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# A Path to NSG: India's Rise in the Global Nuclear Order

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## Abstract

This research provides an empirical analysis of India's limited, but transformative, position in the global nuclear order. By examining India's bid for a Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership, this paper makes three major arguments. First, India's attempt to acquire veto power status through the NSG challenges classical revisionism in international relations theory. Second, India's rise through the NSG is based on selective coalition-building with its partners. Third, although India's bid for the NSG remains inconclusive, India has succeeded to forge solid partnerships with some member states while presenting shared interests. Consequently, India's bidding process for membership in the NSG witnessed its rise in the global nuclear order.

## Keywords

India, Rising Power, Nuclear Suppliers Group, NSG Waiver

## Introduction

For the last fifteen years, India has steadily built international legitimacy for its nuclear weapons status and its recognition as a nuclear weapon state. During the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2008, India succeeded in documenting its clean record on nuclear non-proliferation while gaining a Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) waiver and an India-specific International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards regime. The deal enabled India to join the mainstream of international nuclear commerce; however, more importantly, it resulted in a political consensus among NSG members that decoupled India from other non-NPT nuclear weapons states like Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. Since then, India has undertaken a process to gain full membership of the NSG. While India's NSG bid remains inconclusive, the process which began after the Indo-US nuclear deal is a witness to India's transformation from a nuclear outlier to a major stakeholder in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime.

While India's NSG bid has invited a lot of policy analysis, few attempts have been made to understand how India's pursuit of NSG membership dovetails with its rise in the global nuclear order. This research aims to understand India's membership of the NSG by situating it in the larger theoretical literature on the behaviour of rising powers. In the process, it answers the following questions: whether India's approach to NSG subscribes to the classical understanding of rising powers in international relations literature; how does India leverage its transactional relationship with other major nuclear states to become a major stakeholder in the NPT regime; how have other states read and perceived India's political and technical claims; is India successfully affecting the institutional and normative structures of the global nuclear order? With these questions, this article examines how the incremental process of India's NSG bid that accommodates its interest in the multilateral export control regime – the NSG – is a manifestation of its rise in the global nuclear order.

### **India's Rise at Crossroads**

Recently, the scholarly works to supplement the limitations of realist theories in analysing the behaviour of rising powers have been addressed with several case studies, including on India (Cohen 2002; Mohan 2003; Narlikar 2013; Nayar & Paul 2013; Rajiv 2009). Classical theories of international relations vary in how patterns of state behaviours towards challenging or maintaining the status quo are defined (Buchan 1974). For example, how systemic change induces stability and instability in international relations – such as inciting war to reconstruct the order – is fundamental to the study of rising and declining powers. The most pessimistic predictions are made by Offensive Realism which argues that the interaction between a rising challenger (revisionist state) and the declining hegemon (status quo power) often results in global or hegemonic wars (Mearsheimer 2014). Power transition theories also posit that the nature of systemic stability may change with alternation in hegemonic dominance (Organski 1968). Theories which focus on systemic change as a crucial variable in explaining peace and conflict generally employ the proposition that the redistribution of power among rival states may inevitably result in wars (Schweller 1999, pp. 1–2; Kim and Gates 2015, p. 221).<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, post-war reconstruction processes between the status quo power and revisionist state are integral parts of the course in changing or maintaining the existing order (Bridoux 2011; Buchan 1974; Lee 1976). In consolidating its power, a great power or hegemonic power 'hold[s] global or continental interest' in respect to security goals and is less prone to security interdependence, vulnerability and sensitivity (Mearsheimer 2001; Nayar & Paul 2013).

This structural analysis also conceptualizes rising powers as revisionist states

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the peaceful power transitions have been also argued in other literature. See A. F. K. Organski (1968)

which seek to challenge the dominance of the hegemon and hence the status quo. Challenging the status quo may result in the increasing possibility of war (Lemke 2004, pp. 52–75). There is some debate among scholars over who exactly initiates such hegemonic wars. Though most scholarship argues that given the dissatisfaction of the rising power with status quo, most often ‘the rising power will be the initiator’ of wars (Kim and Gates 2015, p. 222), it may be a misconception to believe that all foreign policy behavior aimed at increasing a rising state’s power is a manifestation of revisionism (Morgenthau & Thompson 1948, p. 5).

Contrary to the Offensive Realism, the defensive realists stress that the increase in power of the rising states does not automatically translate into intentions of aggression (Glaser 1994/95). Power transition theory also incorporates the possibility of a peaceful transition of power, such as when the transition occurs over a prolonged period between a declining status quo power and a rising state, or if the transition occurs between democratic states as was case between Britain and the USA during the early 20th century (Doyle 2011; Ray 1995; Huth 2002). Thus, not all rising powers may adhere to the same pattern of revisionism; instead may adopt both coercive and consenting strategies.

