



DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2026-26-1-20-31

EDN: TEOILI

Research article / Научная статья

## Türkiye's Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy: History and Prospects

Tatyana V. Kashirina<sup>1</sup> , Veronika V. Tsibenko<sup>2</sup>  <sup>1</sup>Moscow State Linguistic University, Moscow, Russian Federation<sup>2</sup>Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation [tsibenkovv@yandex.ru](mailto:tsibenkovv@yandex.ru)

**Abstract.** The relevance of the topic lies in the increasing role of nuclear weapons in international relations, both as a political and military tool and as a means of exerting influence and engaging in confrontation. It also lies in the erosion of the legal regime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Türkiye, while officially a non-nuclear state, is a NATO member and has nuclear weapons and missile defense radars on its territory. This article aims to explore Ankara's policy and its prospects in the field of nuclear non-proliferation (NWF). The scientific novelty of the study is to examine the historical foundations of Turkish nuclear defense policy, to identify a set of factors influencing Ankara's policy, and to identify its three main areas — tactical nuclear weapons, the American/European missile defense system, and the peaceful atom. The scientific problem is considered within the framework of neorealism based on the problem-chronological approach, the principles of dialectics, objectivity, and the historiographical tradition. Traditional historical methods, such as retrospective, concrete historical, and comparative historical methods, were employed. It is concluded that at present time, the issue of Türkiye's official launch of its own nuclear program is not on the agenda, as it may provoke a regional arms race, in which Türkiye will be in a position of catching up with regional actors such as Iran and Israel. In this regard, Türkiye is interested in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and, in general, adheres to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, having signed international treaties in this area. At the same time, Türkiye is an important element of the NATO collective security system, and its position on the issue of nuclear weapons largely depends on its membership in this organization.

**Key words:** international relations, foreign policy, nuclear weapons, nuclear deterrence, nuclear factor, non-proliferation, missile defense, Turkish politics, U.S.-Turkish relations, Russian security, global security

**Authors' contributions.** T. V. Kashirina: preparation of the draft of the article, editing of the manuscript, analysis of the data obtained on US policy towards Türkiye, on European missile defense, writing the text. V. V. Tsibenko: preparation of the draft of the article, editing of the manuscript, analysis of the data obtained on Türkiye's policy in NATO, on the Nuclear non-proliferation, writing the text. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

**Conflicts of interest.** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**For citation:** Kashirina, T. V., & Tsibenko, V. V. (2026). Türkiye's nuclear nonproliferation policy: History and prospects. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 26(1), 20–31. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2026-26-1-20-31>; EDN: TEOILI

© Kashirina T. V., Tsibenko V. V., 2026



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

## Политика Турции в сфере нераспространения ядерного оружия: история и перспективы

Т. В. Каширина<sup>1</sup> , В. В. Цибенко<sup>2</sup>  

<sup>1</sup>Московский государственный лингвистический университет, Москва, Российская Федерация

<sup>2</sup>Южный федеральный университет, Ростов-на-Дону, Российская Федерация

 tsibenkovv@yandex.ru

**Аннотация.** Актуальность темы исследования обусловлена возрастающей ролью ядерного оружия в международных отношениях не только как средства политического, но и военно-стратегического влияния и противостояния, а также размыванием правового режима нераспространения ядерного оружия. Турция, официально являясь неядерным государством, но членом Организации Североатлантического договора (НАТО), имеет на своей территории ядерное оружие и радар противоракетной обороны (ПРО). Цель исследования — выявить особенности политики Анкары и ее перспективы в сфере нераспространения ядерного оружия (НЯО). Научная новизна исследования заключается в рассмотрении исторических основ турецкой политики в сфере НЯО, определении комплекса факторов, влияющих на политику Анкары, и выявлении трех ее основных направлений — тактическое ядерное оружие, система американской/европейской системы ПРО, мирный атом. Научная проблема рассмотрена в рамках неореализма, на основе проблемно-хронологического принципа, принципов диалектики, объективности, историографической традиции. Были использованы традиционные исторические методы — ретроспективный, конкретно-исторический и сравнительно- исторический. Сделан вывод, что в настоящее время вопрос об официальном старте собственной ядерной программы не стоит на повестке дня в Турции, поскольку это может спровоцировать региональную гонку вооружений, в которой Турция будет в позиции догоняющего в отношении таких региональных акторов, как Иран и Израиль. В этой связи Турция заинтересована в сдерживании распространения ядерного оружия и в целом соблюдает режим НЯО и подписанные международные договоры в этой сфере. При этом Турция является важным элементом системы коллективной безопасности НАТО, и ее позиция по вопросу ядерного оружия во многом зависит от членства в этой организации.

