



*Press Advisory
29 May 2001*

Larger Nuclear Weapons Storage Facilities in Europe

Twice as many nuclear weapons can be stored in Europe than assumed earlier. The nuclear weapons storage vaults in Europe are to be modernized by 2005. Modernization will keep them operational until 2018. This information can be drawn from documents and photographs released by the U.S. Air Force and made available to the Berlin Information-center for Transatlantic Security (BITS).

Up to 360 B-61 nuclear weapons can be deployed at 13 operational air force bases located in seven different European countries. Another 68 bombs can be stored at four additional bases, which are in caretaker status. In Germany, operational nuclear vaults are located at Ramstein and Buechel AB. In addition storage vaults at Noervenich and Memmingen AB could be activated. The storage vaults are custom-made, two-storey steel constructions embedded underground into the floor of hardened aircraft shelters. They can hold two weapons each. The vaults can be operated and controlled via sensors and remote control units, while the vault remains closed. The U.S. Air Force is planning to modernize these nuclear storage systems. Among other things data-processing and encryption will be updated at estimated costs of \$ 10.1 million. Costs will be finally shared among NATO member states via the Alliance's infrastructure budget. Six Allies, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey under NATO nuclear sharing arrangements provide the capability to employ US nuclear weapons during wartime with their own dual capable aircraft.

"These US Air Force plans assume that NATO will still have a need to deploy nuclear weapons in Europe 15 or 20 years from now", says Otfried Nassauer, Director of BITS. "However, the USA is in the midst of reviewing its nuclear strategy, posture and forces. President Bush has already announced that the American nuclear arsenal will be reduced significantly. Within this process, the nuclear weapons deployed in Europe can not be a taboo, especially if Russia is to be convinced of reductions of its own tactical nuclear forces."

NATO member states are now free to decide, whether they confirm the deployment of nuclear weapons on their soil or stick to a neither confirm nor denial policy.

A complete list of European nuclear storage locations can be found in the table below.

For additional information, please contact BITS at +49-30-446858-0 or fax +49-30-4410221.

We would like to thank Joshua Handler, Princeton University, for his efforts to get some documents released under the Freedom of Information Act.

NATO's Nuclear Weapons Storage System (May 2001)^[1]

Airbase	Country	Number	Max number of weapons	Units and Status
Buechel AB	GE	11	22	Fighter Bomber Wing, Tornado aircrafts operated by German Air Force, nuclear vaults are operational; USAF maintenance: 852.MUNSS
Ramstein AB	GE	54*	108	86 th Airlift Wing, USAF C-130 maintenance Section, vaults operational
Kleine Brogel AB	BE	11	22	10 th Wing Tactical, F-16 operated by Belgian Air Force, vaults operational; USAF maintenance: 52.MUNSS
Volkel AB	NL	11	22	1 st Fighter Bomber Wing, F-16 operated by Royal Dutch Air Force, vaults operational; USAF maintenance: 752.MUNSS
RAF Lakenheath	UK	33	66	48 th Fighter Wing, F-15E operated by USAF, vaults operational
Aviano AB	IT	18	36	31 st Fighter Wing, F-16 operated by USAF, vaults operational
Ghedi-Torre AB	IT	11	22	6 th Wing, Tornado aircraft operated by Italian Air Force; vaults operational; USAF maintenance: 31.MUNSS
Araxos AB	GR	6	12	116 th Combat Wing, A-7E aircraft operated by Greek Air Force; vaults operational; US maintenance: 731.MUNSS
Incirlik AB	TR	25	50	Rotational USAF units; vaults operational
Memmingen AB	GE	11	0	34 th Fighter Bomber Wing, Tornado aircraft operated by German Air Force; nuclear vaults on caretaker status; location to be closed in 2003; no USAF maintenance unit
Noervenich AB	GE	11	0	31 st Fighter Bomber Wing, Tornado aircraft operated by German Air Force; nuclear vaults on caretaker status; no USAF maintenance unit
Murted AB Akinci	TR	6	0	4 th Wing, F-16 operated by Turkish Air Force; vaults on caretaker status; no USAF maintenance unit

