

US attempt to hustle India into Nuclear Suppliers Group stalls

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The failure of India's high-profile, US-backed diplomatic offensive to secure membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the world body that regulates nuclear trade, is a further indicator of heightening global geopolitical tensions.

In the run-up to the annual plenary meeting of the NSG, which was held in Seoul on June 24, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi toured world capitals to drum up support for India's NSG membership. When Modi visited Washington in early June, US President Barack Obama reiterated the US's strong support for India's speedy entry into the 48-member NSG.

But to New Delhi's and Washington's chagrin, the NSG plenary did not even formally discuss India's application. Instead it held a general discussion on the rules governing the adherence of new states and issued a statement at its conclusion that said "full, complete and effective" implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should remain the basis of NSG membership.

This would appear to bar India—which formally declared itself a nuclear weapons state in 1998—from entering the NSG, since the NPT only recognizes the legal right of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US, Russia, Britain, France and China, to possess nuclear weapons.

However, the US, which is encouraging India's great power ambitions as part of a concerted and increasingly successful drive to harness New Delhi to its military-strategic offensive against China, has signaled it will continue to push for an exception to be made for India.

"We are confident that we have got a path forward ...that India (will) be a full member of the (NSG) regime by the end of the year," a senior Obama administration official told the Press Trust of India only hours after the NSG plenary concluded.

US officials have since repeatedly vowed to work with India to secure its entry into the NSG, while joining India's government and media in suggesting that Beijing was responsible for the rebuff India suffered at the Seoul

meeting. Speaking in New Delhi last Thursday, US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Tom Shannon accused "one country" of "break(ing) consensus" at the NSG, lauded India as an "anchor of stability" in the Asia-Pacific region, and denounced "what China is doing in the South China Sea" as "madness."

Beijing immediately responded to Shannon's remarks, characterizing them as "irresponsible" and charging Washington with seeking to drive "wedges" between countries.

In respect to what had happened at the NSG, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said that Shannon had "shown no regard to facts." "In the plenary meeting in Seoul," Hong continued, "India's accession was not on the agenda ... the meeting discussed the technical, legal and political questions concerning the accession of relevant countries."

According to press reports, two-thirds or more of NSG members supported India's NSG application. These included the US's principal Asian-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia, the major NATO powers, and Russia, which has a decades-old military-strategic partnership with India as well as multiple contracts to sell it nuclear power plants.

However, China was far from alone in insisting that the rules that have hitherto governed NSG membership continue to apply. Switzerland, Ireland, Austria, New Zealand, Turkey, and Brazil are all said to have raised questions about the admission of non-NPT members.

In the run-up to the plenary, Beijing questioned why Washington is rushing to admit India, while vehemently opposing any suggestion that Pakistan, which like India developed nuclear weapons in defiance of the NPT, be considered for NSG membership.

With the US vigorously promoting India, including declaring it a "Major Defense Partner" and giving it access to advanced weaponry, Islamabad and Beijing have increasingly been pushed into each other's strategic embrace.

Pakistan lost little time in boasting about the rebuff India

suffered in Seoul. “Pakistan’s intensive diplomatic lobbying, including Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif personally writing to 17 prime ministers, prevented India from gaining into the NSG,” claimed Sharif’s Foreign Affairs Advisor, Sartaj Aziz.

The Indian media has responded to the diplomatic reversal in Seoul with a China-bashing campaign. Most reports on the NSG meeting had screaming headlines castigating China for blocking India’s advance and entirely omitted the fact at least nine other countries had voiced opposition to junking the NSG’s rules of membership to accommodate India.

Typical was a June 27 *Indian Express* article titled “Obstructionist China will find it difficult to foil India’s NSG bid: Defence Expert.” It cited Major General (Retired) P.K. Sehgal railing against China and Pakistan. “Both know fully well” said Seghal, “that the entire world was unitedly standing behind India and China was on the wrong foot forward.”

There have been a few discordant voices. A *Deccan Herald* editorial questioned the wisdom of New Delhi seeking to railroad China into allowing it into the NSG: “While some risk is necessary to further India’s rise, it is calculated risks that India should be taking.”

Indian geo-political analyst Raja Mohan, a strong supporter of India’s burgeoning alliance with US imperialism, on the other hand had nothing but praise for Modi’s diplomatic offensive. Articulating the great power ambitions of the Indian elite, Mohan said the NSG issue is about making India a “rule maker” and “shaper of the global order.”

In 2008, albeit reluctantly and under a US diplomatic full-court press, China agreed to give India a “permanent” NSG “waiver” allowing it to purchase civilian nuclear technology and fuel despite not having signed the NPT.

The “waiver” was a key element in ending the international nuclear embargo on India and actualizing the Indo-US nuclear accord. While touted by Washington as an agreement limited to the civilian nuclear field, the accord has huge military-strategic implications as it enables New Delhi to concentrate the resources of its indigenous nuclear program on developing its nuclear arsenal. No less significantly, the 2008 accord was fashioned by the Bush administration and Pentagon war-planners as a means of cementing an Indo-US “global strategic partnership” and building up India as a counterweight to China.

Eight years on, Beijing is acutely aware of the extent to which India has been integrated into Washington’s war plans. Under Modi’s two-old government, New Delhi has intensified bilateral and trilateral collaboration with the US’s main regional allies, Japan and Australia; parroted the US line on the South China Sea dispute; and agreed to allow

US warships and planes to use Indian military bases for refueling and resupply.

Fearing encirclement, Beijing, nonetheless, continues to favor wooing New Delhi in the hopes of loosening its embrace of Washington over confrontation. Even as it was impeding India’s quick entry into the NSG, Beijing was agreeing to accept India along with Pakistan as full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at the SCO’s annual summit, held in Tashkent, June 24-25.

The official Chinese position in respect to the NSG is that it is not against India’s admission per se, only that it wants one rule for all, preferably within the framework of the NPT.

However, editorials and op-eds in the state-run *Global Times* are giving voice to growing anger within the Chinese regime over New Delhi’s burgeoning alliance with Washington and are no doubt meant as a warning that Beijing’s “tolerance” has limits.

In a June 28 editorial titled “Delhi’s NSG bid upset by rules, not Beijing,” the *Global Times* attacked a “few Indian media outlets” for “vilify(ing) China’s position” at the NSG. It warned them, and by implication New Delhi, not to think Washington’s “endorsement ... means India has won the backing of the world.”

The editorial went on to charge that India is being “spoiled” by a West intent on using it for “the purpose of containing China.” “Recent years have seen the Western world giving too many thumbs up to India, but thumbs down to China.” After noting that China’s economy is five times bigger than that of India, the *Global Times* said that “the international ‘adulation’ of India” is making it a “bit smug in international affairs.”

“India’s nationalists,” it concluded, “should learn how to behave themselves. Now that they wish their country could be a major power, they should know how major powers play their games.”



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