**Ключевые слова:** международные отношения, внешняя политика, противоракетная оборона, ядерный фактор, ядерное сдерживание, американо-турецкие отношения, безопасность России, глобальная безопасность

**Вклад авторов.** Каширина Т.В.: подготовка черновика статьи, редактирование рукописи, анализ полученных данных по политике США в отношении Турции, по евроПРО, написание текста. Цибенко В.В.: подготовка черновика статьи, редактирование рукописи, анализ полученных данных по политике Турции в НАТО, по НЯО, написание текста. Оба автора ознакомлены с окончательной версией статьи и одобрили ее.

**Заявление о конфликте интересов.** Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Для цитирования:** Каширина Т.В., Цибенко В.В. Политика Турции в сфере нераспространения ядерного оружия: история и перспективы // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2026. Т. 26, № 1. С. 20–31. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2026-26-1-20-31>; EDN: TEOILI

### Introduction

The relevance of studying Türkiye's nuclear non-proliferation policy is determined by the significant role of this non-nuclear state bordering Russia in the Black Sea, which has signed a number of international treaties in the field of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but has

on its territory, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), firstly, tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), and secondly, a radar as part of Washington's anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system.

The purpose of this study is to examine Ankara's nuclear non-proliferation policies and

prospects. The objectives include analyzing Türkiye's NATO membership as a factor in the development of its nuclear program; reviewing the history of its nuclear potential; exploring Ankara's policy on the possession and possible buildup of TNW; and examining Türkiye's position in light of the deployment of elements of the American/European missile defense system, as well as the development of civilian nuclear energy.

The materials used in this study included official documents from the Turkish leadership in the field of foreign policy and security, as well as from the Russian and American leadership; publications containing the official positions of Ankara and Washington in the Turkish and American press; and academic articles by Turkish, Russian, and American researchers.

The research methodology is based on a systems (comprehensive) approach, enabling the problem to be examined in its entirety, along with the interrelationships of all its constituent elements. The scientific problem is considered within the framework of neorealism, in the context of the formation of the balance of power in the system of international relations, based on the problem-chronological principle, the principles of dialectics, objectivity, historiographic tradition. Retrospective, concrete historical and comparative historical methods were also employed.

Türkiye's position on the nuclear issue has received considerable attention from Western (Criss, 1997; Fuerth, 2004; Polser, 2004) and Turkish researchers.<sup>1</sup> The leading expert on this topic is M. Kibaroğlu, who generally negatively assesses the prospects for the development of the Turkish nuclear program (Kibaroglu, 2005; Kibaroğlu, 2012).

In 2024, STRASAM, one of Türkiye's leading think tanks, prepared a report on whether

Türkiye needs nuclear weapons to ensure its security, in which this possibility was linked to the regional situation.<sup>2</sup> A study by P. Tacar, prepared for the Atomic Energy Commission of the Office of the Prime Minister of Türkiye in 1970 (Tacar, 1970), expresses Türkiye's overall commitment to a nuclear deterrence strategy.

In Russia, individual works on this issue have also been presented (Mirgorod, 2022), although the main focus is still on American-Turkish cooperation in the field of security (Aliyeva, 2018; Svistunova, 2016; 2022).

### **Türkiye's Official Position on Nuclear Proliferation**

Türkiye is actively involved in many arms control and disarmament agreements. In 1969, it signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and ratified it in 1980 (Duman, 2023). It has also joined numerous arms control programs, including the Wassenaar Arrangement (a founding member, 1996), the Missile Technology Control Regime (since 1997), the Zangger Committee (since 1999) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (since 2000).

Ankara also supports several additional initiatives, including the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, the International Partnership for Nuclear Verification, and the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament Initiative. Türkiye joined the Missile Technology Control Regime in 1997 and signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. Türkiye has played an active role in enhancing the effectiveness of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards by signing the Additional Protocol to the IAEA safeguards agreement

<sup>1</sup> Uygur H., Toprak E.G. Nükleer İran ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri: Seçenekler ve Sonuçlar // Perspektif. İran Araştırmaları Merkezi (İRAM). 2023 (Temmuz). URL: [https://iramcenter.org/uploads/files/NukleerIranVeTurkiyeyeEtkileri\\_v5.pdf](https://iramcenter.org/uploads/files/NukleerIranVeTurkiyeyeEtkileri_v5.pdf) (accessed: 11.12.2025). See also: (Süvari, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Altıntaş N., Önder E. Türkiye'nin Güvenlik İhtiyacı İçin Nükleer Silaha İhtiyacı Var mı? // STRASAM. February 5, 2024. URL: <https://strasam.org/strateji/ulusal-guvenlik/turkiyenin-guvenlik-ihtiyaci-icin-nukleer-silaha-ihtiyaci-var-mi-2890> (accessed: 10.15.2025).

and ratifying it in 2000 (Kibaroglu & Gurzel, 2008, p. 119).

As noted, Türkiye is a member of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), a coalition of NPT states formed in 2010 to implement the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Türkiye supports the Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone initiative, which has been pursued since 1995 at NPT Review Conferences.

