

Reward India's nonproliferation good behavior by Kelly Wadsworth

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In June, India made yet another bid to join the [Nuclear Suppliers Group](#) (NSG) and [Missile Technology Control Regime](#) (MTCR). Delhi also has standing bids to join the [Wassenaar Arrangement](#) and the [Australia Group](#). These four regimes make consensus-based export recommendations to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). India should be given membership to the NSG on the basis of its compliance with the spirit of these regimes and in demonstrating responsible nonproliferation behavior per the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement.

There are several reasons to back India's bid for membership.

First, India has complied with the US-India civil nuclear agreement. This 2006 agreement required India to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and place its civil facilities under International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) safeguards. Subsequently, India was granted an NSG waiver in 2008, and since then has been allowed to do limited nuclear business with NSG members. India would benefit from full NSG membership, which would increase its ability to engage in responsible nuclear business and would open the door to membership in the other three regimes.

Second, India could serve as an example for other countries with significant nuclear activities wishing to join the regimes that compliance is rewarded. India has been advocating for membership in these regimes for nearly a decade, increasing its efforts to establish itself in the global nuclear order. By formally seeking membership, Delhi wants to be involved in writing the rulebook instead of being limited by it. India has thus been working hard to prove its nonproliferation good behavior. Admitting it to the NSG and other regimes on the basis of compliance – not favoritism – would serve as an example to non-member states with significant nuclear business, [such as Pakistan](#), that demonstrating long-term adherence to regime guidelines will be indiscriminately rewarded.

Third, becoming a member of the NSG would allow India to import the uranium and reactor technology it needs. India is the world's fourth largest energy consumer, yet is heavily reliant on energy imports. A [2014 report by McKinsey](#) concluded that as energy consumption continues to grow, India will become the most import-dependent economy in the world. India's nuclear power industry is [growing exponentially](#), as the country aims to supply 25 percent of its electricity from nuclear power by 2050. Even after President Obama and Prime Minister Modi agreed to allow US

companies to build nuclear power plants in India, America's two major nuclear power companies – GE and Westinghouse – [are still hesitant](#) to invest. Admitting India to the NSG would be another step in elevating the civil nuclear energy cooperation that Obama and Modi envision.

Some countries, [such as China](#), argue that India should not be accepted into the NSG because it refuses to sign the [Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty](#) (NPT). China's opposition to India on the basis of being a non-signatory to the NPT is disingenuous; Beijing has been [conducting nuclear business](#) with Pakistan, also a non-party to the NPT. Some speculate that Beijing is opposed to India's membership because it is intimidated by Delhi's growing influence in the region; that, too, is counter-intuitive. As India's largest trade partner, China has a stake in tapping the opportunities for trade in the nuclear power sector. Beijing and Delhi have been working to strengthen their bilateral cooperation on several initiatives, including the Chinese-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), of which India is a founding member.

Others argue that membership in export control groups should be limited rather than expanded, even if would-be members demonstrate consistent compliance, fearing that it will become more difficult to reach consensus on export guidelines as membership increases, especially when including non-Western nations. Diversity could instead work in the groups' favor, however. While consensus may be more difficult to achieve, having India as a member [could help shift the regime's image](#) from that of Western-centric interests to one of more global interests. Also China is [the only member](#) of the NSG that does not support India's inclusion – India's bid is supported by the US, UK, France, and even Russia. Delhi has gathered support for its bids in other regimes as well, from both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. For example, during President Mukherjee's recent visit, Prime Minister Lofven of Sweden – a key member of the MTCR – [expressed his support](#) for India to join the MTCR as well as become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Signing the NPT is regarded as a first-step for states that do nuclear business to gain membership in the NSG. India's refusal to endorse the rules and norms of the NPT has barred it from information sharing, trade privileges, and prestige that come with membership in these regimes. The United States and other countries have set up bilateral agreements with India even though Delhi is a non-party to the NPT. Formal inclusion in these regimes – specifically the NSG – would facilitate India's quest for energy independence and increased investment in nuclear power.

India is unlikely to sign the NPT, but behavior matters more than NPT signature. Giving India membership in the

NSG and other export control regimes is a different way to bring it into the nonproliferation regime and to reward India for its compliance. Export control regime members should think of ways to include rather than exclude nonproliferators. India is a start.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.