attack Munitions GBU- 31/32/38," Department of the Air Force, http://www.af.mil/information/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsid=108&page=1.

Hans Kristensen, "B61 LEP: Increasing NATO Nuclear Capability and Precision Low-Yield Strikes," Federation of American Scientists Issue Brief, June 2011, http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/publications1/IssueBrief_B61-12.pdf.

²² Hans Kristensen, "B61 LEP: Increasing NATO Nuclear Capability and Precision Low-Yield Strikes," Federation of American Scientists Issue Brief, June 2011, http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/publications1/IssueBrief_B61-12.pdf

While the yield of the upgraded B-61-12 will be smaller than the current B-61-4 mod deployed in Europe, the refurbishment and increased accuracy arguably augments the capabilities of the current weapon. The combination of greater accuracy, with the stealthy F-35 could potentially be destabilizing. This would contradict the tenets of the AKP's current foreign policy approach. As a member of NATO, keen on being involved in the Alliance's security policy, Turkey has shown a consistent commitment to NATO tactical nuclear weapons. On the one hand, Ankara remains committed to the peaceful resolution of the Iran nuclear issue, but on the other it supports the introduction of more accurate, and arguably more usable, nuclear weapons on its territory. These two policy positions appear to be at odds with one another. Thus far, Ankara has not adequately explained the apparent discrepancies in its policies.

Generally, the support for the program reflects Turkey's approach to the NATO alliance and its burden sharing commitment. From the Turkish perspective, LEP is a necessary function to ensure the reliability of the Alliance's nuclear deterrent. The presence of the B-61-12 will continue to serve as a political symbol of the American commitment to Turkish defense. However, little if any attention is being paid to the message the development of more capable nuclear weapons sends to would be proliferators and Turkey's neighbors.

Prospects for the Future: Turkey and the Future of NATO Nukes in Europe

Despite the current plans to refurbish the B-61 and to begin re-deploying the new mod in 2018, there are signs that NATO's pro-withdrawal coalition has had a real impact on the drafting of the most recent Strategic Concept. The 2010 Strategic Concept is a marked shift from NATO's 1999 document. The new concept says that the Alliance relies primarily on the strategic (long range) nuclear forces of the United States, France and Britain for deterrence and the protection of the Allies.²³ In contrast with earlier postures, the role of tactical nuclear weapons is left vague and open ended. The 2010 Strategic Concept, however, ties the future withdrawal of the American weapons from Europe to reciprocal reductions by the Russian Federation. According to the 2010 Strategic Concept, "with any future reductions, our aim should be to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on its nuclear weapons in Europe and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members. Any further steps must take into account the disparity with the greater Russian stockpiles of short-range [tactical] nuclear weapons." This language has allowed Turkey to lump its tactical nuclear weapons policy behind like-minded states within the Alliance, in order to prevent any quick decision on further consolidation or removal.

However, the new Strategic Concept's vague and open-ended role for tactical nuclear weapons could also be seen as a precursor for withdrawal. According to the 2010 Strategic Concept, NATO will "ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defense planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control and consultation arrangements."²⁴ The language does not mandate the permanent basing of American nuclear weapons in Europe and could be fulfilled by NATO's continued participation in Nuclear Planning Group.

²³ "Strategic Concept For the Defense and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

²⁴ "Strategic Concept For the Defense and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

It is possible that the fast approaching decisions on whether or not Germany and Belgium will replace their dual capable aircraft could expedite the removal of NATO nuclear weapons, or, at the very least, alter the current locations of the weapons. Germany, in particular, has not announced whether or not it will order a new generation of DCA. The general consensus is that once the Tornado aircraft (Germany's current DCA) is retired, the German air force's nuclear role will end. The DCA's were supposed to be retired by 2015 – 2018, but the German government has decided to maintain some aircraft until 2020.²⁵

Belgium is not a participant in the F-35 program and the government has not yet made a decision about whether or not it will procure a multi-role combat fighter once its current dual capable F-16s are retired in 2025.²⁶ The Netherlands, which was originally part of the F-35 program, has recently decided to cancel its investment. The Netherlands's current fleet of dual capable F-16s are slated for retirement in 2025. If the Dutch Parliament does not reverse its decision, or find an alternative DCA, the Dutch have no plans to deploy an aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons in the future.²⁷ NATO has not announced what they would do if these two countries were to insist on the removal of NATO nukes. In either, case Turkey and Italy should consider the political implication of being the only two countries hosting nuclear weapons and DCAs.

The 2012 NATO Chicago Summit: The Status Quo remains for now

At a May 2012 Conference in Chicago, the Alliance approved a study reaffirming the “nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defense posture.”²⁸ The Deterrence and Defense Posture Review reaffirms the presence of 200 tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. The document does task the Nuclear Planners Group to undertake studies to “develop concepts for how to ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned in their nuclear sharing arrangements, including in case NATO were to decide to reduce its reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe.”²⁹ However, the DDPR also reaffirmed the condition in the 2010 Strategic Concept that further NATO reductions will only take place if Russia is prepared to take similar steps. According to the DDPR document, “NATO is prepared to consider further reducing its requirement for non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to the Alliance in the context of reciprocal steps by Russia . . .”³⁰

Essentially, the DDPR was a compromise between NATO's pro and anti-removal blocs. The DDPR echoed the broad tenets of the 2010 Strategic Concept and reaffirmed the current nuclear status quo. However, it did take a tentative first step to begin internal discussions about the

²⁵ George Perkovich, Malcolm Chalmers, Steven Pifer, Paul Schulte, and Jaclyn Tandler, “Looking Beyond the Chicago Summit: Nuclear Weapons in Europe and the Future of NATO,” The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2012, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/beyond_chicago_summit.pdf.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Kingston Reif, “Dutch Parliament says no to F-35,” Nukes of Hazard Blog, Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, 9 July 2012, <http://nukesofhazardblog.com/story/2012/7/9/234925/4128>.

²⁸ Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 20 May 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-1D41DDB0-B87E01C8/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

future withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. However, the backdrop for these current studies is the ongoing B-61 LEP and the planned sale of F-35s to Italy and Turkey. These two actions are at odds with one another and contradict NATO's stated goal of working towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

Conclusion: Turkey kicks the nuclear can down the road

Turkey is not facing a concerted domestic or political effort to remove American tactical nuclear weapons from its territory. While some of NATO's nuclear states have called for the removal of these weapons, Turkey's preference for their continued deployment has been shielded by the combined objections of the Baltic NATO countries, Italy and, most importantly, the United States. Turkey has indicated that it would not stand in the way of an Alliance wide consensus on the weapon's removal, but the tying of the issue to reciprocal Russian tactical weapons limits seems to preclude a quick resolution to this issue. In tandem, the Turkish government is not facing the same political action by constituencies intent on making the presence of nuclear weapons an election issue.

While Turkey's own state of nuclear readiness has declined considerably since the height of the Cold War, its commitment to the maintenance of tactical nuclear weapons on its territory remains steadfast. Turkey is committed to the preservation of NATO's nuclear status as part of a larger effort to ensure the maintenance of the American security commitment to Turkish defense. Turkey's commitment to NATO remaining a nuclear alliance has outweighed Ankara's nuclear free rhetoric. Ankara's actions to date suggest that the leadership is comfortable with the nuclear status quo and its commitment to putting in place the infrastructure to continue its nuclear role for the foreseeable future.