However, Ankara, along with other NATO members on whose territory US nuclear weapons are currently deployed, and countries possessing nuclear weapons, has not joined the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (which entered into force in 2021). This step can be interpreted, on the one hand, as an attempt to preserve US nuclear weapons and avoid damaging relations with Washington. On the other hand, it clearly demonstrates Ankara's reluctance to completely close off the potential path to nuclear weapons.

Türkiye's official position is expressed in a number of documents. Notably, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a strategic vision for national foreign policy toward the "Century of Türkiye" declared by the country's president in 2023.<sup>3</sup> This program emphasizes the peaceful nature of Turkish foreign policy, but also provides reasons for a proactive regional and global policy: Türkiye's central geographic location, its historical wealth, strong institutions and human capital, and a dynamic economy. This enables Türkiye to defend its national interests on the global stage and act as a regional leader with an independent policy, ensuring peace and security in the region. Within this framework, which is defined by Türkiye's national interests and national security issues, the fight against terrorism and extremism, conflict prevention,

and their peaceful resolution, with Türkiye as a mediator, are prioritized.

This thesis is based on the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding arms control and disarmament.<sup>4</sup> It expresses concern regarding the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their capture by terrorists, the violation of treaties and agreements, and the general regression in this area. The importance of maintaining stability and strengthening the institutional framework for non-proliferation, as well as Türkiye's participation in control mechanisms, is emphasized. As stated in the program "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Century of Türkiye," presented by Turkish Foreign Minister H. Fidan to the Turkish parliament in November 2024, the current unfavorable security conditions, which allow for uncontrolled arms transfers, increase the risk of these military materials being intercepted, particularly by terrorist organizations. This creates an additional security threat not only for conflict zones but also for all countries engaged in the fight against terrorism, especially Türkiye. In these circumstances, Türkiye requires a "decisive and strong foreign policy" and is ready to participate in the development of a new European security architecture.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that the Turkish Defense Industry Sector Strategy Document for 2023–2027 does not contain a section on nuclear weapons, but it does reflect the country's overall strategy for other types of weapons. Specifically, the first of the sector's objectives for developing ammunition production highlights the primary objective of imparting properties to heavy-class munitions that will further enhance their impact on targets. Türkiye already possesses its own SOM cruise missiles and ATMACA anti-ship cruise missiles, which could potentially

<sup>3</sup> Türkiye Yüzyılı'nda Milli Dış Politika // Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/dis-politika-genel.tr.mfa> (accessed: 05.12.2024)..

<sup>4</sup> Silahların Kontrolü ve Silahsızlanma // Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/silahlarin-kontrolu-ve-silahsızlanma.tr.mfa> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

<sup>5</sup> Belirsizlikler Çağında Karaklı ve Güçlü Türk Dış Politikası // Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. URL: [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/site\\_media/html/belirsizlikler-caginda-kararli-ve-guclu-turk-dis-politikasi-2025-kitapcik.pdf](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/belirsizlikler-caginda-kararli-ve-guclu-turk-dis-politikasi-2025-kitapcik.pdf) (accessed: 25.12.2024).

be equipped with nuclear warheads. The sector development strategy therefore emphasizes localizing the production of all components (SOMs have been manufactured with Turkish engines since 2022), minimizing costs, and increasing flight range.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the strategy outlined in the document, it's worth quoting Haluk Gorgün, head of the Turkish Presidential Defense Industries Directorate: "Given the current global situation, the importance of taking the necessary measures to prepare for war in peacetime is becoming clear. Strength today lies in possessing the technologies and capabilities that will be present on the battlefield today, creating the effect of surprise and leaving no chance for the enemy to win."<sup>7</sup> This statement perfectly reflects Türkiye's overall attitude and its weapons plans.

### **Türkiye's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy in the Context of NATO Membership and Turkish-American Relations**

The issue of Türkiye's nuclear policy cannot be examined outside the context of Türkiye's relations with NATO and the United States. Türkiye has traditionally been viewed as a key military-political bridgehead for the Western bloc in its confrontation with the East during the Cold War (Baharçipek & Ekici, 2016). Security, a central element of which for Türkiye is the protection of its territory by a "nuclear umbrella," underpins Türkiye's commitment to maintaining its membership in the Western military bloc and relations with the United States, despite the high level of dissatisfaction with American policy in the region and towards Türkiye itself (Efe, 2019). As early as 1997, Turkish diplomats openly stated that without the deployment of American nuclear weapons

in Türkiye, NATO would mean nothing to the Turks (Kibaroglu, 2005, p. 455).

A number of factors significantly influence bilateral relations between Türkiye and the United States. First and foremost, the Kurdish issue, which is significant for Türkiye and led to a divergence in Ankara and Washington's positions on the Kurds during the US military operation in Iraq in the 2000s, and Türkiye's active intervention in the Syrian conflict that broke out in 2011, which also affected Russia's interests.

