

TURKEY'S NUCLEAR FUTURE

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Turkey is a rising economic and political force with the ability to affect dynamics in the greater Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. To meet its rising energy needs, the country—already an important actor in the international nuclear order—plans to establish nuclear power plants on its territory. Turkey's location in a nuclearized environment fraught with security dilemmas has led to speculation that Turkish leaders could someday move beyond civilian use and begin to develop nuclear weapons.

An Evolving Nuclear Posture

- Turkey has reached an agreement with Russia to finance, build, and operate its first nuclear power plant. But Turkey's political leadership has not yet delegated power to an independent oversight authority that can ensure the transparency and accountability needed to govern nuclear energy.
- Turkey is a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the leading nuclear export control mechanism. Over time, Turkey's views of both have evolved, but the country remains committed to nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation, and the deployment of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.
- Despite occasional frustrations, Turkey continues to benefit from its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). By hosting U.S./NATO nuclear weapons, Turkey enjoys a much less risky and less costly degree of nuclear deterrence than it would if the country undertook a fraught campaign to acquire its own nuclear deterrent.

A Continued Commitment to Nonproliferation

Turkish leaders have not moved toward acquiring nuclear weapons. Turkish officials have not authorized extensive exploration of the feasibility or desirability of an independent nuclear force. Turkey has not sought and does not possess the equipment, material, design information, and multifaceted expertise necessary to produce a usable nuclear arsenal.

Turkey is likely to continue to see its national interest as best served by eschewing moves to obtain an independent nuclear force. Turkey is faced with asymmetric and conventional threats both within and beyond its borders. But a range of factors, including domestic politics, multilateral interests and commitments, and current and projected nuclear capabilities, favors continued proliferation restraint. For the foreseeable future, Ankara will not risk the diplomatic, political, economic, and military repercussions of seeking nuclear weapons.

A fractured relationship with NATO could change Turkey's interest in nuclear weapons. The only scenario in which Turkey might contemplate seeking its own nuclear deterrent would be in the unlikely case that its security relationship with NATO and the United States collapses, forcing the country to fend for itself.

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