

Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy INC.



January 9, 2024

Hon. Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

The illegal and recklessly irresponsible actions of Russia since the invasion of Ukraine have led to calls for counter measures involving nuclear weapons. Apparently serious consideration is being given to the deployment of additional nuclear weapons in Europe, possibly in the United Kingdom.¹ That action would be a grave mistake.

Any new deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe would be a severe and possibly decisive blow to a non-proliferation regime which is already under intense pressure from multiple sources. Such an action would violate commitments made by the Nuclear Weapon States under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. At the 2000 NPT Review Conference the Nuclear Weapon States agreed to “reduce the role for nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons will ever be used,”² and this commitment was reaffirmed in the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan.³ While Russia has already violated this commitment by its sharing agreement with Belarus, spokespersons for the National Security Council and for NATO have concluded that this does not require any shift in NATO’s nuclear posture, and any imitation of Russia’s irresponsible action would weaken the nonproliferation regime unnecessarily.

In addition to the increased proliferation danger, any new deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe and the resulting increase in tensions would increase the risk of escalating the Ukraine

¹ Federation of American Scientists, www.fas.org, “Increasing Evidence that the U.S. Air Force’s Nuclear Mission May Be Returning to the United Kingdom,” August 28, 2023; Jennifer Knox, Union of Concerned Scientists www.ucsusa.org, “Will There Be a Nuclear Buildup in Europe?,” October 2, 2023.

² Final Documents 2000 NPT Review Conference. NPT/Conf 2000 28, Vol. I p.15.

³ Final Document, 2010 NPT Review Conference, NPT/Conf.2010 50, Vol I p.21.

President
Quy Quinlan

Vice Presidents
Jutta Bertram-Nothnagel
Saul Mendlovitz

Executive Director
Deepshikha Vijh

President Emeritus
Peter Weiss

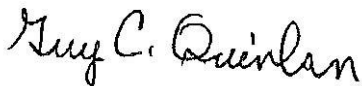
Senior Analyst
John Burroughs

war. The same would be true of any new nuclear sharing agreement, such as has been proposed in connection with Poland,⁴ especially because scheduled changes in NATO's existing sharing arrangements are likely to be viewed as an enhancements in any event. In addition to deployment of the modernized nuclear gravity bomb, all current NATO sharing partners plan to replace their current jets with the F35A Lightning II.⁵

Such an escalation in nuclear tensions, dangerous in itself, would also hinder efforts to restart the arms control negotiation process. This would come at an especially unfortunate time, as rapid developments in technology are narrowing the time window for reaching an effective arms control agreement by threatening the perceived survivability of second-strike capabilities.⁶

In the face of severe difficulties created by Russian actions, the Administration has invested enormous efforts in seeking to avoid escalation of the Ukraine war, and in keeping the arms control process alive. These efforts should not be undermined by an overreaction to Putin's irresponsible behavior in Belarus.

Very truly yours,



Guy C. Quinlan
President, Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy

cc: Hon. Jake Sullivan, National Security Adviser

⁴ Frank Kuhn, "Making Nuclear Sharing Credible" What the F35A means for NATO", War on the Rocks, September 14, 2023, link in CSIS Nuclear Policy News 9-15-23.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Rose Gottemoeller, "The Case against a New Arms Race," *Foreign Affairs* August 2022