The second factor is the issue of recognizing of the Armenian Genocide, which Washington recognized at the national level during the US presidency of George Biden in 2019. Despite calls from the US administration and even hints of pressure on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,<sup>8</sup> the Turkish side has refused to change Ankara's fundamental position on this issue.

One of the most important factors is the policy of strengthening the American ally in the Middle East, Israel (especially against the backdrop of the potential collapse of the Syrian state after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad). Israel unofficially possesses nuclear weapons, which, naturally, is perceived painfully by Ankara actively claiming the role of regional leader in the Middle East.

The next factor is the policy of Iran, a long-standing American adversary in the region. On the one hand, Türkiye is not interested in further strengthening of the US in the Middle East. Here, Tehran's anti-American policy even benefits the Turkish leadership. However, on the other hand, Iran's future position in the region, in light of the fall of the Tehran-allied Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, remains somewhat uncertain, as does the entire Middle East configuration. This opens a window of opportunity for Türkiye, but it also carries obvious risks.

<sup>6</sup> 2023–2027 Savunma Sanayii Sektorel Strateji Dokumanı // Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı. URL: <http://www.sp.gov.tr/tr/temel-belge/s/242/Savunma+Sanayi+Sektorel+Strateji+Belgesi+2023-2027> (accessed: 25.12.2024).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Suchkov M. Political History: Why the United States Recognized the Armenian Genocide // Forbes. April 27, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/obshchestvo/427839-politicheskaya-istoriya-pochemu-ssha-priznali-genocid-armyan> (accessed: 10.01.2025).

Another factor is the long-standing, unresolved issue of Türkiye's accession to the European Union (EU), especially since Ankara's NATO allies are EU members, including — particularly sensitive for Türkiye — Greece. The US position on Türkiye's military-technical cooperation with Russia (primarily regarding the supply of Russian S-400 missiles) is also a source of disagreement.

Despite these factors, Türkiye remains an active and significant member of NATO today. At the same time, it is attempting to pursue an independent policy within the alliance, which has recently been highlighted by the lengthy process of coordinating Türkiye's position on the accession of new members Sweden and Finland. Türkiye's NATO membership largely determines its stance on the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons, a point discussed below.

### **Deployment of Tactical Nuclear Weapons on Turkish Territory**

Türkiye acceded to the 1968 NPT the following year after the UN General Assembly approved it. However, another 12 years passed before formal ratification, during which time it is believed Türkiye could have seriously considered developing its own nuclear program (Fuerth, 2004). Researchers consider the security guarantees it received from NATO, permission to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and the ability of a party to withdraw from the Treaty at any time as the main reasons for Türkiye's decision to ratify the NPT (Süvari, 2017). These security guarantees were reinforced by the deployment of US military personnel and tactical nuclear weapons on Turkish territory.

As early as 1961, the United States deployed 15 Jupiter medium-range nuclear ballistic missiles (SM-78) near the Çiğli airbase in the Izmir region, based on the bilateral cooperation agreement between Türkiye and the United States of March 5, 1959, which outlined cooperation in ensuring security and defense against direct and indirect threats. These missiles could be used by the

Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, subject to approval by the United States and Türkiye. However, the harsh Soviet reaction to the deployment of nuclear weapons on its borders and the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, led to the withdrawal of the missiles from Turkish territory, but their place was taken by B-61 nuclear bombs. According to the American position, this did not contradict the NPT, since these weapons on Turkish territory were controlled by the American military, although they would be transferred to the disposal of the Turkish military in the event of war (Sechser, 2015, pp. 5, 11–12; Süvari, 2017, p. 180).

It should be noted that the decision to withdraw the Jupiter missiles was made without Türkiye's participation or even prior knowledge, which provoked a rise in anti-American sentiment in the country and serious tensions with the United States, exacerbated by US President Lyndon Johnson's direct threat in 1964 to abandon his obligations to protect Türkiye from the Soviet threat if Ankara escalated the situation in Cyprus (Süvari, 2017, p. 186). The lack of control over nuclear weapons on Turkish territory by the Turkish leadership continues to generate public outcry and is one of the main arguments against their deployment in Türkiye.

While in the post-Soviet period, Iran, given its nuclear program, was considered the primary target for a possible nuclear attack from Turkish territory, during the Cold War, the USSR was the primary target. The missile systems deployed in Türkiye were vital to US interests, given Türkiye's then 250-mile border with the Soviet Union. Radar installations located within Turkish territory enabled for the monitoring of Soviet missile tests and the control of a significant portion of Soviet airspace. Surface-to-air missiles protected the approaches to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, the Incirlik Air Base was a key staging area for US fighter-bombers in the Eastern Mediterranean, large naval supply and fuel depots were based in Turkish ports, and Coast Guard stations provided long-range navigation for the US 6th Fleet. In the event of military action, NATO countries, according to a separate agreement

of 1982,<sup>9</sup> provided for the deployment of American tactical aircraft to the Turkish forward air bases of Erzurum, Van, Batman, Mush, Diyarbakir, Mürted, Eskisehir, Izmir and Çiğli.

