

Turkey and Shared Responsibilities

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In his article, Scott Sagan outlines a new conceptual framework designed to encourage nuclear-weapons states (NWS) and non-nuclear-weapons states (NNWS) to share responsibilities for, *inter alia*, rethinking extended deterrence, with the goal of eventually eliminating nuclear weapons.¹ I fully support the framework that Sagan presents, and I believe that states must do their utmost to achieve such a noble objective by putting aside their misgivings about the effectiveness of the nuclear nonproliferation regime at the present time, even if this may require some states to make sacrifices.

Turkey is one such state. It has long been a staunch supporter of efforts to strengthen the nuclear, chemical, and biological nonproliferation regimes, having become party to virtually all of the formal and informal arrangements related to them. Turkey has not, however, shared the benefits of being loyal to the principles and norms of the nonproliferation regimes.

Turkey signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969 and ratified it in 1980. A safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for a 5 MW(th) research reactor constructed in Istanbul has been in place since 1981. Yet Turkey's plans for building nuclear power plants have been obstructed by its Western allies, fearful that Turkey would one day decide to weaponize its capabilities if it acquired the necessary nuclear technology and material. These fears stem from rumors regarding Turkey's close relations with Pakistan, especially in the early 1980s, when both countries were under military rule imposed by generals who had seized power in *coups d'état*.² Despite Turkey's return to democratic rule in the second half of the 1980s, fears lingered that Turkey might seek nuclear technology and materials that could be diverted to military purposes. In the 1990s, the West focused its concern on the former Soviet republics inhabited largely by Turkish-speaking peoples as the potential sources of this technology and nuclear material.

1. Scott D. Sagan, "Shared Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament," *Daedalus* 138 (4) (Fall 2009): 157–168.

2. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey's Quest for Peaceful Nuclear Power," *The Nonproliferation Review* 4 (3) (Spring-Summer 1997): 33–44.

Successive Turkish governments, including responsible figures in Turkey's military and diplomatic circles, have done nothing to warrant such concern. On the contrary, Turkey has sought to buttress international confidence in its peaceful nuclear intentions by demonstrating—especially vis-à-vis its Middle Eastern neighbors—how a responsible state should behave. In addition to signing and ratifying the Additional Protocol and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Turkey joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Australia Group, demonstrating its commitment to the effective control of the export of sensitive and dual-use material and technologies.

Turkey continues to view with great concern the security situation in the Middle East, which the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) until recently regarded as operationally “out of area.” Despite the “solidarity clause” in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty of 1949, which established NATO, Turkey feared that its European NATO allies would come to Turkey's aid only if Turkey were attacked by a country or countries in the Warsaw Pact.³ This perception underscored worries that the solidarity clause in Article 5 would not extend to an attack from one of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors, such as Syria or Iraq, both Soviet allies in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴

At the same time, Turkey has allowed U.S. nuclear weapons on Turkish soil since 1960, as part of NATO's policy of extended deterrence.⁵ This decision was initially taken at NATO's Paris summit in 1957. In addition to Jupiter missiles that have a range of 3,000 kilometers and a warhead yield of 1.5 megatons, which attracted much public attention due to the role they played in the resolution of the Cuban crisis in October 1962, beginning in the early 1960s, nuclear weapons under U.S. Air Force custody that could be delivered by F-100, F-104, and F-4 aircraft were also deployed from air bases in Eskisehir, Malatya (Erhac), Ankara (Murted), and Balikesir.⁶ On April 14, 1963, the U.S. Polaris submarine USS *Sam Houston* visited the Turkish port of Izmir in a display of NATO solidarity with Turkey and to demonstrate the alliance's commitment to extended nuclear deterrence.⁷

Believing that Turkey was safe from attack by countries in the Warsaw Pact, Turkish policy-makers focused their attention on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East. Acquisition of chemical, biological, and especially nuclear weapons by Turkey's immediate neighbors poses

3. Interview with General Çevik Bir (ret.), former Deputy Chief of Turkish General Staff, January 19, 2005, Istanbul.

4. Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey,” in *Europe and Nuclear Disarmament: Debates and Political Attitudes in 16 European Countries*, ed. Harald Müller (Brussels: European Interuniversity Press, 1998), 161–193.

5. Mustafa Kibaroglu, “La Turquie, les États-Unis, et l'OTAN: Une alliance dans l'Alliance,” *Questions Internationales* (12) (March–April 2005): 30–32.

6. Conversations with a retired top military commander who wished to remain anonymous, February 15, 2010, Ankara.

7. Ed Offley, *Scorpion Down, Sunk by the Soviet, Buried by the Pentagon: The Untold Story of USS Scorpion* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 195.

a significant threat to the country's security and stability. For this reason, during the Cold War, the Turkish government opposed Soviet proposals to create a Balkans nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ), which would have included Turkey. However, the Turkish government supported the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East (NWFZ/ME), provided that any agreement establishing this zone did not, by definition, include Turkey as part of the Middle East.

