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US NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN TURKEY: YANKEE GO HOME?

The end of the Cold War raised hopes that the world would soon be rid of the menace of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. However, this mood did not last long. Towards the late 1990s the momentum of progress somehow has slowed down. Yet, in spite of all the setbacks and obstacles that the world has gone through, there are still chances to promote nuclear nonproliferation and other arms control regime with a view to reducing the risk of use of nuclear weapons by states or non-state armed groups (i.e., terrorist organizations).

In this respect, in a departure from its traditional foreign and security policy behavior, Turkey can be an important player in strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime by drawing down the U.S. nuclear weapons that have been deployed in its territory for decades. This step may demonstrate that Turkey indeed shares key security concerns of its Middle Eastern neighbors and this policy could provide Turkey the necessary building blocs for convincing these countries to eventually form a nuclear weapons-free-zone in the Middle East.

With these in mind, this paper aims to discuss the role that the U.S. nuclear weapons have played in the security of the European allies within the context of the North Atlantic alliance during the Cold War years, and why this role needs to be terminated. Then, there will be a discussion about the reasons why Turkish officials would be reluctant to send back these nuclear weapons and why, on the contrary, the U.S. nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from Turkey's territory.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The bipolar system has long come to an end and the rivalry between the two superpowers has ended. There are new challenges facing the international community of nations such as the presence of the non-state actors, namely the religiously motivated terrorist organizations, against whom traditional notions of nuclear deterrence are meaningless, are known to be in the pursuit of nuclear as well as other weapons of mass destruction.¹

Today, nuclear weapons are no longer essential to maintain international security as a means of deterrence as it was during the Cold War years. For the purpose of deterrence nuclear weapons have become «increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective» according to a number of distinguished figures who have been active in the United States as well as world politics, such as George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn.² Deterrence is not what it used to be and there are several reasons why reliance in nuclear weapons for the purpose of deterrence is an illusion in today's security environment. First and foremost, there is hard evidence that the terrorists are willing to acquire a nuclear weapon be it a dirty bomb or a crude nuclear weapon to conduct a nuclear attack.³ Yet, unlike the states, terrorists will probably not be deterred by the threat of use of nuclear weapons. Second, perfect safety and



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security of these weapons can never be assured even though they are well protected. Third, the size of U.S. nuclear forces in Europe remains to be a justification for Russia to maintain similar nuclear weapons and those weapons are reportedly less well protected against any terrorist threat. The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, signed between Russia and the United States in 1992, has made some progress in safeguarding nuclear weapons in Russia; however, there is still work to be done. Last but not least, the deterrence that relies on large numbers of deployment of nuclear weapons may provide an incentive for other countries to proliferate.⁴

The world has changed dramatically but have the military strategies been adapted to these changes? Now that the threat which brought about the need for deployment of the U.S. nuclear weapons in the allies countries is gone are they still needed in Europe? It would be wise to question whether basing theater nuclear weapons in Europe would be a useful or relevant strategy for maintaining security in Europe in the current security environment.

Many non-proliferation and arms control experts argue that the U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe not only enhance (rather than to deter) proliferation, but also undermine the fundamental premises of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Some even go further to argue that the nuclear sharing arrangement in NATO was de facto proliferation. British American Security Information Council reported that more than 100 countries have expressed concern that the NATO members, especially Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey were themselves nuclear proliferators.⁵ The continued reliance of these countries on the presence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in their territory for exerting more political power in their relations with other countries, in turn, is argued to have limited the success of confidence and security building measures that were designed to accelerate cooperation in area of nuclear nonproliferation as well as other regional arms control and disarmament agreements.

As such, there seems to be two policy options for the countries that deploy the U.S. nuclear weapons in their territories. The first option may be to maintain the status quo while the second option would be to adapt to the current security environment and send back the U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe.

According to a comprehensive study published by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in 2005 based on declassified documents obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, military literature, the media, non-governmental organizations, and other sources there are 480 American tactical nuclear weapons stored at eight air bases in six NATO countries. According to the study there are total of 90 tactical nuclear weapons (all of which are B61-type gravity bombs) deployed in Turkey's Incirlik base near Adana where U.S. bomber aircrafts are also stationed.⁶

The NRDC study concludes that the continuing presence of these weapons irritates relations with Russia, undermines global efforts to dissuade other nations from developing nuclear weapons, and impedes NATO's post-Cold War evolution.⁷

It is no secret that economic interdependence and institutional arrangements tie the United States and Europe together. These nuclear weapons just have a symbolic meaning for Europe and Washington. Irrespective of the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in their territory or not, non-nuclear NATO members will continue to participate in nuclear policy decision-making through the political mechanisms in the Nuclear Planning Group as has been the case for members such as Norway that have never accepted nuclear weapons to be deployed in their soil.⁸

Deploying these weapons may also seem irrelevant because of the «nuclear taboo» which has somehow survived quite difficult and critical episodes in the contemporary history. The decision to employ these weapons would create a huge and negative impact on the public opinion. Any rational leader would definitely hesitate to make such a decision.

Moreover, NATO's continued reliance on these weapons created obstacles for NATO and Russia to pursue a security relationship based on partnership and cooperation. William Potter

and Nikolai Sokov have quite wisely argued that a U.S. initiative could indeed dispel some of Russian fears about NATO and could «revive the spirit» of the early 1990s. Authors accordingly argued that the U.S. nuclear presence in Europe was seen as a reminder of the Cold War, and that this policy is nothing but a «roadblock to cooperation» between the US and Russia.⁹

Against this background, conventional deterrence may be more effective in addressing today's challenges. Collaboration in the field of conventional deterrence may be increased between Europe and the United States. In fact, it is well known that today the United States has absolute superiority in conventional weapons technology, too. During the Cold War the U.S. nuclear weapons were deployed in Europe because the Soviet Union's conventional weapons far outnumbered the conventional capabilities of the North Atlantic Alliance. However, the second-strike capabilities of the superpowers during the Cold War years have made it impossible for one of the superpowers to launch a surprise attack on the other with a view to disarming the enemy. In the light of these facts, there seems to be no need for deploying nuclear weapons to pursue a first-use strategy anymore.

TURKEY AND AMERICAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Both Ankara and Washington need to accept that the world has fundamentally changed. Although troubling as it may seem, this shift could be an opportunity for Ankara to seize the moment and to show Turkey is an important regional player by sending back U.S. nukes.

Turkey has indeed taken part in many of the arms control and disarmament agreements. First, Turkey signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on January 28, 1969 and ratified it on April 17, 1980.¹⁰ Second, Turkey also became part of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention and ratified it in November 1974. Third, Turkey signed the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention and ratified it in April 1997. Fourth, she became a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2000. Fifth, it has taken a positive stance toward the Zangger Committee and became one of its members. Sixth, Turkey also became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in April 1997. Last but not least, Turkey signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. Turkey not only contributed to the international efforts to strengthen the nonproliferation regime but also participated actively in the process of enhancing the IAEA's verification system. Turkey did not resist signing the Additional Protocol that was a result of IAEA efforts which was called the «Program 93-2» and this document was ratified in July 2000.

It is now the time for Turkey to take the lead and to become a model to the international community on its efforts to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime. If Turkey decides to withdraw U.S. nuclear weapons from its soil, this would be a significant disarmament step. Withdrawal would increase Turkey's credibility and enhance international effort to stop nuclear proliferation. On the other hand, if Turkey can send back the U.S. nuclear bombs, then this policy would demonstrate that Ankara was serious about addressing its neighbors' key security concerns. These measures could, in turn, provide the building blocks for an eventual nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Such a decision could also become the cornerstone of a lasting transformation of the Middle East, thereby leading to a global effort to make the world a safer place to live.

Turkish officials prefer to keep deploying the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in the Turkish territory because they consider them to be more as political weapons.¹¹ They want Turkey to remain in the Western alliance – be it the United States or the European allies of NATO.