NATO nuclear weapons, maintained by the US military, are still stationed in Türkiye, but information about them is not disclosed, continuing the Turkish tradition of withholding sensitive information on nuclear weapons (Kibaroglu, 2005, pp. 443–444; Criss, 1997, pp. 98–100, 111–112). Turkish nuclear experts generally indicate that there are approximately 60–70 nuclear warheads (TNW, B-61 gravity bombs) on Turkish territory, the vast majority of which are located at the Incirlik airbase in the Adana region in the south of the country.<sup>10</sup>

### American/European Missile Defense System in Türkiye

In February 1995, the Clinton administration adopted the National Missile Defense (NMD) program, which involved deploying the NMD in three phases, excluding Türkiye at that time. The plan envisaged using existing missile defense stations and radars in the United States, Great Britain, and Greenland, without deploying them in the Middle East or Central and Eastern Europe.

In 2002, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty (1972) and began developing its European segment. According to the George W. Bush administration's plans, the ABM system was to resemble a giant triangle, with one peak in Eastern Europe and the other two in the United States, Alaska, and California. The European component of the ABM system (the third positioning area) would be responsible for detecting incoming missiles and destroying

them in the early and mid-flight phases. The ABM system also included space-based elements for destroying missiles in mid-flight using laser cannons.

Since 2003, the NMD project has been actually implemented (Lobanov, 2011, pp. 51–52). Following Barack Obama's inauguration as US President in 2009, a new plan for deploying a layered missile defense system in Europe was announced.<sup>11</sup> Already in the first stage, during 2011, ships with interceptors were deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, operating unhindered, including off the Turkish coast.

At that time, there was no final confirmation regarding the deployment of not only the land-based SM-3 interceptor missiles (Romania, Bulgaria) but also the radars in Europe. However, it was no longer excluded that these radars could be deployed in Türkiye, Georgia, and Eastern European countries. Since they are, in any case, an integral part of the US and European missile defense system, the entire system must be considered from the standpoint of the threat it poses to Russia's nuclear deterrent potential (Arbatov & Dvorkin, 2011, pp. 192–193).

In September 2010, Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, held talks in Ankara with Turkish military and political leaders. Türkiye was promised that its territory would not be used for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, and that it would continue to fight alongside the US against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK). The parties also discussed the establishment of a missile defense site in Europe, which was to be the central topic of the NATO summit scheduled for November.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Military Base in Izmir, Turkey, Will Be Closed // IA Regnum. November 5, 2010. (In Russian). URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/1343505> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

<sup>10</sup> Karadağ M.F. Nükleer Silahlar ve Türkiye // Stratejik Ortak. January 31, 2017. URL: <https://stratejikortak.com/2017/01/nukleer-silahlar-ve-turkiye.html> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

<sup>11</sup> Fact Sheet: U.S. Missile Defense Policy: A Phased, Adaptive Approach for Missile Defense in Europe // The White House. September 17, 2009. URL: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/fact-sheet-us-missile-defense-policy-a-phased-adaptive-approach-missile-defense-eur> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

<sup>12</sup> Kardaş Ş. Admiral Mullen Discusses Critical Military Engagement in Turkey // The Jamestown Foundation. August 9, 2010. URL: <https://jamestown.org/program/admiral-mullen-discusses-critical-military-engagement-in-turkey/> (accessed: 01.09.2025).

By that time, NATO members had been planning to deploy strategic facilities on Turkish territory for several months. Essentially, October 2010 presented Türkiye with another moment of truth: either support this US-promoted plan and thereby demonstrate its pro-Western orientation, or refuse to participate in the plan and continue its “courtship” of Iran.

Ankara kept its position under wraps until the November NATO summit in Lisbon, where a new strategic concept for the North Atlantic Alliance was adopted.<sup>13</sup> Officially, the decision to install an early-warning radar was taken to protect all members of the bloc from Tehran’s allegedly dangerous actions. Türkiye supported the alliance’s new initiative but voiced its own condition: not to identify any specific country as the source of the threat against which the radar was being installed (Kibaroglu, 2012, p. 7; Cakmak & Güneysu, 2013, p. 198). However, Ankara also put forward other demands, in particular that the costs of the project be shared equally among the bloc’s members and that access to intelligence collected at facilities in Türkiye be denied to Israel (Oğuzlu, 2012, pp. 158–159). NATO allies made concessions to Türkiye on these issues (Aliyeva, 2018, pp. 68–70).

As a result, in 2012, following the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit, elements of the NATO missile defense system were installed in Türkiye — an early warning radar at the Kurecik military base in southeastern Türkiye, near Malatya. The radar is under the full control of the US Army Europe Command and American troops on the ground (Svistunova, 2016, p. 56). Significantly, back in the 1960s, a radar base used by NATO to monitor Soviet airspace was located at this same location. A radar at the Piriçlik Air Base in southeastern Türkiye, opened in 1956 (it was closed in 1997), was also used for the same purpose.

