May 16, 2018

Dear Colleague:

Please join me in cosponsoring H.R. 5840, the Relocating U.S. Nuclear Weapons from Turkey Review Act of 2018, which requests a report from the U.S. Secretary of Defense within 90 days of enactment of this Act on recommended alternative European NATO bases to store U.S. nuclear assets in Turkey and a plan to relocate them within a year of enactment of this Act (or as soon as practicable).

Turkey is no longer a reliable close ally to the United States. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Republic of Turkey has become increasingly Islamist, authoritarian, and intolerant of press freedom and civil liberties.

Storing U.S. nuclear weapons in Turkey no longer makes sense. Under NATO nuclear sharing, the U.S. keeps around 180 B61 nuclear gravity bombs in Europe, including around 50 at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. The other five sites are in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy – each has capacity to store many more. During the attempted coup in Turkey, power to the Incirlik base was shut off, although the impact on the security of the B61s was unclear.

Turkey doesn’t even have aircraft for delivering them. They would if the United States foolishly sells F-35 aircraft to Turkey, as I have opposed. Turkey is deepening political, economic, and military ties to Russia and China, the two countries the F-35 is most needed to deter and, if necessary, counter.

U.S. or NATO aircraft would have to fly to Incirlik to pick them up. And if they would be used to stop Russian aggression, it is unclear if Turkey would let NATO aircraft land, load, or takeoff.

Outrageous behavior is the new normal for Turkey’s government.
- April 2017: Erdogan narrowly won referendum vastly expanding his powers as president.
- May 2017: Erdogan’s security forces brutally attacked peaceful protestors in Washington, DC.
- December 2017: Erdogan said, “The ones who made Jerusalem a dungeon for Muslims and members of other religions will never be able to clean the blood from their hands. With their decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the United States has become a partner in this bloodshed.”
- December 2017: Turkey signs agreement to buy four of Russia’s S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries, which are not interoperable with NATO assets.
- FreedomHouse ranks Turkey as “not free” and explains that the ruling party “has shown growing contempt for political rights and civil liberties in recent years.”
- February 2018: Erdogan threatened U.S. forces fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria, saying “It is obvious that those, who say they will 'give a sharp response' if they were hit, have not been hit by the Ottoman slap.”
- May 2018: Turkey recalls its ambassadors to the U.S. and Israel in protest of the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem and protests in Gaza.

Someday Turkey may be a reliable ally again. For now, however, U.S. nuclear weapons should be removed from Turkish soil. Erdogan’s recklessness cannot go unanswered. In addition, it isn’t safe or tactically useful to keep B61s at Incirlik instead of in other, more responsible NATO allies’ territories.

I hope you will support requiring a review and recommendations for moving U.S. B61s from Turkey to a more suitable location in NATO. Please contact Shayne Woods (shayne.woods@mail.house.gov) on my staff for more information or to cosponsor.

Sincerely,

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress