



INDIA'S NSG BID: TRACKING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

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Lately, the Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG) has taken up the Indian bid of membership into consideration. Though the results of a typical 'inter-club discussion' would arrive not before the Annual Plenary scheduled on 24 and 25 June in Seoul yet the diplomatic hustles and inclinations are somewhat audible and visible to New Delhi. The regime requires building of consensus amongst its 48-members for taking all the major decisions, including admission of new members. This gives India a good reason to attempt understanding the perception and the resultant diplomatic preferences of member states of the NSG towards it. The issue of the Indian membership has already gathered attention of a majority of the global nuclear non proliferation community. Some underlining and widely recognized features of the story have been, (a) enhancement in the international goodwill for India and wider acknowledgement of its non proliferation credentials, (b) the continuation of the diplomatic support from the United States to India, as promised through the

Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, (c) the show spoiling activities of Pakistan by forwarding its candidature into the NSG after realizing the bright chances of inclusion for India, (d) the attempts of China to discourage an Indian entry into the NSG. However, a worth noting and largely under-recognized feature of the recent discussions on the larger issue of membership of India in the multilateral export control institutions and the NSG in particular has been emergence of a comparatively clearer and largely positive diplomatic inclination and support for India.

Pakistan has had a history of diplomatic mischief at multilateral forums targeted against India. On the NSG membership it has again iterated the old habit of equating itself with India. Playing this card it has tried to push itself into the regime even with a pathetic nuclear non proliferation record. China on the other hand is already a member of the NSG and has emerged as the 'primary obstructionist'¹ against the Indian

membership. This is contrary to the Chinese earlier and common diplomatic *avatar* where it used to carefully avoid 'standing singly'² against India on various issues. Out of the various parallel developments around this issue the most interesting and of utmost relevance has been the remarkable diplomatic progress made by India. Several states have shed their prolong mistrust towards India and have affirmed their confidence in it acknowledging two of its salient realities, (i) the dire requirement of nuclear energy for the developmental needs and for the larger energy scarce population of the country, and (ii) the Indian *de facto* adherence to the spirit of the nuclear non proliferation regime through its prolonged nuclear non proliferation behaviour. The big picture on the opinion of the NSG members while considering Indian membership reveals the following three categories. Firstly, states who have expressed lesser faith in the Indian 'responsible' nuclear behaviour and sanity of future intentions. These states could be called "conventional" in their approach to nuclear non proliferation regime as they often equate the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) membership as the benchmark for any state's involvement in any of the regime's institution, including the export control mechanisms like the NSG. Ireland, Austria, New Zealand, South Africa are the probable countries in this category. These states are often known as "nuclear non proliferation hardliners". Secondly, states who have deliberately attempted derailing the

momentum of international acceptance for the Indian nuclear 'exceptionalism' for their vested interests, thus being a clear spoiler. China can be counted as one located in this category. Thirdly, states who have attempted to trust India by listening and understanding its nuclear journey and behaviour, and then forwarding their support for its entry into the NSG and the similar regimes. The United States of America (USA), France, Russia, Britain etc are some countries in this particular category. Australia, a major supplier of uranium to the world and a member of the NSG had sealed a nuclear deal³ with India in 2014. And quite recently few nuclear non proliferation hardliners like Mexico, Italy and Switzerland have also forwarded their support for the Indian membership bid at the NSG.

Why the Third Category of States Important?

These are states that have previously not recognized the Indian nuclear 'exceptionalism' but in the recent have attempt understanding its nuclear non proliferation record and civilian energy requirements. These states consequently have pledged their support to the Indian inclusion into the NSG. Although, France, USA, Russia, and Britain had communicated at earlier occasions their support to the Indian membership into the multilateral export control regimes but the recent developments involving the support from Mexico, Italy and Switzerland to the Indian candidature holds great importance. Indian nuclear diplomacy could be

applauded for the hard earned wide acceptance of its nuclear non proliferation record in the past. Enhancement of India's international goodwill and greater recognition to its nuclear non proliferation credentials by more and more countries is decisive for realization of the role India envisions in the 21st century which involves greater participation in the world affairs. On the lines of 'cooperation not dominance'⁴ of any single state, India has favoured polycentric international order in place of a hierarchical world order. A global system where the international institutions and mechanisms are well representative and are inclusive and not exclusive in nature is salient part of the overall Indian vision for the present century. India's bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been well-deserving and long pending. The membership of all the four major export control regimes- the NSG, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Australia Group becomes more so necessary because India already has been 'a key player in export of some crucial items under the purview of the export regimes'⁵. In addition with a projected rise in defence exports India is bound to become a player too big to be pushed on to the sidelines of the international system⁶ and the regimes that deal with the trade and transfers of these goods. Reiterating the fact that most of these regime institutions work by building 'consensus', the support of member states to India becomes even