### **Instead of a Conclusion: Findings and Forecasts**

The question of Türkiye’s open launch of its own nuclear program is not currently on the agenda. This is evidenced by Ankara’s official position on nuclear weapons. Its disinterest can be explained by its technological backwardness, as well as the fact that information about the development of a nuclear program could trigger a regional arms race, in which it would be playing catch-up with regional actors such as Iran and Israel. Therefore, Türkiye is interested in curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and generally complies with the nuclear non-proliferation regime and signed international treaties in this area. Furthermore, Türkiye has to take into account the nuclear factor when considering the prospects of its NATO membership, weighing the security risks posed by nuclear powers (Iran, Russia, and Israel), on the one hand, and the US and its political ambitions in the region, which could put Türkiye at risk, on the other.

As an important element of NATO’s collective security system, Türkiye hosts tactical nuclear weapons and a missile defense radar. Türkiye currently possesses nuclear weapons *de facto*, and in the event of a military threat, the Turkish leadership may be empowered to use them. This poses certain threats to Türkiye, raising concerns among both the Turkish leadership and the public: how reliable are Türkiye’s NATO partners, and whether Türkiye could be used as a nuclear target in the event of an open conflict between NATO and Russia or Iran. In particular, such threats were already reported in the 2010s by Iran, which designated the missile defense radar in Türkiye as a priority target for attack.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Lisbon Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon // NATO. November 20, 2010. URL: <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2010/11/20/lisbon-summit-declaration> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

<sup>14</sup> Uygur H., Toprak E. G. Nükleer İran ve Türkiye’ye Etkileri: Seçenekler ve Sonuçlar // Perspektif. İran Araştırmaları Merkezi (İRAM). 2023 (Temmuz). URL: [https://iramcenter.org/uploads/files/NukleerIranVeTurkiyeyeEtkileri\\_v5.pdf](https://iramcenter.org/uploads/files/NukleerIranVeTurkiyeyeEtkileri_v5.pdf) (accessed: 11.12.2025).

Türkiye is also concerned about the US-Israeli partnership in the region, as the US could use Türkiye and its military capabilities to strengthen Israel. In particular, Israel's recent actions in Gaza have sparked mass protests against the deployment of missile defense elements in Türkiye. It should also be noted that the issue of withdrawing nuclear weapons from Türkiye has been consistently raised by one of the leading Turkish experts in this field, Mustafa Kibaroglu (2005).

The Turkish leadership's future nuclear non-proliferation policy will largely depend on the evolving configuration in the Middle East. With the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, Türkiye's potential for consolidating its leadership position increases. In such a case, a conflict of interests with Israel, which possesses nuclear weapons and aspires to regional leadership, including by exploiting the opportunities created by the collapse of the Syrian regime, is inevitable. The future of Iran, which has been actively pursuing its own nuclear program and with which Türkiye has maintained long-standing, balanced ties, is becoming quite uncertain.

Türkiye has also initiated a rapprochement with nuclear-armed Pakistan. Türkiye was Pakistan's fourth-largest arms supplier, surpassing the United States, and Pakistan was Türkiye's third-largest arms export market between 2016 and 2019 (Kibaroglu, 2012). Türkiye may also want to receive nuclear technology for military use from Islamabad in return. At least, such concerns have been repeatedly expressed by Ankara's Western partners (Khan, 2020; Kibaroglu, 2012, p. 15).

The use of 'peaceful atoms' in the development of nuclear energy in Türkiye by Russia (the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant as an example) and possibly by other countries could also serve as a source for developing Türkiye's domestic nuclear program. This is especially true given that Türkiye has been conducting its own research in this area since the 1950s,<sup>15</sup> and in 1962, as part of technology transfer cooperation with the United States, it launched its first experimental pool-type nuclear reactor near Lake Küçükçekmece.<sup>16</sup> A second similar reactor was opened at Istanbul Technical University. Both are incapable of generating nuclear energy and are currently used only for research. A new stage in this direction was the announcement by the Turkish Minister of Industry and Technology Mehmet Fatih Kacir, in September 2025 of the launch of a program to develop domestic nuclear reactors.<sup>17</sup>

However, despite more than half a century of nuclear research in Türkiye, the country has yet to reach the necessary technical level for an independent nuclear program. Some experts estimate that, given the lagging nature of current research, even if Türkiye officially adopts a nuclear program for the production and use of nuclear weapons, it will not be implemented until 2050.<sup>18</sup> This does not rule out the possibility of accelerating the necessary progress through voluntary technology transfer from one of the nuclear powers or through scientific and industrial espionage. Furthermore, Türkiye is currently actively enhancing its nuclear capabilities and developing its human resources.

