

Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project



University of Texas at Austin
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2016

CONTACT: Prof. Alan J. Kuperman
akuperman@mail.utexas.edu (512) 471-8245

Belgium Drops Request for Export of U.S. Bomb-Grade Uranium NPPP Says Goal of Its Petition to NRC Has Been Achieved

AUSTIN – Belgian officials have withdrawn an application to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for export of 144 kilograms (317 pounds) of highly enriched uranium (HEU) – a quantity sufficient for several nuclear weapons – according to correspondence from the [NRC](#) and [National Nuclear Security Administration \(NNSA\)](#), obtained by the Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project (NPPP). The NNSA contacted the NRC to withdraw the request from the Belgian Nuclear Research Centre (SCK-CEN), in Mol, Belgium, which has been targeted by Islamic State terrorists according to the [New York Times](#).

Dr. Alan J. Kuperman of the University of Texas says that, in light of this positive development, he is withdrawing his petition to the NRC that had sought to block the proposed export as dangerous and contrary to U.S. nonproliferation policy. Kuperman is Associate Professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, where he is also Coordinator of the NPPP. Kuperman says he will maintain a second petition against a similar proposed export for a reactor in France. In both cases, the uranium at issue is 93-percent enriched – identical to that in U.S. nuclear weapons.

Kuperman's [petition](#) to the NRC, filed in March 2015, opposed the proposed Belgian export on grounds that it represented at least a five-year supply of bomb-grade fuel for the BR-2 research reactor – an amount he characterized as excessive, especially in light of the recent U.S. nonproliferation practice of limiting such exports to a single year's supply. The petition argued that exporting such a large quantity of bomb-grade uranium would reduce Belgium's incentive to develop and switch to fuel of low-enriched uranium, which is not suitable for nuclear weapons, as the United States has advocated for nearly four decades. The proposed export also risked creating a surplus of bomb-grade uranium in Europe if the Belgian reactor shut down prematurely, according to the petition, potentially further undermining U.S. nonproliferation objectives.

Belgian officials reportedly withdrew their export request because they have decided to fabricate fuel in the United States rather than in Europe, according to Kuperman. As a result, the Belgians are expected to submit a new request to export fabricated fuel from the United States, and only one year's worth at a time, rather than the previously anticipated bulk shipment of bomb-grade uranium metal. Kuperman says he will await the details of any forthcoming Belgian export license application before deciding whether again to intervene.

Kuperman says the goal of his intervention has been achieved. "I filed the petition because it would have been reckless and counter-productive to approve the export of a five-year supply of bomb-grade uranium to Belgium. Since that is now not going to happen, I have withdrawn my petition. But France still has a similar application pending, and unless they withdraw or modify it, I will continue to insist on the opportunity to explain to the NRC why the commission has a statutory responsibility to reject such an export as inconsistent with U.S. nonproliferation policy."