

US Nuclear Weapons Base In Italy Eyed By Alleged Terrorists

Posted on Jul.22, 2015 in [NATO](#), [Nuclear Weapons](#), [United States](#) by [Hans M. Kristensen](#)



Italian security forces practice protection of US nuclear weapons at Ghedi Air Base in 2014.
By Hans M. Kristensen

Two suspected terrorists arrested by the Italian police [allegedly were planning](#) an attack against the nuclear weapons base at Ghedi.

The base [stores 20 US B61 nuclear bombs](#) earmarked for delivery by Italian PA-200 Tornado fighter-bombers in war. Nuclear security and strike exercises were conducted at the base in 2014. During peacetime the bombs are under the custody of the US Air Force 704th Munitions Support Squadron (MUNSS), a 130-personnel strong units at Ghedi Air Base.

The Italian police said at a [press conference](#) today that the two men in their conversations “were referring to several targets, particularly the Ghedi military base” near Brescia in northern Italy.

Ghedi Air Base is one of several national air bases in Europe that a US Air Force investigation in 2008 [concluded](#) did not meet US security standards for nuclear weapons storage. Since then, the Pentagon and NATO have [spent tens of millions of dollars and are planning to spend more](#) to improve security at the nuclear weapons bases in Europe.

There are currently approximately 180 US B61 bombs deployed in Europe at six bases in five NATO countries: Belgium (Kleine Brogel AB), Germany (Buchel AB), Italy (Aviano AB and Ghedi AB), the Netherlands (Volkel AB), and Turkey (Incirlik AB).

Over the next decade, the B61s in Europe will [be modernized](#) and, when delivered by the new F-35A fighter-bomber, turned into a guided nuclear bomb (B61-12) with greater accuracy than the B61s currently deployed in Europe. Aircraft integration of the B61-12 [has already started](#).

<https://fas.org/blogs/security/2015/07/ghedi-terror/>

Italy Arrests Two Suspected of Planning IS-Style Attacks

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by Naharnet Newsdesk 22 July 2015, 14:31



Italian police arrested two men Wednesday suspected of supporting the Islamic State group and plotting to carrying out attacks in the country.

The Tunisian and Pakistani had opened a Twitter account on which they posted threatening messages written by hand and held up in front of historic Italian monuments, from the Colosseum in Rome to the Duomo in Milan.

"We are in your streets, we are everywhere. We identify our targets while we wait for zero hour", said one message, written in Italian, French and Arabic.

Milan prosecutor Maurizio Romanelli said, however, that the sites in question "were never in danger" because the pair, based in Brescia in northern Italy, had not set their plans in motion.

"The two men were referring to several targets, particularly the Ghedi military base" near Brescia, "but also other possible targets including law enforcement forces," he said at a press conference.

The two men had also downloaded from the Internet a manual on bomb-making and how to disguise their identities online, he said.

"This morning's arrests show our system to prevent terrorist attacks works. It confirms that Internet controls allow us to take preventative action with great efficiency," Interior Minister Angelino Alfano said.

Source [Agence France Presse](#)

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/185398-italy-arrests-two-suspected-of-planning-is-style-attacks>

Upgrades At US Nuclear Bases In Europe Acknowledge Security Risk



Posted on Sep. 10, 2015 in [NATO](#), [Nuclear Weapons](#), [United States](#) by [Hans M. Kristensen](#)

By Hans M. Kristensen

Security upgrades underway at U.S. Air Force bases in Europe indicate that nuclear weapons deployed in Europe have been stored under unsafe conditions for more than two decades.

Commercial satellite images show work underway at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey and Aviano Air Base in Italy. The upgrades are intended to increase the physical protection of nuclear weapons stored at the two U.S. Air Force Bases.

The upgrades indirectly acknowledge that security at U.S. nuclear weapons storage sites in Europe has been inadequate for more than two decades.

And the decision to upgrade nuclear security perimeters at the two U.S. bases strongly implies that security at the other four European host bases must now be characterized as inadequate.