<sup>15</sup> In 1956, the Atomic Energy Commission was founded within the Prime Minister's Office of Türkiye, followed by the Turkish Electricity Authority in 1970, with a separate Nuclear Energy Authority established in 1972. In 1982, the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) was established, existing until 2020, when its functions and powers were transferred to the Turkish Energy, Nuclear and Mineral Research Agency. Furthermore, in 1988, a separate Nuclear Power Plant Project Office was created in Türkiye, and in 2018, a Nuclear Regulation Authority was established.

<sup>16</sup> It was closed in 1977 and a new one with increased capacity (5 MW instead of 1 MW) was opened on its basis in 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Türkiye Yerli Nükleer Reaktör Geliştirme Çağrısı Başlattı // TRT Haber. September 14, 2025. URL: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/bilim-teknoloji/turkiye-yerli-nukleer-reaktor-gelistirme-cagrisi-baslatti-919826.html> (accessed: 25.09.2025).

<sup>18</sup> Karadağ M.F. Nükleer Silahlar ve Türkiye // Stratejik Ortak. January 31, 2017. URL: <https://stratejikortak.com/2017/01/nukleer-silahlar-ve-turkiye.html> (accessed: 05.12.2024).

Other widely unreported signs of Türkiye's ambitions include the development of ballistic missiles and its space program (Gheorghe, 2022). In this regard, one could speak of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's growing nuclear ambitions, and some signs indicate that these intentions may be realized (Mirgorod, 2022, p. 129). In 2019, at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, President Erdoğan included the issue of nuclear weapons possession in his ideological formula "The World is Bigger Than Five," declaring the inequality and injustice of the current international order and proposing the following solution to the nuclear weapons issue: either everyone has them or no one has them.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Türkiye is effectively calling for the nuclear factor to be nullified in order to eliminate its technological backwardness in this area and lay claim to joining the ranks of global leaders without resolving the "nuclear issue."

Turkish authorities want to maintain the American tactical nuclear weapons deployed on Turkish territory, viewing them primarily as an instrument of political influence (Kibaroglu, 2005, p. 449). Ankara's primary motivation for retaining its tactical nuclear weapons stems from its desire to remain part of the North Atlantic Alliance. At the same time, it is linked to maintaining relatively strong relations between Ankara and Washington, as well as Türkiye's relations with its European allies, EU members. Clearly, the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on Turkish territory has strengthened relations with the United States, at a time when these ties periodically weakened in the context of Türkiye's proactive policy in the Middle East and the development of economic and political ties with Russia. The Turkish authorities may have assumed that the withdrawal of American tactical nuclear weapons during this difficult period could

further weaken relations between Türkiye and the United States. In this context, it is also possible that The Turkish authorities also want to maintain the radar as part of the European missile defense system operated by the United States.

Thus, Türkiye's potential possession of nuclear weapons depends on the current military and political situation in the Middle East and on the internal political dynamics and determination of the current Turkish authorities. Most likely, in the case of a hypothetically actively deployed nuclear arms race in the region, Türkiye will lose, but it can be assumed that Ankara will try to increase the number of nuclear weapons in the country, using primarily the developments of the "peaceful atom." In the context of Türkiye's hypothetical appearance of its own nuclear weapons, the entire regional nuclear security architecture from the Middle East to the Transcaucasia (at the borders and on the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States) will undergo modification, which will affect global international security.

Thus, Türkiye's potential possession of nuclear weapons depends on the evolving military-political situation in the Middle East and on the domestic political dynamics and resolve of the current Turkish authorities. In the event of a hypothetical nuclear arms race in the region, Türkiye would likely lose, but it can be assumed that Ankara will seek to increase the number of nuclear weapons within its borders, primarily using its "peaceful" nuclear developments. In the context of this still hypothetical acquisition of Türkiye's own nuclear weapons, the entire regional nuclear security architecture from the Middle East to the Caucasus (along the borders and within the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States) would be subject to change, which would also impact global international security.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 15.01.2025

Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 14.10.2025

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 18.12.2025

<sup>19</sup> Erdoğan Assessed the Use of Nuclear Weapons as a Lever of Pressure // RIA Novosti. September 24, 2019. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20190924/1559081137.html> (accessed: 29.12.2024).

