

*Arms Control and Tactical
Nuclear Weapons in Europe.
The Case of Italy*

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Outline

- Definition of TNW
- Challenges to international security
- Italy as a reluctant disarmer
 - Valuing TNWs
 - Devaluing TNWs
 - Constraining factors
- Conclusions

TNWs in NATO Europe

- 150-200 US B-61 gravity bombs in 5 host countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey.
- Italy: 50 Aviano Air base; 10-20 Ghedi Torre Air base.



Tactical missions

“The use of nuclear weapons by land, sea, or air forces against opposing forces, supporting installations or facilities, in support of operations that contribute to the accomplishment of a military mission of limited scope, or in support of the military commander’s scheme of manoeuvre, usually limited to the area of military operations”.

(US DoD Dictionary of Military Terms)

Political-symbolic function

“It takes only five per cent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians, but ninety-five per cent credibility to reassure the Europeans”.

Challenges

“In some respects, TNWs are more dangerous than strategic weapons. Their small size, vulnerability to theft, and perceived usability make the existence of TNWs in national arsenals a risk to global security”.

(Nikolai Sokov, 2002)

Critical aspects

- Lack of transparency;
- Crisis (in)stability;
- Usability;
- Safety and security concerns;
- Proliferation and disarmament concerns.
 - Issues of compatibility with NPT
 - Dangerous precedent
 - Credibility of NATO non-proliferation policy

TNWs in Italy

Throughout the Cold War, Italy pursued an important nuclear weapons policy and was one of the primary bases of the US nuclear forward deployment in NATO-dominated Europe.

Objectives and functions

- Increase international status and prestige
- Secure real decision-making power
- Reaffirm Italy's solid pro-Western stance
- Strengthen transatlantic link and partnership with the US
- "Acceptable path" to the Bomb

Devaluing TNWs

The original objectives and functions of the US forward deployment in Italy are no longer achieved by the remaining TNW deployment in Italian territory.

Devaluing TNWs

Status and prestige

- TNWs no “quick fix” to gain status and prestige. Italy failed to become a full member in an inner leadership group in international affairs.
- Today, the country’s level of involvement in international affairs is measured by its capacity and willingness to provide “boots of the ground” rather than by hosting TNWs of limited use for the new international tasks to which Italy is demanded to contribute.

Devaluing TNWs

Status and prestige

- Delegitimization of nuclear weapons -> *negative prestige* attached to nuclear weapons: the world's "good citizens" do not want nuclear weapons and condemn them on moral and political grounds.

Devaluing TNWs

Decision-making power

- The long-desired “finger on the nuclear trigger” has proven to be primarily a theoretical concept.

Devaluing TNWs

Decision-making power

- Limited military value.
 - In the new security agenda, TNWs have little ability to counter the main threats to Italy's security
 - Better conventional – and even non-conventional – alternatives to TNWs
- No TNW mission = no decision-making power.

Devaluing TNWs

Reaffirming domestic pro-Western stance

- Today, there are no more political forces advocating a thorough reorientation of the country's foreign policy.
- Despite certain anti-America sentiments remain, as in every European country, Italy is solidly and irreversibly in the Western camp and a loyal member of the Alliance. TNWs are no longer needed to affirm this position.

Devaluing TNWs

Transatlantic link and partnership with the US

The transatlantic link is solid and will not disappear if TNWs are withdrawn altogether. As a symbol of the US commitment to defending Italy, TNWs are no longer necessary (instead increasing defence budget expenses for conventional forces is what the US expects from Italy).

Devaluing TNWs

Acceptable path to the Bomb

- The acceptability of the US forward deployment of TNWs is increasingly questioned.
- Reservations about military and political utility.
- Problems of compatibility with the spirit of the NPT.

Domestic politics

- TNWs is not high on the national agenda. Italy is fully absorbed by other priorities, particularly priorities related to the current financial crisis.
- Highly depoliticised issue, which commands little public interest and remains at the periphery of the Italian political debate).



Alliance cohesion

Italy continues to assign paramount value to the cohesion of NATO, seeking to prevent rifts that could compromise its solidarity. To that end, Italy is willing to slow down or postpone the elimination of tactical weapons from its territory if necessary, although it otherwise considers TNW to be of little intrinsic value.

Final remarks

- Limited intrinsic value but non-proliferation challenges;
- Engaging in earnest to fight nuclear proliferation is in the strategic interest of NATO;
- PNI model: unilateral withdrawals without reciprocation by Moscow;
- Asian model: credible extended deterrence without forward-deployment