It is believed that the bond between the United States and Turkey was strengthened with the deployment of the tactical nuclear weapons. It is also true that the bonds were strained during and after the crisis in Iraq in late 2002 and neither of the parties got what they wanted.¹² Hence, Turkish officials might assume that withdrawing the American nuclear weapons at a delicate period could further weaken the wounded bonds between Turkey and the United States. It is also feared by the Turkish officials that, in due course, the isolationist view and the advocates



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of disengagement may have the upper hand in the American domestic politics. Should this be the case then there may be further deterioration in transatlantic relations.

Turkish officials also see the deployment of these weapons as part of the 'burden sharing' principle within the NATO alliance, which was one of the reasons why they were deployed in Europe during the Cold War. They would like the others to keep on sharing the burden as they used to during the Cold War so that they will not stand out as the only country in NATO that retains the U.S. nuclear weapons on its soil. Turkish officials, moreover, point out their concern that Washington may have secretly developed a new weapons system that may not necessitate overseas deployment which may threaten Turkey's security.¹³ In this case the Turkish officials fear that the solidarity principle may be seriously hurt and NATO may lose its spirit.

At the same time, there are many arguments against further deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons on the Turkish territory. Apart from their irrelevance to the current and possibly future security concerns of most nations, deploying nuclear weapons for the sake of achieving deterrence may bring with it trouble and may have unprecedented consequences to the environment as well, regardless of whether they are used deliberately or accidentally, which is most of the time ignored by military officials.¹⁴

The so-called second-strike capabilities of the United States and the Soviet Union made it impossible for either of the parties to launch a surprise attack so as to destroy and disarm the other. But deterrence has also lost its significance because the Soviet Union is, literally, gone and there is absence of threat of military conflict with any powerful nuclear armed nation. Instead there are new challenges such as terrorists who seek nuclear arms, and these new realities of the current strategic environment needs to be faced and can no longer be ignored by any rational actor. The superpower rivalry during the Cold War cannot be used as a pretext for keeping the nuclear weapons.

It is too dangerous to keep nuclear weapons as a symbol of prestige or national pride because whether one acknowledges it or not there are non-state actors that are willing and possibly able to build dirty bombs or crude nuclear devices that can hurt everyone and cause terror worldwide. To avoid a nuclear catastrophe in the hand of the transnational terrorist organizations every nation must timely start thinking of how to get rid of the remaining nuclear weapons.

Just like Turkey, the United States also has a few policy factors advocating the need for withdrawal. First in 1994 and then in 1999 the Clinton administration in the United States drafted plans to withdraw the tactical nuclear weapons from Europe with the anticipation that the world was changing. Nevertheless, they failed to implement the plan due to the resistance from the majority of the European NATO allies.¹⁵ One could also argue that there were some signs that the U.S. nuclear weapons deployment in Europe was simply allowed to wither away through what may be called a «benign neglect».¹⁶

That said, if the Democrats win the presidential elections in the United States in 2008, then similar policies may once again come to the forefront. Yet, this time the Democrats may be more willing to pursue the policy to draw down the U.S. nukes deployed in allied countries for the sake of strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime and other arms control and disarmament agreements, which have lived quite a number of setbacks. The progress that was set forth in these fields throughout most of the 1990s when Democrats were in power in the United States has lost momentum and slowed down, then turned from optimism to frustration and pessimism during the tenure of a Republican president. Therefore, a major effort is needed by Washington to produce a positive outcome through concrete steps.

Another argument in favor is that since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the prevailing view among the American security experts is that retaining tactical nuclear weapons overseas would be highly dangerous because they simply increase the probability of theft and the use by terrorists. Taking tighter measures to safeguard the nuclear and radiological material would probably not be enough and, hence, much bolder steps would have to be taken. One of the first measures would be to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation

regime – states could sign up for drawing down the remaining U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in NATO allies including Turkey.

CONCLUSION

If Turkey chooses to maintain the status quo and follow this policy option then these weapons will continue to increase the risk of proliferation. This policy course may be criticized by Turkey's neighbors, such as Iran, as being incompatible with the NPT norms and principles. Moreover, if a Democrat administration in the United States (which is likely to take over from the Republicans in the next elections) decides to take these weapons back from Turkey, the latter will lose its chance to demonstrate independent policy and play an effective role as a regional player.