## References

- Aliyeva, A.I. (2018). The U.S.—Turkey ‘model partnership’: Testing the limits (2009–2010). *Lomonosov World Politics Journal*, 10(4), 41–78. (In Russian). EDN: MNUHJS
- Arbatov, A. G., & Dvorkin, V.Z. (Eds.). (2011). *Nuclear reset: Arms reduction and nonproliferation*. Moscow: ROSSPEN publ. (In Russian). EDN: QPSBTZ
- Baharççek, A., & Ekici, S. (2016). NATO’ya üyelik sürecinde Türkiye ABD ilişkileri. *Birey ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(1), 149–168. Retrieved from <https://izlik.org/JA46FG42AJ>
- Cakmak, C., & Güneysu, G. (2013). Turkish-American relations during Obama era: Unfulfilled expectations. *Turkish Studies*, 14(2), 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2013.802923>
- Criss, N.B. (1997). Strategic nuclear missiles in Turkey: The Jupiter affair, 1959–1963. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 20(3), 97–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399708437689>
- Duman, M. (2023). 70. Yılında Türkiye — NATO İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Boyutu. *Akademik Hassasiyetler*, 10(21), 400–429. <https://doi.org/10.58884/akademik-hassasiyetler.1216268>; EDN: QLMQMZ
- Efe, İ. (2019). NATO’ya Üyelik Sürecinde Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri ve Türk Kamuoyundaki Akisleri. *History Studies: International Journal of History*, 11(2), 601–619. <https://doi.org/10.9737/hist.2019.732>
- Fuerth, L. (2004). Turkey: Nuclear choices amongst dangerous neighbors. In K. M. Campbell, R. J. Einhorn & M. B. Reiss (Eds.), *The nuclear tipping point: Why states reconsider their nuclear choices* (pp. 145–174). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.cttlvjqptv.11>
- Gheorghe, E. (2022). Polarity, proliferation, and restraint: A market-centric approach. In N. Græger, B. Heurlin, O. Wæver & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Polarity in international relations: Past, present, future* (pp. 291–311). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05505-8\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05505-8_15)
- Khan, S. (2020). Dynamics of Pakistan — Turkey relations. *Pakistan Review of Social Sciences*, 1(2), 14–24. Retrieved from <https://www.pakistanreview.com/index.php/PRSS/article/download/62/32/177>
- Kibaroglu, M. (2005). Isn’t it time to say farewell to nuke’s in Turkey? *European Security*, 14(4), 443–457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830500528294>
- Kibaroglu, M. (2012). Lessons from Turkey’s long quest for nuclear power. *The Nuclear Question in the Middle East. Working Group Summary Report, Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar*, (4), 15–17. Retrieved from <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/140996/NuclearQuestionSummaryReport.pdf>
- Kibaroglu, M., & Gurzel, A. (2008). Does Turkey need U.S. nuclear weapons? *Indeks Bezopasnosti*, 14(3), 117–122. (In Russian). EDN: OWMHGX
- Lobanov, R. O. (2011). The creation of the US national missile defense system as a threat to Russia’s security (late 20th — early 21st centuries). *Problems of modern and contemporary history of foreign countries: collection of scientific papers*, (9), 47–61. (In Russian).
- Mirgorod, D.A. (2022). The prospects for nuclear weapons by Turkey: Military and political aspect. *Modern Science and Innovations*, (4), 128–133. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.37493/2307-910X.2022.4.14>; EDN: XGBMZS
- Oğuzlu, T. (2012). Turkey’s eroding commitment to NATO: From identity to interests. *The Washington Quarterly*, 35(3), 153–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.706578>
- Polser, B.G. (2004). Theater nuclear weapons in Europe: The contemporary debate. *Strategic Insights*, 3(10), 1–8. Retrieved from <https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/11363/polserSept04.pdf?sequence=3>
- Sechser, T.S. (2015). *Sharing the bomb: Nonproliferation, deterrence, and foreign nuclear deployments*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia. Retrieved from <https://posse.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/pubfiles/Sechser%20-%20Sharing%20the%20Bomb%20-%202015.pdf>
- Süvari, K. (2017). Türkiye’nin Nükleer Silahların Yayılmasının Önlenmesi (NSYÖ) Antlaşmasına katılımı: Nedenleri ve etkileri. *AİBÜ Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 17(2), 167–194. Retrieved from <https://izlik.org/JA76PB53GH>
- Svistunova, I. A. (2016). The security aspect of Turkey — United States relations: In search for a new model. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, (2), 53–61. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2016-2-47-53-61>; EDN: VWVFNR

Svistunova, I. A. (2022). Turkey and NATO relations through assessments of Turkish experts. *Contemporary Europe*, (4), 135–147. (In Russian). EDN: GKIEQE

Tacar, P. Y. (1970). *Nükleer silahların yayılmasının önlenmesi sorunu*. Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Atom Enerjisi Komisyonu.

**About the authors:**

*Kashirina Tatyana Vladislavovna* — PhD, Dr.Sc. (History), Professor, Head, Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia, Moscow State Linguistic University; 38 Ostozhenka St, Moscow, 119034, Russian Federation; eLibrary SPIN-code: 5898-3052; ORCID: 0000-0002-4361-7778; e-mail: kashirina73@mail.ru

*Tsibenko Veronika Vitalievna* — PhD, Dr.Sc. (History), Director, Center for Interdisciplinary Humanitarian Studies, Southern Federal University; 105/42 B. Sadovaya St, Rostov-on-Don, 344006, Russian Federation; eLibrary SPIN-code: 7623-6259; ORCID: 0000-0001-5755-1231; e-mail: tsibenkovv@yandex.ru