

Europe's Unofficial Nuclear Power. Dirty Little Secrets: Why Germany Won't Give Up Its Nukes

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Despite the end of the Cold War, and the dismantling of over 25,000 nuclear weapons, NATO still maintains a stock of nuclear bombs in Europe.

Global Research Editor's Note

Germany is a de Facto Nuclear Power. Among the five European "non-nuclear states" (Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy) "Germany remains the most heavily nuclearized country with three nuclear bases (two of which are fully operational) and may store as many as 150 [B61 bunker buster] bombs [with nuclear warheads]". In accordance with "NATO strike plans", these thermonuclear B61 bunker buster bombs (stockpiled by the "non-nuclear States") could be launched "against targets in Russia or countries in the Middle East such as Syria and Iran" (quoted in [National Resources Defense Council, Nuclear Weapons in Europe](#), February 2005)

While Germany is not officially a nuclear power, it produces nuclear warheads for the French Navy. It stockpiles nuclear warheads and it has the capabilities of delivering nuclear weapons. [The European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company - EADS](#), a Franco-German-Spanish joint venture, controlled by Deutsche Aerospace and the powerful Daimler Group is Europe's second largest military producer, supplying France's M51 nuclear missile.

Michel Chossudovsky, November 30, 2010

These are American weapons, to be used by NATO allies with U.S. permission. They are not covered by START (the strategic nuclear disarmament treaty) because they are not strategic, they are local, or "theater" weapons. NATO would like to negotiate a disarmament treaty to cover such non-strategic nukes, but to get the Russians to do that, it helps if there are some nukes under NATO control. Like with START, a treaty covering non-strategic weapons would require all parties to show what they got, and where they store it.

Since the 1980s, the United States has slowly reduced its once enormous nuclear weapons stockpile in Europe. Three years ago, for example, an administrative document revealed that there would no longer be nuclear weapons inspections at Ramstein airbase, meaning that the U.S. no longer stored nuclear weapons there. These bombs were intended for the use by German aircraft, in the event of a major war with, well, there didn't seem to be any suitably scary enemies available any more. But there are still about 250 American nuclear weapons stored in Europe, all of them believed to be 1960s era B61 nuclear weapons, configured as a half ton bomb that can be carried by most U.S., and some European, fighter-bombers.

Some 3,200 B61s were built since the design went into service in the mid-1960s, and about half of those remain available for use. Some are being refurbished, so they will be good for another two decades. The basic B61 nuclear bomb weighs 318 kg (700 pounds), is 330mm in diameter and about 3.9 meters (twelve feet) long. Those stored in Europe are not being refurbished, meaning that those withdrawn are probably approaching the end of their shelf life. Without the refurb, all these older warheads will be useless in less than a decade. Most B61 warheads were variable yield, and could be set to provide an explosion ranging from less than a kiloton, to over 300 kilotons.

During the early 1970s, the United States had over 7,000 nuclear warheads stored in Europe, most of them 8 inch (204mm) and 155mm artillery shells. This was in the belief that, if the Russians, and their Warsaw Pact allies, invaded Western Europe, they would do so using these "tactical" (a yield of under 100 kilotons) nuclear weapons.

Plans were drawn up to use hundreds of these warheads in battles with the invading Russians. But eventually, it was realized that such use would destroy Western Europe, and probably lead to a full scale nuclear war that would devastate the planet. So, by the end of the Cold War in 1990, there were only about 4,000 U.S. nukes left in Europe. By the end of the 1990s, there were only about 500 left. Most of these were for the use of NATO allies. During the Cold War, European nations were to be provided with American nuclear weapons, in the event of a major war. Most of these agreements are still in effect.

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