Turkey cannot continue to rely on nuclear weapons as a cornerstone of its relations with Washington and the transatlantic community as well as its national pride. Turkish officials being aware of the transformations in international security environment should adapt to structural changes in the world more rapidly.

As former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara has once stated, he has never seen «a piece of paper that outlined a plan for the U.S. or NATO to initiate the use of nuclear weapons with any benefit for U.S. or NATO».¹⁷ Thus, it must be the time to address several hurdles such as the political prestige accruing to nations that possess these weapons and the belief that the possession of nuclear weapons will enhance their national security. The finite zero-sum game of having nuclear weapons on one's territory needs to be replaced by an infinite win-win game of global cooperative security.

Note

¹ James Doyle, «U.S. National Security and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century», *Proliferation Analysis*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 23, 2007.

² George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, «A World Free of Nuclear Weapons», *Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 2007, p. 1.

³ Matthew Bunn, Anthony Wier, *Securing the Bomb, Nuclear Threat Initiative*, Washington D.C., 2006, pp. 10–11.

⁴ James Doyle, «U.S. National Security»; George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, «A World Free of Nuclear Weapons».

⁵ Brain Polser, «Theater Nuclear Weapons in Europe: The Contemporary Debate», *Strategic Insights*, Vol. III, Issue 9 (September 2004), p. 4.

⁶ Hans M. Kristensen, *US Nuclear Weapons in Europe: A Review of Post-Cold War Policy, Force Levels, and War Planning*, Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005, p. 8.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Brain Polser, «Theater Nuclear Weapons», p. 3.

⁹ William C. Potter, «Practical Steps for Addressing the Problem of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons,» in Jeffrey A. Larsen and Kurt J. Klingenberger, eds., *Controlling Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons: Obstacles and Opportunities*, USAF Institute for National Security Studies (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2001), p. 218.

¹⁰ Turkey's rather late ratification of the NPT may raise the question of whether Turkish politicians wanted to keep the nuclear option open. The conventional wisdom suggests that this is unlikely. However, the traditional influence of the military on matters relating to national security was probably a factor that delayed ratification. During the 1970s, there was a growing interest in nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in neighboring countries like Iran, Iraq, and Syria. At that time the Turkish military might not have wanted to give the impression, by means of a hasty ratification, that Turkey would definitely forgo the



nuclear option. Although they had no real nuclear intention, Turkish officials wished to leave the issue ambiguous as a deterrent against regional rivals and enemies.

¹¹ Mustafa Kibaroglu, «Isn't it time to say Farewell to Nuke's in Turkey?», *European Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (December 2005), p. 449.

¹² Mustafa Kibaroglu, «Turkey Says No», *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (July-August 2003) p. 22. Also see Mustafa Kibaroglu, «Missing Bill Clinton», *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (March-April 2004), pp. 30–32.

¹³ In the context of a research project on «Turkey and Nuclear Disarmament» carried out in Monterey, California back in February 1997, then Turkish Ambassador to Ottawa, Mr. Omer Ersun clearly stated to the author in a telephone interview that «NATO without the U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey would mean nothing to the Turks». See Mustafa Kibaroglu, «Turkey's Quest for Peaceful Nuclear Power,» *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring-Summer 1997), Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS), Monterey, California, pp. 33–44.

¹⁴ Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986); Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Nuclear Ethics* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Avner Cohen and Steven Lee (eds.), *Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Humanity* (New Jersey: Rowman & Allenheld Publishers, 1986); Marc A. Harvell and Thomas C. Hutchinson (eds.), *Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986); Eric R. Merc and Carl Walter (eds.), *Disposal of Weapons Plutonium: Approaches and Prospects* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996).

¹⁵ Martin A. Smith, «To Neither Use Them nor Lose Them: NATO and Nuclear Weapons since the Cold War», *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (December 2004), p. 528.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 536.

¹⁷ Robert McNamara, «Apocalypse Soon», *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2005), p.4.