

Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project



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Petition Demands NRC Reject Bomb-Grade Uranium to Belgium Reactor Site Was Recent Target of ISIS Terrorists Belgians Can and Should Convert to Bomb-Proof Fuel, Says NPPP

AUSTIN – The proposed export to Belgium of more than 300 pounds of highly enriched uranium (HEU) – sufficient for six or more nuclear weapons – was opposed today in a [petition](#) filed with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) by Prof. Alan J. Kuperman of the University of Texas at Austin’s [Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project \(NPPP\)](#).

European investigators have disclosed that Islamic State terrorists recently conducted video surveillance of a senior official at the Belgian Nuclear Research Center, the facility now seeking U.S. bomb-grade fuel for its BR-2 nuclear reactor, according to NPPP’s filing. “This clear and present danger underscores the urgency of minimizing the supply of HEU to the BR-2 reactor, and ending that supply as soon as possible,” declares the petition.

Last month a U.S. company applied to the NRC for a 10-year license to export HEU fuel to the Belgian site. But the NPPP contends that U.S. law prohibits HEU export licenses of such long duration. Its petition cites a 1992 law, the so-called Schumer Amendment, written by incoming Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer, which prohibits export of the weapons-usable fuel unless the U.S. government is actively developing a bomb-proof substitute.

According to NPPP’s filing, “It is impossible for the Commission to determine in advance if this condition would be satisfied for the entire 10-year duration,” so “it would violate the letter and spirit of U.S. law for the Commission to approve” the license. In addition, the petition notes, since 2012 the duration of NRC export licenses for bomb-grade uranium has been only about one year, much shorter than the 10 years requested in the pending application.

Belgium’s nuclear reactor can and should be converted to safer low-enriched uranium (LEU) “silicide” fuel, which is unsuitable for nuclear weapons, says NPPP’s filing. Unless the reactor operator commits to such conversion, which many other nuclear facilities worldwide already have completed successfully, the United States should immediately end exports to the Belgian reactor, the petition urges. It adds: “Even if the applicant were to provide such assurances, U.S. law implies that the Commission should not approve export of more than a three-year supply of HEU fuel for the BR-2 reactor, an amount sufficient to enable the reactor’s operation during the interim period prior to conversion to LEU.”

The export application was published in the [Federal Register](#) on July 13, 2016, and U.S. law provides a 30-day window for submission of public comments. NPPP’s petition states that “A full oral hearing to examine Petitioner’s contentions is essential both to serve the public interest and to assist the Commission in making its statutory determinations.” Last year, NPPP filed a petition against a previous version of the Belgian HEU export application, which the applicant subsequently [withdrew](#).