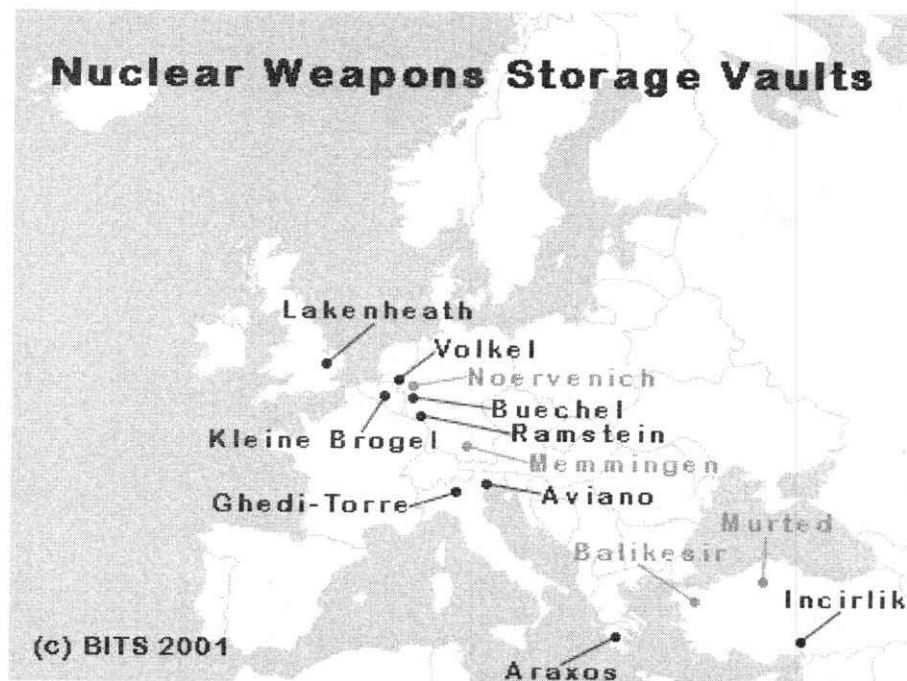
Balikesir AB	TR	6	0	9 th Wing, F-16 operated by Turkish Air Force; vaults on caretaker status; no USAF maintenance unit
Total	NATO	214	360**	

* plus one additional training vault.

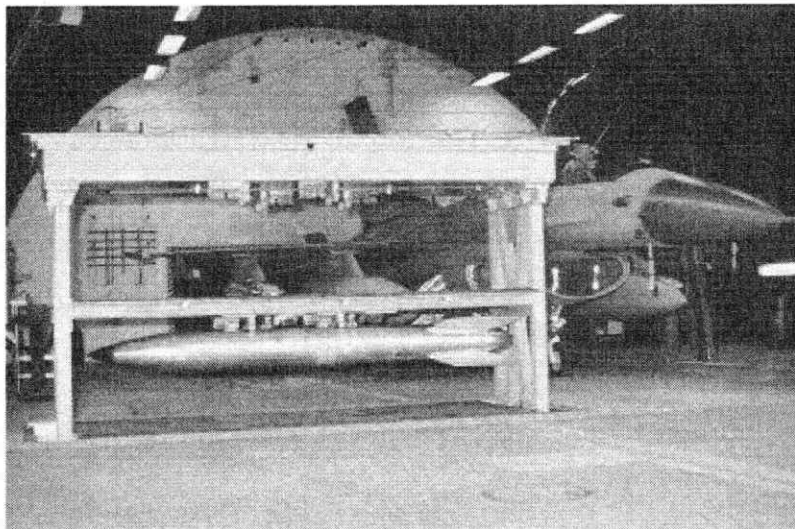
** Up to 360 weapons can be stored, although the actual number of weapons might be significantly lower. Estimates assume 150 to 180 weapons. Experts assume that during peacetime one vault at each base contains training weapons, used to exercise on-base nuclear procedures and flight training. Most, if not all of the weapons in storage are B-61 10 free falling bombs.

Sources:

[1] USAF Electronic Systems Center, Cryptologic Systems Group: WS3 Sustainment Program, Hanford Airforce Base, 3.3.2000, Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Joshua Handler, Princeton University; Department of the US Air Force, 11th Wing, Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Joshua Handler, Princeton University, released 01/30/1998; Department of the US Air Force, Headquarters US Air Forces in Europe, Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Joshua Handler, released 12/02/1997; Der Spiegel, No. 16/98, 04/13/98, p.135; USAF Electronic Systems Center: Press Release, Hanscom, 18.7.1995; USAF Electronic Systems Center: Communication to BASIC, Hanscom, 20.11.1996; US Congress, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, DoD Appropriations for FY 1987, Part 5, p.216; US Congress, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, DoD Appropriations for FY 1990, part 7, p.479; Institut für Internationale Politik: Die Atomare Planung der NATO nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges, Wuppertal, 1990..



Blue locations have vaults on caretaker status, brown locations are operational.



The photo shows Nuclear Weapons Storage Vault with B-61 freefall bomb. (photo: USAF)

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