

Nuclear Suppliers Group: Finding entry points

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As India continues to seek membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, **Kanica Rakhra** reflects on current controls regarding the trade of nuclear material. She argues that these have been unable to take account of the many rapid changes in the international system, and needs to be updated to provide reference points for acceptable behaviour and strengthen the goals of non-proliferation.



A recent war of words between the two Asian powers, reflected the closed nature the Nuclear Supplier's Group when China commented on India's NSG membership as a 'farewell gift' from Obama to India. The very public exchange between the neighbouring states highlighted the debates international institutions are currently facing in accepting or rejecting new members.

Prior to this, in a closed door meeting on 11 November 2016, the Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG) was provided with a [draft proposal](#) that discusses membership for Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) non-signatories; a significant step that will lead to a manifold increase in civilian nuclear trade especially with nations that have been under a nuclear embargo. In spite of taking account, however, several international organisations and states have been crying foul over this draft proposal.



NSG members such as Austria, New Zealand and Ireland, have voiced their opinion against any non-NPT signatories' entry into the coveted group, while international organisations such as [Arms Control Association](#) have termed the draft proposal as 'lowering the bar' on non-proliferation. These organizations and states are of the opinion that the purpose of the NPT is defeated if non-signatories are allowed to trade in nuclear material.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was created to control the spread of nuclear weapons among states, and the NSG was later created in 1975 for additional control regarding the trade of nuclear material. The purpose of the NSG was to strengthen the existing non-proliferation regime and as the rules of NSG were linked with those of the NPT, they together fortified the non-proliferation regime. Although the NSG has a three-year review process, it has not been able to take account of the many rapid changes in the international system, especially in the nuclear domain. Apart from the [123 Agreement](#) between United States and India, the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) between the P5 +1 and Iran, President Obama's [Prague speech](#), Nuclear Security Summits to counter nuclear

terrorism and North Korea's nuclear tests are significant events that have occurred parallel to the existence of non-proliferation regime. So how should the NSG and NPT effectively deal with these new unforeseen events within the existing setup?

With the passage of time, a number of other states have become economically stable and in order to fulfil their regional and international ambitions, they have acquired or developed the expertise to advance their nuclear programmes. This development of nuclear programmes need not always fit within the norms of non-proliferation as laid down in the NPT and NSG. A most recent example of this is North Korea, which broke the norms of the NPT to develop nuclear weapons and is now under sanctions. Its nuclear growth has not been reigned in by the NSG or the NPT and might encourage other ambitious states to break the norms of the NPT once again. Moreover, sanctions imposed on the state create space for non-proliferation as the state's existence is at stake. So should the international community punish every state that has broken the norms? Or should it accept new members into its fold? What criteria should entry into the NSG be based on?

India received an NSG waiver after the 123 Agreement but now seeks to make the waiver permanent with a membership to the coveted nuclear suppliers club. Russia, France and Brazil have [supported India](#) in its endeavours to become a member of the NSG, but roadblocks still exist. While India's first attempt was unsuccessful in securing membership, the nuclear draft proposal prepared by former NSG Chair Rafeal Mariono Grossi is likely to help prove New Delhi's nuclear behaviour as acceptable to achieve its membership in the elite club.

As a state that was involved in the creation of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, India's intentions regarding global disarmament have not been hidden. From the time of the [Eighteen Member Disarmament Committee](#) to the Nuclear Supplier's Group, India has played a key role in the development of non-proliferation norms at the international stage. The United States, too, has time and again commended New Delhi positively on its non-proliferation history.

To vindicate support for its membership ambitions, New Delhi has actively participated in the Nuclear Security Summits and supported the case against nuclear terrorism, an eminent threat to the world. It is the only state east of Europe that has not been involved in nuclear proliferation activities with other states; Israel, Libya, Pakistan, Iran and South Africa have all been accused of proliferation. India also resisted pressures for state to state proliferation, thwarting Libya's attempts for nuclear knowhow even though New Delhi was suffering from harsh economic sanctions. While repelling demands of this nature, the state has been consistently appealing for disarmament at various international platforms since its independence. These initiatives did not stop after the nuclear tests in May 1998, but have continued with equal gusto. And it is on this [basis](#) that which India seeks a membership to the NSG.

Both the NPT and the NSG are important tools that were created to control non-proliferation. They, however, must be strengthened further with reference to new developments in the world. Adding members based on their past nuclear behaviour and proliferation record would set a guiding example for other states who want to develop nuclear technology but are outside the norms set by the NPT or might upset the norms of the treaty set more than 40 years ago. India has consistently upheld the norms of the NPT and rewarding its behaviour would set correct examples for nuclear ambitious states. It would provide reference points for acceptable behaviour which in-turn would strengthen the goals of non-proliferation. As Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar stated in his speech at the recently concluded [Raisina Dialogue](#), it is illogical for 70 year old international institutions to continue without changes being incorporated into them.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not represent the views of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, nor the London School of Economics.

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