



NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION  
PREVENTION PROJECT

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**Prepping for UN NPT Review, US Experts Agree with China, Indonesia:  
AUKUS Submarines Undermine Nonproliferation**

NEW YORK – In a surprising conjunction, US nonproliferation experts this week wrote to US President Joe Biden, echoing concerns expressed by both China and Indonesia about US and UK plans to sell Australia nuclear submarines under the 2021 AUKUS partnership.

Writing in advance of the UN review conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that starts Monday in New York, the U.S. experts [urged](#) President Biden not to proceed with the planned sale of eight submarines fueled by tons of nuclear weapons-grade, highly enriched uranium (HEU), arguing it would “undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime.” The experts said any such submarines should instead be fueled with low-enriched uranium (LEU), which is unsuitable for nuclear weapons.

Indonesia this week similarly submitted to the UN conference a [working paper](#) that, “notes with concern the potential consequences of nuclear-powered submarine capability sharing to the global non-proliferation regime,” highlighting that it, “increases the associated risks ... posed by potential proliferation and conversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons, particularly HEU in the operational status of nuclear naval propulsion.”

In China last week, a government-affiliated [report](#) likewise warned that, “The AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines collaboration is a serious violation of the object and purpose of the NPT, sets a dangerous precedent for the illegal transfer of weapons-grade nuclear materials from nuclear-weapon states to a non-nuclear-weapon state, and thus constitutes a blatant act of nuclear proliferation.”

The confluence of criticism is unusual and reflects the radical nature of the AUKUS plan, according to Alan J. Kuperman, professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and coordinator of the Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project ([www.NPPP.org](http://www.NPPP.org)). “For half a century, the world has phased out bomb-grade uranium fuel to reduce proliferation risks,” he said, “but now the United States would export massive quantities of it as submarine fuel, creating a precedent for other countries to demand the same right to import or produce their own HEU – which would be game-over for nonproliferation.”

In a recent [article](#) published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Kuperman proposed three ways Australia could reduce the proliferation risk of AUKUS: switching to non-nuclear submarines, asking the US and UK instead for LEU submarines that are under development, or buying [French nuclear submarines](#) that already are fueled with LEU.

The US experts’ letter concludes by advising President Biden that, “the US and UK should commit that any future exported naval-reactor technology will be LEU-fueled.”

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