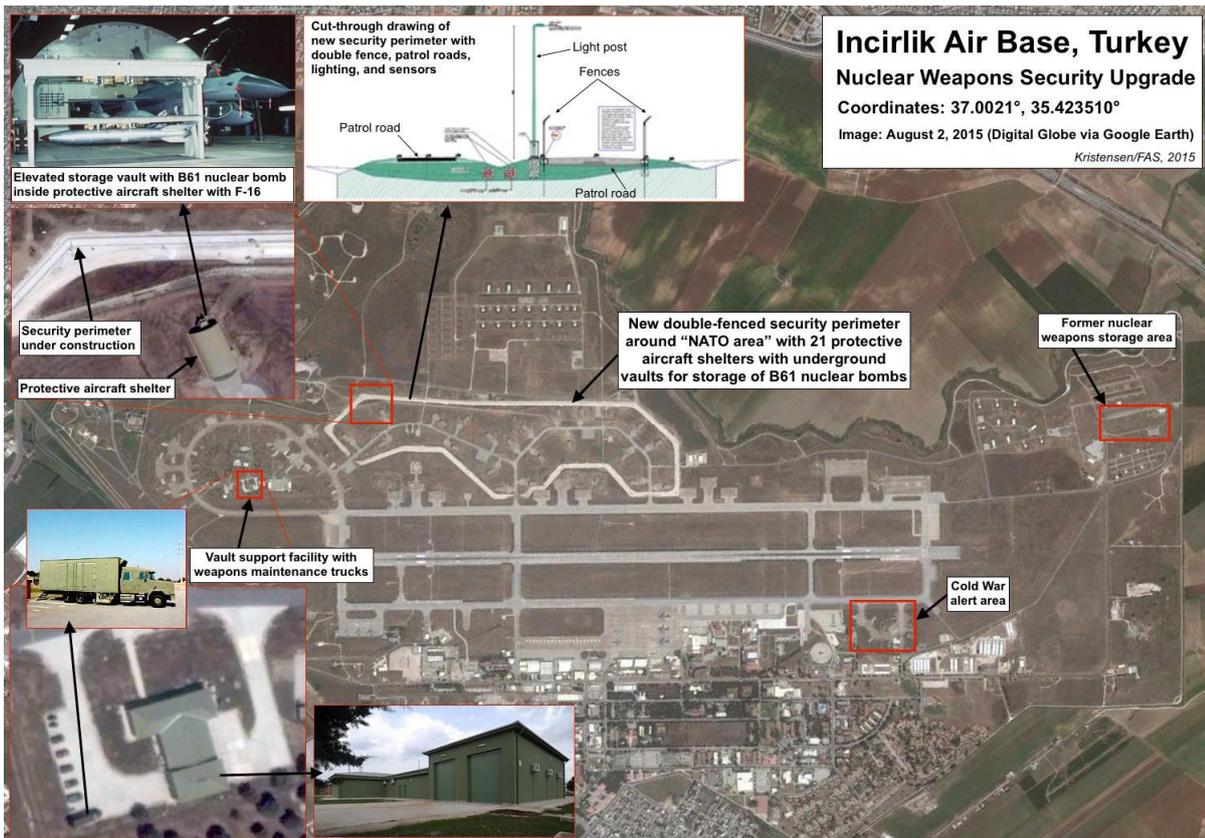
Security challenges at Incirlik AB are unique in NATO's nuclear posture because the base is located only 110 kilometers (68 miles) from war-torn Syria and because of an [ongoing armed conflict](#) within Turkey between the Turkish authorities and Kurdish militants. The wisdom of deploying NATO's largest nuclear weapons stockpile in such a volatile region seems questionable. (UPDATE: [Pentagon orders "voluntary departure" of 900 family members of U.S. personnel stationed at Incirlik.](#))

Upgrades at Incirlik Air Base

Incirlik Air Base is the largest nuclear weapons storage site in Europe with 25 underground vaults installed inside as many protective aircraft shelters (PAS) in 1998. Each vault can hold up to four bombs for a maximum total base capacity of 100 bombs. There were 90 B61 nuclear bombs in 2000, or 3-4 bombs per vault. This included 40 bombs earmarked for deliver by Turkish F-16 jets at Balikesir Air Base and Akinci Air

Base. There are currently an estimated 50 bombs at the base, or an average of 2-3 bombs in each of the 21 vaults inside the new security perimeter.

The new security perimeter under construction surrounds the so-called "NATO area" with 21 aircraft shelters (the remaining four vaults might be in shelters inside the Cold War alert area that is no longer used for nuclear operations). The security perimeter is a 4,200-meter (2,600-mile) double-fenced with lighting, cameras, intrusion detection, and a vehicle patrol-road running between the two fences. There are five or six access points including three for aircraft. Construction is done by [Kuanta Construction](#) for the [Aselsan Cooperation](#) under a contract with the Turkish Ministry of Defense.



