

As NATO Summit Approaches: Will Biden Keep U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Turkey?

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A [piece was published in Turkey's Hürriyet on May 5](#) by its editor-in-chief Sedat Ergin analyzing the prospects of the Biden administration removing American nuclear bombs from Turkey.

It has been estimated that the Pentagon maintains 50 B61 tactical nuclear weapons at the Incirlik Air Base in the country [among an estimated 350 of those kept in Europe under the auspices of a NATO nuclear sharing or burden sharing arrangement](#). Both expressions are used. The other 300 bombs are reputed to be in Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Those in Turkey have the advantage of being closer to Russia and the Middle East. The Incirlik Air Base, in Adana, is not far from Turkey's border with Syria.

It was only in 2019 that an American official appeared to acknowledge the existence of the bombs. In a meeting in the Oval Office with the president of Italy President Donald Trump was asked by a reporter if he was concerned about the “as many as 50 nuclear weapons at Incirlik Air Base,” at a time when Turkey had launched a major military incursion into Syria and backed anti-government rebel groups in conflict with those supported by military forces of the U.S. in the country. Neither country had, or now has, any right to station troops in the sovereign nation of Syria.

Trump answered obliquely - “We’re confident. We have a great air base there, a very powerful air base.” - but didn’t deny the assertion.

Because of the adamant opposition of Washington, then and now, to Ankara purchasing S-400 anti-aircraft weapons from Russia, and with President Biden recently using the word genocide in regard to Turkey’s treatment of Armenians during World War I, many observers, including the author of the article mentioned above, are musing over whether Washington will keep its nuclear weapons in Turkey.

By way of background, the arrangement with NATO to base the B61s in European nations also contains the proviso that they can be loaded onto and delivered by host countries’ bombers. That is in flagrant violation of the [first two articles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which read:](#)

Article I

*Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes **not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly**; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear-weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices.*

Article II

*Each **non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer from any transferor whatsoever of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly**; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.*

Yet the U.S. continues to maintain theater nuclear weapons in five European nations under a mandate from NATO.

At the NATO summit in Brussels next month the thirty-nation military bloc will deliberate on a new Strategic Concept to replace that adopted at the Lisbon summit in 2010. [Section 16 of the current version states](#) that “The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.” The article is a collective military assistance clause. Section 17 follows that up with: “Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.”

The last sentence is a standard one and was [employed recently in a video issued by NATO](#) ahead of this year’s summit.

Section 18 affirms: “The supreme guarantee of the *security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States*; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.”

In addition to the estimated 350 American tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, France has 300 of its own nuclear bombs and Britain has recently pledged to increase its stockpile to 280, for a total of 930. The British and French weapons are not covered by any treaty honored by the U.S. and Russia.

Section 19 of the current NATO Strategic Concept says:

“We will ensure that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of our populations. Therefore, we will:

- *maintain an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces;*

- maintain the ability to sustain concurrent major joint operations and several smaller operations for collective defence and crisis response, including at strategic distance;
- develop and maintain robust, mobile and deployable conventional forces to carry out both our Article 5 responsibilities and the Alliance's expeditionary operations, including with the NATO Response Force....

The [statement released by NATO at its last summit in Brussels in 2018](#), reaffirms the above principles that 1) NATO will collectively support any member or members that seeks its assistance in time of armed conflict. 2) That it will deploy expeditionary, including strike, forces anywhere in the world it chooses to, and 3) It will use nuclear weapons when and where it sees fit.

The 2010 summit statement lists the following items, in many ways duplicating the relevant parts of the Strategic Concept:

*"The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. **No one should doubt NATO's resolve if the security of any of its members were to be threatened.** Faced with a highly diverse, complex, and demanding international security environment, NATO is determined to maintain the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of our populations, wherever it should arise.*

*"...credible deterrence and defence is essential and will continue to be based on **an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defence capabilities.***

*"**As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.** The strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of Allies. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance....**NATO's nuclear deterrence posture also relies on United States' nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe and the capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned.** National contributions of dual-capable aircraft to NATO's nuclear deterrence mission remain central to this effort. Supporting contributions by Allies concerned to ensure the **broadest possible participation in the agreed nuclear burden-sharing arrangements** further enhance this mission. Allies concerned will continue to take steps to ensure sustained leadership focus and institutional excellence for the nuclear deterrence mission, coherence between conventional and nuclear components of NATO's deterrence and defence posture, and effective strategic communications."*

Any nation or nations that could find themselves embroiled in a dispute with a NATO member state have been served notice that they may well be on the receiving end of a nuclear attack. Nothing less. NATO reserves the right to use nuclear arms for not only deterrent effect but for actual warfighting purposes and would do so with American bombs stationed on the territory of European countries that are not signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - in open breach of that treaty.

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The Turkish columnist, after reflecting on a 2019 comment by Joe Biden that he was “worried” about U.S. nuclear bombs in Turkey, indicates that Biden’s foreign policy priority of strengthening transatlantic – which is to say NATO and European Union – ties will override concerns about Turkey, hence American nuclear weapons will remain in the nation.

He quotes from the Brussels summit statement of three years ago concerning U.S. nuclear weapons based in Europe being the main deterrent to – let’s be honest – Russian actions.

In that context the author states of the Turkish air base where Washington keeps its nuclear bombs:

“Without a doubt, Incirlik has a very essential place in the infrastructure provided to the U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. By allowing the possession of U.S. nuclear weapons in Incirlik and becoming the host to these weapons, Turkey has assumed a significant role in NATO’s nuclear deterrence. In this respect, Incirlik forms one of the most critical pillars of NATO’s nuclear umbrella under current conditions. Of course, the proximity of this base to not only Russia but also to the Middle East is undoubtedly a factor that needs to be taken into account.”

That is, Turkey, because of its location as much as any other factor, remains too critical to U.S. and NATO war plans relating to Russia and nations like Syria and Iran to in any manner weaken the strategic relations between the two countries.

Biden and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are likely to confirm that continuing relationship next month in Brussels. The summit statement and the new Strategic Concept will both reaffirm NATO as a nuclear alliance, one that reserves the right to use nuclear weapons for defensive, and not only defensive, purposes.

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