

# Erdogan Holding 50 US Tactical Nukes ‘Hostage’ as Trump Authorizes Sanctions

By [Zero Hedge](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

*Amid all the media and pundit outrage since Turkey’s President Erdogan launched his so-called ‘Operation Peace Spring’ into northeast Syria last week, vowing to wipe out Syrian Kurdish forces who’ve long held the border areas, what’s been largely missing is acknowledgement of the uncomfortable fact that NATO ally Turkey has long hosted a major portion of America’s nuclear Cold War-era arsenal [stored across Europe](#).*

And as Erdogan [threatens](#) to “open the doors and send 3.6 million migrants” to Europe while under increased international criticism for the rapidly rising civilian death toll in Syria, [The New York Times](#) reports the following bombshell Monday: some 50 US tactical nukes are “now essentially Erdogan’s hostages”.

The Times [cites](#) growing alarm by top State and Energy Dept. officials over what the publication likens as a “disastrous” and confusing break from US policy in northern Syria, given not only further expected destabilization in the region, but worsening and unpredictable ties with Erdogan’s Turkey, given Trump is now preparing to [sign into effect](#) severe sanctions with the aim of attempting to “limit” his military incursion.

According to [the report](#):

And over the weekend, State and Energy Department officials were quietly reviewing plans for evacuating roughly 50 tactical nuclear weapons that the United States had long stored, under American control, at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, about 250 miles from the Syrian border, according to two American officials.

Turkey is among a handful of European NATO allies which play host to the extensive US nuclear arsenal on European soil — a remnant and continuation of the historic Cold War build-up — when Washington was locked in battle to deter Soviet expansion in Europe, which also allowed US allies to not have to pursue their own nukes.

The further irony in all this is that Incirlik Air Base is precisely where during the opening years of the war in Syria, US intelligence and military officials teamed up with their Turkish counterparts to wage proxy war against Assad, which involved [fueling the jihadist insurgency](#) which birthed the very groups now slaughtering Syrian Kurds and Christians in the country’s northeast.

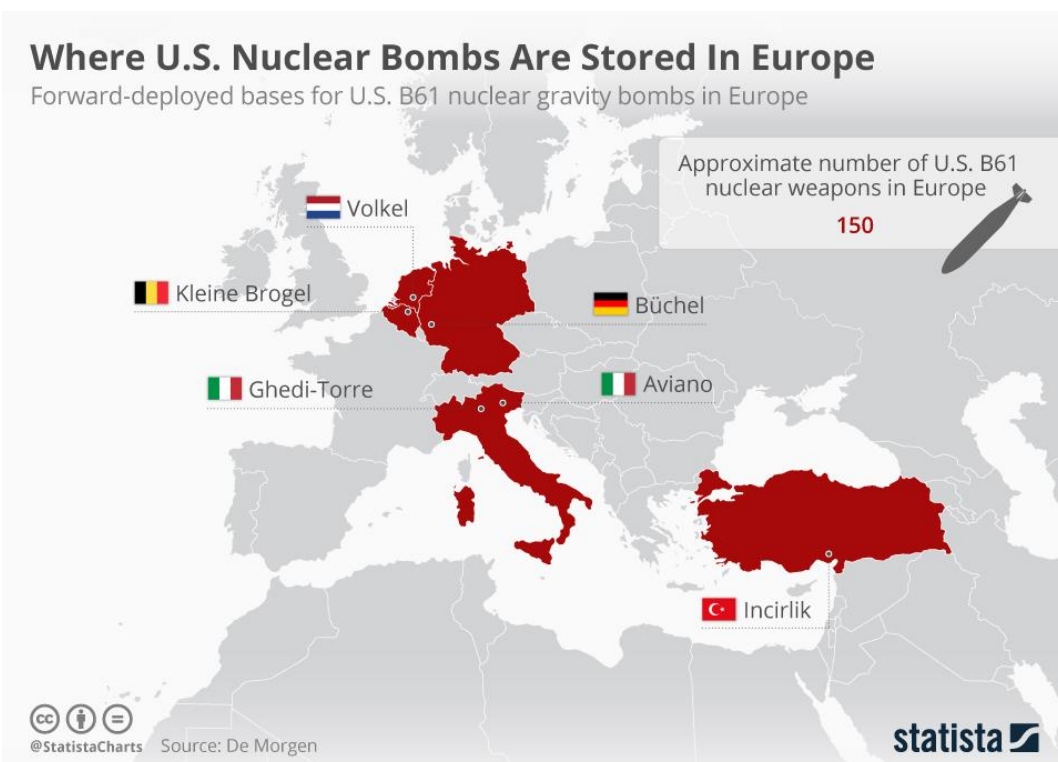


B61-12 guided nuclear bomb (Screengrab from a US Air Force video)

The NYT report [continues](#):

Those weapons, one senior official said, were now essentially Erdogan's hostages. To fly them out of Incirlik would be to mark the de facto end of the Turkish-American alliance. To keep them there, though, is to perpetuate a nuclear vulnerability that should have been eliminated years ago.

It's believed that across Europe the US has some 150 US nuclear weapons at various bases, "specifically B61 gravity bombs," according to a leaked NATO report which gained widespread media coverage [earlier this year](#).



[Via Statista](#): “The B61 is a low to intermediate-yield strategic and tactical thermonuclear gravity bomb which deatures a two-stage radiation implosion design. It is capable of being deployed on a range of aircraft such as the F-15E, F-16 and Tornado. It can be released at speeds up to Mach 2 and dropped as low as 50 feet where it features a 31 second delay to allow the delivery aircraft to escape the blast radius.”

After it appears US special forces stationed in the northern Syria town of Kobane came under Turkish artillery fire last Friday, Jeffrey Lewis of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies [observed](#), “I think this is a first — a country with U.S. nuclear weapons stationed in it literally firing artillery at US forces,” as cited in the *Times* report.

This also as Erdogan threatened last week, not for the first time: “Hey EU, wake up. I say it again: if you try to frame our operation there as an invasion, our task is simple: we will open the doors and send 3.6 million migrants to you,” [he said](#).

We [noted previously](#) how Erdogan is feeling emboldened vis-a-vis Europe, especially given the EU’s Monday decision not to impose a Europe-wide arms embargo at the urging of France and Germany, which one top Turkish official called “a joke”.

The fact is Erdogan has all the leverage, again in the form of millions or refugees he’s threatened to flood Europe’s borders with.

And now, add to this the ultimate leverage of hosting some 50 US/NATO tactical nukes. Erdogan will indeed hold these weapons “hostage” if it comes down to it.

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