

THE SUSPENSION OF THE TREATY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES IN EUROPE (CFE)

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SETA | PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2024 . NUMBER 74

- What is the significance of the CFE?
- Which countries suspended or has withdrawn from the CFE?
 - Why did Türkiye suspend the practice of the CFE?
- Can Türkiye start an armament program exceeding the existing limits of the CFE?
 - What could be the impact of Türkiye's suspension?

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CFE?

The treaty was signed on 19 November 1990, entitled the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (aka the CFE). It was signed between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, including the Soviet Union. The treaty aimed to reduce the risk of military conflict by limiting the number of conventional weapons. The numbers of the weapons are set to build a balance and prevent surprise attacks on the parties of the signatories. Other than quantity limitations, the Open Skies Treaty embedded in the CFE, facilitated the parties to inspect the signing states by joint flights as far as they inform the receiving party about the airport to be used and the route to be followed 24 hours before the inspection. In this sense, an aircraft of the requesting country would fly through the designated route in the aerospace of the receiving country and take pictures of the informed area to see if there exists any violation for the declared weapons in terms of numbers.

The Treaty was useful for the predictability and mutual trust of the signatory parties since it facilitated an inspection and reporting mechanism. On the other

hand, the state actors party to the Treaty prioritized more capable weapons and complementary systems to increase their effectiveness. Hence the treaty was good to limit the numbers but never served to constrain the lethality of the weapons in inventory. Meanwhile, signing parties declared exceptions in their motherland that could have exceeded the number of weapon systems. Hence the parties to the Treaty usually transferred the weapon systems to the regions where exemptions were bypassing the inspection requests.

WHICH COUNTRIES SUSPENDED OR HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM THE CFE?

Russia withdrew from the treaty on 07 November 2023, and in response, NATO members, including the US, suspended the implementation of it. At the very same day of the Russian withdrawal, NATO announced the same intention. Similarly Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the need to suspend the CFE on 7 November 2023 since it has become impossible to implement it. The reason for Russia's withdrawal was the new sort of polarization after the Russian aggression on Ukraine, which created a wave of distrust. It

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was nonsense to accept the NATO countries inspect the Russian territory during a war with Ukraine. Once Russia leaves the Treaty, it does not make any sense to have NATO countries control each other since former Warsaw Pact countries are NATO members anymore.

WHY DID TURKIYE SUSPEND THE PRACTICE OF THE CFE?

The treaty has become a not-functioning arrangement after the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Meanwhile the opinion leaders and leaders of the governments, like PM Donald Tusk of Poland, has been calling their public to be ready for another great war. Hence the treaty has lost its practicability. Per the suspension of the USA and NATO's relevant policies, Turkiye took a similar posture. The Presidential Decree on 5 April 2024 announced that Turkiye has suspended the practice of the CFE. As a result, Turkiye did not completely withdraw from the Treaty but stopped the implementation in accordance with reciprocity.

The other reason for the Presidential decree is that open resources and governmental announcement clearly inform publics about the military procurements, manufactured weapon systems, and mobilizations. In this intelligence age, inspecting the limits mainly through the Open Skies have lost its prominence.

CAN TURKIYE START AN ARMAMENT PROGRAM EXCEEDING THE EXISTING LIMITS OF THE CFE?

The decision of the Turkish Government is not about starting an armament program for the Armed Forces. The current inventory is already aging and will be replaced by effective combat systems, most likely by domestically manufactured ones. Nevertheless, the budgetary limits constrain high numbers of weapon procurement or manufacturing efforts. Hence the numbers of the weapon systems will be at the same levels within the limits of the budget, organizational charts, and human resources.

To exemplify the policy of self-limitation in weapon procurement and production, the main combat systems may be scrutinized. The M60s and M48 of the Turkish Land Forces will be replaced by ALTAY tanks, which are still in the test phase, and it will take years to renew the combat tank inventory. Another example is the aircraft manufacture and procurement for the Turkish Air Force. The number of F16s, to be procured in the coming years, is clearly circulated by, both the U.S. and Turkish governments. On the other hand, F4 Phantoms will be excluded from the inventory and be replaced by the new F16 Vipers. The fifth generation KAAN (TFX), on the other hand, is still in the research and development phase and the number of manufactured KAAN fighters are transparent. Turkish armament program is already transparent and predictable. Turkiye's threat assessment, on the other hand, requires a high degree of combat readiness. This intention is not to increase the number of already existing weapons and equipment at the expense of NATO countries that Greece should not be scared of.

WHAT COULD BE THE IMPACT OF TURKIYE'S SUSPENSION?

The other NATO countries already stopped the implementation of the CFE. Hence, we may expect further NATO countries to suspend the treaty. The probability of an arms race could be on the agenda in Europe since the Ukraine War ignited a concern about the adequacy of defense programs. For instance, Germany has already started a 100-billion-euro-worth armament program. The other NATO countries in Europe may expand their arsenals and exceed the limits of the CFE. Greece has the utmost concern for this scenario due to Turkiye's national defense industry and technology capacity. In this sense, NATO may start an initiative to share more information on the levels of weapon procurements to relax Greece-like member states, based on reciprocity.

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