Turkish leaders, including President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Chiefs of the General Staff Generals Hilmi Ozkok, Yasar Buyukanit, and Ilker Basbug, have repeatedly stated that a lasting solution to WMD proliferation in the Middle East will require the creation of a NWFZ, which should eventually be expanded into a regional WMD-free zone.⁸

Recently Turkey has been seen as part of the Middle East because of its involvement in a number of regional political issues. Not only has Turkey acted as a mediator between Syria and Israel, but it has proposed to take on a similar function concerning the nuclear issue vis-à-vis Iran, Israel, and the United States. To be consistent with its policy of supporting a NWFZ/ME, Turkey will be expected to denuclearize its territory first. The Turkish government should therefore seek the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Turkey before other states in the region request that it do so. This decision should not be tied to, for instance, cuts in the tactical nuclear weapons in the Russian arsenal, as suggested in the *Briefing Note* published by the Center for European Reform.⁹

In general, Turkish officials attach greater political value to nuclear weapons than they do military value. They do not seriously contemplate contingencies where nuclear weapons could or even should be used. Yet some believe that U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey have a deterrent purpose.¹⁰

Uncertainty surrounding the political situation in Iraq, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and Iran's nuclear program, which is suspected of having weapons-development capabilities, make peace and stability in the Middle East and the adjacent regions appear elusive. Uncertainties regarding the full scope of Iran's nuclear capabilities and intentions further complicate Turkish threat assessments. Against this background, some Turkish officials believe that allowing U.S. nuclear weapons to remain in Turkey is sensible. Another reason centers on the nature and scope of U.S.-Turkish relations, which have suffered serious setbacks since the 2003 Iraq war. Some Turkish officials fear that withdrawal of

8. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "EURATOM & ABACC: Safeguard Models for the Middle East?" in *A Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East*, ed. Jan Prawitz and James F. Leonard (New York and Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1996), 93-123.

9. Franklin Miller, George Robertson, and Kori Schake, "Germany Opens Pandora's Box," *Briefing Note* (London: Center for European Reform, February 2010), 1-3.

10. Many Turkish government officials and military officers expressed these and similar views in not-for-attribution interviews and private conversations over a long period of time during the author's deliberations on these matters.

nuclear weapons could weaken Turkey's long-standing strategic alliance with the United States. Others view their presence as part of the "burden sharing" principle of NATO. Still others believe that Turkey and its other allies should host a symbolic number of U.S. nuclear weapons on their territory, so that Turkey is not the only NATO country other than the United States to permit U.S. nuclear weapons on its soil.¹¹

Despite powerful arguments to the contrary, the removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Turkey would strengthen the Turkish government's position vis-à-vis aspiring nuclear states in the region, improve the prospects of a NWFZ/ME, and be compatible with Turkey's long-standing efforts to stem proliferation. Such action from Turkey—a significant regional military power and a member of NATO—would signal to Iran, Israel, and the Arab states that nuclear weapons are no longer vital for maintaining security.¹² Moreover, according to General Ergin Celasin (ret.), a former commander of the Turkish Air Force (TUAF), nuclear weapons that reportedly remain in Turkey cannot be linked to the Turkish military. TUAF's role in NATO's nuclear contingency plans has come 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.¹³ General Celasin's words suggest that the Turkish Air Force no longer has a nuclear mission under NATO, which it had under the Cold War dual-key arrangements. This underscores that the U.S. nuclear deterrent on submarines or in the United States could just as easily continue to serve the limited extended deterrent function of protecting Turkey from the unlikely event of a Russian nuclear strike. Hence, the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Turkey and NATO's "first use" policy are no longer necessary.¹⁴

As a final note, if we ask Turkey to be ready to make sacrifices in order to share responsibilities even without sharing the benefits, the "holdouts"—India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan—must also be ready to act along the lines of both NWS and NNWS who are seeking to strike a balance between their rights and responsibilities. Without the involvement of these holdouts, nuclear disarmament cannot succeed.

11. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Isn't it Time to Say Farewell to US Nukes in Turkey?" *European Security* 14 (4) (December 2005): 443–457.

12. Mustafa Kibaroglu, "A Turkish Nuclear Turnaround," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 63 (6) (November-December 2007): 64.

13. Telephone interview with General Ergin Celasin (ret.), former Commander of the Turkish Air Force, February 15, 2010, Ankara.

14. For an explanation of how no-first-use would produce a more tailored and more credible form of extended deterrence, see Scott D. Sagan, "The Case for No First Use," *Survival* 51 (3) (June-July 2009): 163–182.