more relevant. India has definitely come a long way from the era of nuclear segregation fuelled by the Pokharan I and II tests and the resultant international misunderstandings regarding India. Presently, India has planned to entrust a considerable chunk of its energy needs into the safe, reliable, carbon-emission free source of energy generation through the nuclear technology, yet the implementation of it would need wide global support. The country has been leaping confident steps favouring 'connectivity not isolation'⁷ to facilitate its ambitious project on energy security by atomic technology.

The recent developments reveal that a majority of the world has stated support and faith in the past Indian nuclear non proliferation record and the bright future it has envisioned with nuclear energy. The Swiss President Johann Schneider-Ammann on 6 June, 2016 announced his country's support to the Indian membership in the NSG after holding comprehensive talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Italy has also indicated that it would support the Indian membership into the NSG.⁸ The country was earlier upset with India over the issue of arrest of two of its Marines by India, accused of killing Indian fishermen. This largely appeared from its unsupportive attitude towards the Indian MTCR membership lately. On the other hand Mexico, which has long been counted amongst nuclear non-proliferation hardliners⁹ has affirmed that, "as a country (it is) going to be positively and constructively supporting India's (membership

at the NSG) in recognition of the commitment by PM Modi to the International agenda of disarmament and non proliferation of nuclear weapons.”¹⁰

Way Forward

Instead of looking at the Indian NSG bid and the emerging challenges from a typical pessimistic lens one ought to acknowledge the positivity and the improved international situation for India post it has forwarded its bid for membership into the multilateral export control regimes, the NSG and the MTCR. The optimism emerges out of plural support the Indian candidature for the NSG has received. This in particular hints at a ray of light in the end of a long and dark tunnel for India. Reaffirming the eternal feature of ‘continuity’ of the Indian Foreign Policy Prime Minister Modi has remarkably carry forwarded his successor, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s efforts. The Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Cooperation or simply the nuclear deal of 2005 introduced the concept of Indian nuclear mainstreaming which has been in a remarkable manner carried forwarded since. The membership into the NSG stands for a country in agreement for ‘adherence to international rules and norms’¹¹ with substantial backing from its past nuclear non proliferation record. India quite aptly fits into the required. The dire energy needs of the country and its willingness to fulfil its climate change obligations through active reduction in carbon emissions has

called for wide international support for India. With a prolong responsible nuclear behaviour ‘India has transited from its status of a “nuclear apartheid” country to a “responsible state with advanced nuclear technology” through a strategy of alignments with multiple global players to harness atom as viable source of its energy security.’¹² The need of the hour is to realize the potential of the wide international support India has gathered and the more that could be done in this particular direction. After all, the glass that is perceived half empty could also be seen from a different lens as half full.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ Manpreet Sethi, “Entry into the NSG: Getting Past the Doorman”, Accessed on 9 June, 2016. Available at: <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/entry-into-the-nsg-getting-past-the-doorman-5052.html>

² Ibid

³ As per the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Press Release on 5 September, 2014, India-Australia Nuclear agreement was to promote cooperation in the field peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It mentioned that Australia recognized India’s commitment and use of nuclear energy with a view to achieving sustainable development and strengthening energy security. Australia was thus seen as a long-term reliable supplier of uranium to India.

⁴ Narendra Modi, “PM Narendra Modi’s Speech in US Congress”, 2016. Accessed on 12 June, 2016. Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/prime-minister-narendra-modi-us-congress-speech-2842046/>

⁵ Manisha Chaurasiya, “Challenges to India’s Membership of Multilateral Export Control Regimes”, in Vinod Patney ed. *Asian Defence Review 2016* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2016)



⁶Ibid

⁷ Narendra Modi, 2016.

⁸ Suhasini Haider, "Mexico, Italy Back India's NSG Bid", 2016. Accessed on 12 June, 2016. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mexico-italy-back-indias-nsg-bid/article8710683.ece>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, As said by the Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto after a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

¹¹ Narendra Modi, 2016.

¹² Sitakanta Mishra, "India - From 'Nuclear Apartheid' to Nuclear Multi-Alignment", Accessed on 12 June, 2016. Available at: <http://www.indrastra.com/2016/06/PAPERS-India-From-Nuclear-Apartheid-to-Nuclear-Multi-Alignment-002-06-2016-0017.html?spref=fb>