

European News Outlets Say U.S. Nukes Leaving Turkey

The European news outlet , quoting two independent sources, is reporting that U.S. nuclear weapons housed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey have been transferred to another NATO facility in Romania.

According to the report, the transfer is in part the result of the failed coup last month that resulted in power temporarily being shut off to the base. U.S. flights to and from the base were halted by Turkish officials, and the base commander—a Turkish Air Force officer—was arrested for being implicated in the coup plot.

But, EurActiv also reports relations between the U.S. and Turkey have been frayed, which also led the transfer.

The American weapons are being moved to the Deveselu air base in Romania, the source said. Deveselu, near the city of Caracal, is the new home of the U.S. missile shield, which has infuriated Russia.

Romania was an ally of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but it never hosted nuclear weapons during that period. Stationing tactical U.S. nuclear weapons close to Russia's borders is likely to infuriate Russia and lead to an escalation. The stationing of Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962 was the closest the Cold War came to escalating into a full-scale nuclear war.

The Romanian foreign ministry has denied the report. But, dating back to the Cold War, the presence of nuclear weapons—or lack thereof—in any European country has never been officially confirmed by U.S. or NATO officials. Military analysts who scrutinize public reports are only able to produce estimated numbers of weapons.

Incirlik was estimated to have up to 50 nuclear bombs of the B-61 variety. EurActiv reported on relations following the failed coup:

After the failed putsch, relations between Washington and Ankara are at their worst since Turkey joined NATO in 1952. Ankara believes the U.S. government supports the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, whom it accuses of having masterminded the failed coup. Turkey is demanding Gülen's extradition, and the issue is expected to take center stage when U.S. Vice President Joe Biden visits Turkey on August 24.

Arthur H. Hughes, a retired U.S. ambassador, wrote in EurActiv (August 17) that Gülen has indeed received considerable assistance from the CIA.

Friday evening, the Romanian government again refuted the EurActiv report. However, U.S. and NATO officials have neither confirmed nor denied its authenticity.