In this context, India’s rise continues to attract empirical analyses and observations of state behaviour and of the consequential challenges facing status quo powers. Prevailing scholarship on India’s rise largely focus upon its capability and intention to demonstrate its material strength (Nayar & Paul 2013). Bipartisan understanding among political leaders during the secret preparations for nuclear tests in 1998 is one example of India’s adaptation to realism when facing security competition and pressure from the NPT regime during the post-Cold War period (Ghose 2013). As former External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh argued after the 1998 nuclear tests, ‘Faced as India was with a legitimization of nuclear weapons by the haves, a global nuclear security paradigm from which it was excluded, trends towards disequilibrium in the Asian balance of power, and a neighbourhood in which two nuclear weapons countries act in concert, India had to protect its future by exercising its nuclear option’ (Singh 1998, p. 49). Although India’s recent shift towards realism was not a clear rejection of a past embedded in moralism, internationalism and the non-alignment principle, it did indicate that India’s rise is not unexceptional; India, like all rising powers, seeks to revise the global order (Raja Mohan 2004, p.7; Pardesi 2015).

This follows Mearsheimer’s argument that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a prerequisite of being a great power in the nuclear age (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 5). However, both offensive and defensive realism agree with the proposition that “nuclear weapons have little utility for offensive purpose, except where only one side in a conflict has them” (Mearsheimer 2006, p. 76). Thus, it is farfetched to interpret that India’s nuclear weapons development automatically indicates an

intention of aggression toward the status quo powers.

In this context, many still question India's global approach and its status. According to Miller, there is a wide discrepancy between the expectations and perceptions regarding India's rise (Miller 2013). The continuing debate on India's rise posits that India's power status has received recognition limited to South Asia and neighbouring regions due to its lack of global military goals, limited resources and little drive to build supremacy (Karnad 2015). As Mehta has points out, 'India's problem is not that its realism is constrained by considerations other than those of the exercise power; its constraints are more a consequence of its military, social, and political incapacity' (Mehta 2009, p. 212). The discrepancy regarding India's rise appears to be the widest between its own domestic perspective and others' expectations of its international role. Thus, some clearly reject putting India in the category of great powers; as Sridharan states, 'India is neither one of the great powers nor a minor power; but it is one that cannot be ignored, and in this sense, fits the most general definition of a middle power' (Sridharan 2017, p. 56). Overall, the debate over India's great power status remains unresolved; most observers however agree that India is on a rising trajectory.

Supplementing structural analysis, recent studies observing India's rise calls for a broader understanding of its distinctive behaviour during this period of its rise in the international system. India's strategy has generally been perceived as domestically-oriented, prone to regional conflict, less dependent upon and contradictive of the international regime (Anderson 1983; Thakur 1992). India's foreign policy is generally attributed to domestic perceptions around preserving its autonomy and strategic independence (Cohen 2001, Mitra 2009). The strong emphasis on autonomy in India's foreign policy has elicited a limited response from the major powers towards forging a convergence of interests with New Delhi (Perkovich 2003). India's normative stance and bargaining behaviour was typically viewed as contrary to those of the international community; India volunteered to be a 'contrarian loner' in the world, which did not attract many in the international community to work with it (Ibid).

This predicates India as neither a military threat nor as a state overtly challenging the existing order (Cohen 2002; Malone 2011, p. 270; Wang 2015). For instance, after the 1998 nuclear tests, rather than subverting the nuclear non-proliferation regime, New Delhi initiated a process to reconcile its nuclear status with the international non-proliferation regime (Hall 2010). However, India's rise as a nuclear power has generally failed to create a positive or comprehensive global reach in relation to the NPT regime, despite its relentless advocacy for non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament (Ghose 2012). To offset its status as a de facto nuclear-weapons state outside of the NPT regime, India continuously attempts to accommodate itself with the existing global nuclear order.

Recent debates around behaviour of rising powers continue to examine India's behaviour and strategy as a counter-narrative to the dominant structural theories of state behaviour. This literature on rising power cites political willingness and management as indicators of how successfully the status quo can be challenged (Miller 2016; Sridharan 2017). Narlikar employs Tsebelise's concept of the veto-player to measure those two indicators related to rising powers, with a veto-player being "an individual or collective actor whose agreement is necessary for policy change" (Ganghof 2017; Narlikar 2011; Tsebelise 2002). To challenge the international order, rising powers avail their increasing influence and political will to attain veto-player status, in order to partly or entirely reconstruct the international political consensus over their roles in the international system.