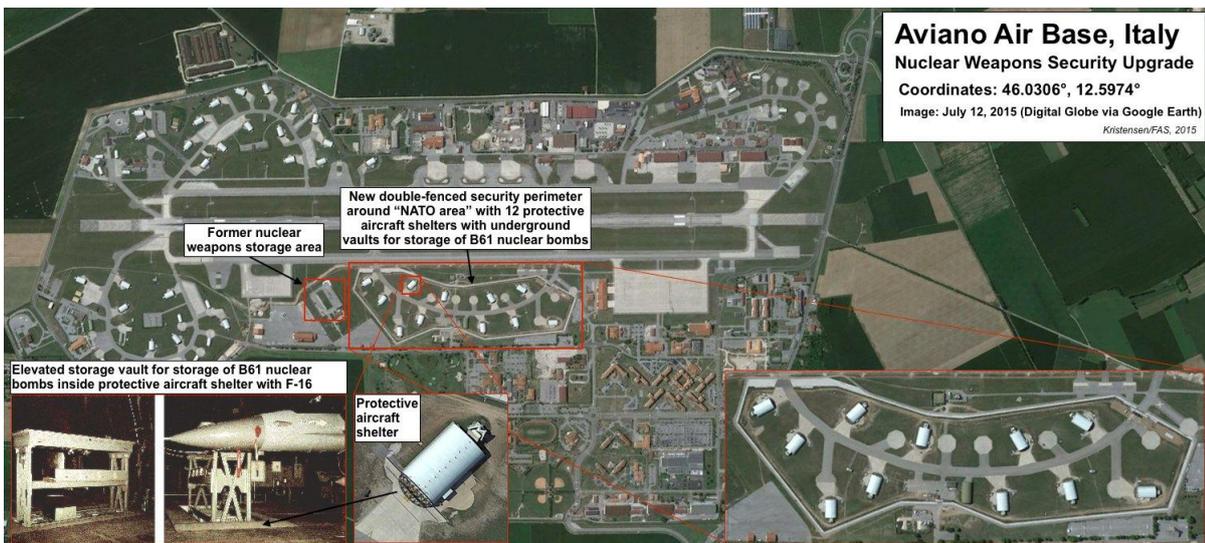
A major nuclear weapons security upgrade is underway at the U.S. Air Force base at Incirlik in Turkey. Click on image to view full size.

In addition to the security perimeter, an upgrade is also planned of the vault support facility garage that is used by the special weapons maintenance trucks (WMT) that drive out to service the B61 bombs inside the aircraft shelters. The vault support facility is located outside the west-end of the security perimeter. The weapons maintenance trucks themselves [are also being upgraded and replaced](#) with new Secure Transportable Maintenance System (STMS) trailers.

The nuclear role of Incirlik is unique in NATO's nuclear posture in that it is the only base in Europe with nuclear weapons that doesn't have nuclear-capable fighter-bombers permanently present. Even though the Turkish government recently has allowed the U.S. Air Force to fly strikes from Incirlik against targets in Syria, the Turks have declined U.S. requests to permanently base a fighter wing at the base. As such, there is no designated nuclear wing with squadrons of aircraft intended to employ the nuclear bombs stored at Incirlik; in a war, aircraft would have to fly in from wings at other bases to pick up and deliver the weapons.

Upgrades at Aviano Air Base

A nuclear security upgrade is also underway at the U.S. Air Force base near Aviano in northern Italy. Unlike Incirlik, that does not have nuclear-capable aircraft permanently based, Aviano Air Base is home to the 31st Fighter Wing with its two squadrons of nuclear-capable F-16C/Ds: the 510th "Buzzards" Fighter Squadron and the 555th "Triple Nickel" Fighter Squadron. These squadrons have been very busy as part of NATO's recent response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and some of Aviano's F-16s are currently operating from Incirlik as part of strike operations in Syria.



A nuclear security upgrade appears to have been nearly completed at the U.S. Air Base at Aviano in Italy. Click on image to view full size.

A total of 18 underground nuclear weapons storage vaults were installed in as many protective aircraft shelters at Aviano in 1996 for a maximum total base storage capacity of 72 nuclear bombs. Only 12 of those shelters are inside the new security perimeter under construction at the base. Assuming nuclear weapons will only be stored in vaults inside the new security perimeter in the future, this indicates that the nuclear mission at Aviano may have been reduced.

In 2000, shortly after the original 18 vaults were completed, Aviano stored 50 nuclear bombs, or an average of 2-3 in each vault. The 12 shelters inside the new perimeter (one of which is of a smaller design) would only be able to hold a maximum of 48 weapons if loaded to capacity. If each vault has only 2-3 weapons, it would imply only 25-35 weapons remain at the base.

NATO Nuclear Security Costs

Publicly available information about how much money NATO spends on security upgrades to protect the deployment in Europe is sketchy and incomplete. But U.S. officials have provided some data over the past few years.

In November 2011, three years after the U.S. Air Force Ribbon Review Review in 2008 [concluded](#) that "most" nuclear weapons storage sites in Europe did not meet U.S. Department of Defense security standards, James Miller, then Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, [informed Congress](#) that NATO would spend \$63.4 million in 2011-2012 on security upgrades for munitions storage sites and another \$67 million in 2013-2014.

In March 2014, as part of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget request, the U.S. Department of Defense [stated](#) that NATO since 2000 had invested over \$80 million in infrastructure improvements required to store nuclear weapons within secure facilities in storage sites in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Another \$154 million was planned for these sites on security improvements to meet with stringent new U.S. standards.

The following month, in April 2014, Andrew Weber, then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs, [told Congress](#) that “NATO common funding has paid for over \$300 million, approximately 75 percent of the B61 storage security infrastructure and upgrades” in Europe. Elaine Bunn, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy, [added](#) that because host base facilities are funded through individual national budgets, “it is not possible to provide an accurate assessment of exactly how much NATO basing nations have contributed in Fiscal Year 2014 toward NATO nuclear burden sharing, although it is substantial.” Bunn provided additional information that showed funding of security enhancements and upgrades as well as funding of infrastructure upgrades (investment) at the specific European weapon storage sites. This funding, she explained, is provided through the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP) and there have been four NATO weapons storage-related upgrades (Capability Package upgrades) since the original NATO Capability Package was approved in 2000:

NATO Security Investment Program Spending on European Weapon Storage Sites			
Program Name	Total (millions)	Total (US\$M)*	Remarks
Initial WS3 Installation	~\$215M	\$250	249 vaults at 13 bases
Basic Capability Package (July 2000)	€12.8	\$11.8	
Addendum 1 (February 2005)	€17.9	\$23.6	First after 9/11 attacks
Addendum 2 (April 2006)	€13.0	\$16	
Addendum 3 (March 2009)	€13.0	\$17.5	
Addendum 4 (August 2011)	€108.0	\$155.7**	Includes security perimeters at Incirlik and Aviano
Total:		\$474.6	
<p>* Numbers are approximate (in millions), assuming then-year dollars and conversion rates from European Central Bank at https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/exchange/eurofxref/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html</p> <p>** This number is similar to the \$154 million DOD stated in 2014 was planned to bring European sites up to more stringent U.S. security standards.</p>			

In addition to the security upgrades underway at Incirlik and Aviano, upgrades of nuclear-related facilities are also underway or planned at national host bases that store U.S. nuclear weapons. This includes a new WS3 vault support facility and a MUNSS (Munitions Support Squadron) Operations Center-Command Post at Kleine Brogel AB in Belgium, and a WS3 vault support facility at Ghedi AB in Italy.

Implications and Recommendations

When I obtained a copy of the U.S. Air Force Blue Ribbon Review report in 2008 under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act and [made it available](#) on the FAS Strategic Security Blog, it’s most central finding – that “most” U.S. nuclear weapons storage sites in Europe did not meet U.S. security requirements – was dismissed by government officials in Europe and the United States.

US Nuclear Weapons Storage Sites In Europe (2015)

Country	Air Base	WS3 Vaults	Weapons (B61)	Remarks
Belgium	Kleine Brogel AB	11	20	For Belgian F-16s
Germany	Büchel AB	11	20	For German Tornados
Italy	Aviano AB	18	50*	For U.S. F-16s
	Ghedi AB	11	20	For Italian Tornados
Netherlands	Volkel AB	11	20	For Dutch F-16s
Turkey	Incirlik AB	25	50	For US rotational aircraft
Total	6 bases	87	180	

* The security upgrade at Aviano AB indicates that the number of operational nuclear weapons storage vaults at the base might have been reduced and the B61 bombs reduced from 50 to 25-35.

During a debate in the Dutch Parliament, then Defense Minister Eimert van Middelkoop [dismissed](#) the findings saying "safety and security at Volkel are in good order." A member of the U.S. Congressional delegation that was sent to Europe to investigate told me security problems were minor and could be fixed by routine management, a view echoed in conversations with other officials since then.

Yet seven years and more than \$170 million later, construction of improved security perimeters at Incirlik AB and Aviano AB suggest that security of nuclear weapons storage vaults in Europe has been inadequate for the past two and a half decades and that official European and U.S. confidence was misguided (as they [were reminded](#) by European peace activists in 2010).

And the security upgrades do raise a pertinent question: since NATO now has decided that it is necessary after all to enhance security perimeters around underground vaults with nuclear weapons at the two U.S. bases at Incirlik and Aviano, doesn't that mean that security at the four European national bases that currently store nuclear weapons (Büchel, Ghedi, Kleine Brogel, and Volkel) is inadequate? Ghedi [reportedly](#) was recently eyed by suspected terrorists arrested by the Italian police.

Just wondering.

<https://fas.org/blogs/security/2015/09/nuclear-insecurity/>