In taking steps to acquire a veto-power status, Narlikar develops a theory that indicates several stages through which rising powers influence and change the existing global order. The first is the acquisition of agenda-setting power by a rising powers to effect changes they so desire. (Narlikar 2011). A state can set an agenda, individually or collectively, with respect to the "self-defined national interest of increased scope and depth" to accommodate both internal ambition and external recognition (Miller 2016, p. 217). Instead of demonstrating the classical revisionism, the concept of veto-power strategy employs methods of flexible and selective coalition-building, relying on small constituencies that can nurture one another through the supply of "club goods," or, a shared interest (Narlikar 2011, p. 1609). Club goods that can formulate a convergence of interest often result in certain coalitions that may help a rising powers bargaining ability both for status or access to key decision-making forums.

For rising powers, it is both less costly and more effective to generate political consensus in order to challenge the existing order (Ibid). During this process, the level of acceptance of the state translates into growing influence, which elevates its power position in the decision-making system. In this regard, rising powers takes on flexible strategies to forge consensus among existing institutions that enable their own rise while introducing alternative norms of global governance.

Based on its increasing nuclear weapon capabilities, India's approach to integration in the NPT regime is not completely subversive but should be viewed as manifesting a strong inclination to become a veto-player in the global nuclear order. Since the NSG works on political consensus among its members, India's policy objective is to gain full membership and to become a veto-player in a small constituency, like the NSG, that can be extended to a larger constituency like the NPT. For entry into the group, India's agenda is based on a self-defined role as a responsible nuclear weapons state (Narlikar 2007). As the following section explores, India's approach to the NPT through NSG cannot be classified into patterns of the classical revisionism. Rather, maintaining minimum deterrence

capability, India's aim is to bolster its legal status within the NPT regime that advances its rise to a status quo power (Narlikar 2011, p.1608).

### **India Towards the NSG Membership**

The NSG was set up with an idea to tighten the supply-side of nuclear non-proliferation. India's peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) in 1974 was a major shock to the NPT regime, resulting in a strong desire among technologically-advanced states to formulate a tougher non-proliferation policy (Barnaby 1977, p.469).<sup>2</sup> After the 1974 PNE, major nuclear suppliers concluded that India's actions were in violation of its nuclear energy cooperation agreements with the US and Canada (Weiss 2010, p.259). Led by the US, seven countries drafted the guidelines for major or potential nuclear exporters. This was initially called the London Club, and later became the NSG (Burr 2014). In 1977, this group finalized a document controlling the export of nuclear technology, equipment, and materials, which was later incorporated into the Trigger List of another nuclear export control group, the Zangger Committee. However, the NSG expanded to include enrichment and reprocessing technology and heavy water items in its nuclear trade guidelines.

Similar to Zangger Committee, NSG calls for 'responsible' government control and international cooperation over the transfer of nuclear and dual-use items before those items depart from the regulating authority's jurisdiction. Although informal, NSG aims to add precision in the language of NPT article III.2, which dictates that each of the state parties must not provide '(a) source or special fissionable material, or (b) equipment or material especially designed or prepared for the processing, use or production of special fissionable material, to any non-nuclear weapon state for peaceful purposes' unless the provided source or material is subject to the safeguards in compliance with the treaty (2005 Review Conference, 2–27 May 2005).

In the wake of Iraq's nuclear programme during the Gulf War, the next meeting held in 1991 continued the intensive debate to update the items on the Trigger List. In its 1992 meeting at Warsaw, the NSG conditioned nuclear exports over the acceptance of full-scope IAEA safeguards covering all nuclear activities and facilities of the importing states (Bano 2014, p.119). NSG's full-scope safeguards policy was then endorsed at the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995 and synchronised the export control mechanisms between NPT, NSG and IAEA (Ibid). All major nuclear suppliers agreed to set 'full-scope or comprehensive safeguards' as a condition for nuclear trade (IAEA 2000, p. 5). This meant that all non-NPT nuclear weapons states could not engage in nuclear trade with any of

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<sup>2</sup> The formation of the NSG was heavily influenced by three events: India's peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974, West Germany's sale regarding a uranium enrichment and reprocessing plant to Brazil, and France's sale of a reprocessing plant to Pakistan.

the NSG members. And in 2004, NSG guidelines adopted a catch-all rule that encouraged '[providing] a national legal basis to control the export of nuclear related items which are not on the control list' (Hibbs 2011, p.10). Since 1974, nuclear export control conditions have become stricter and stricter due to the NSG.

From its inception, India viewed NSG as an oligopoly of the nuclear powers which was neither beneficial nor equitable for developing countries (Kamath 1977, p. 1; Sharma 1979, p. 8). As the NSG expanded and became a major institution of the non-proliferation regime, the gulf between India and NSG continued to grow over the technical and material origin of India's PNE, its refusal to join the NPT, and its reluctance to accept full-scope safeguards. India's self-declared nuclear weapons power status following the 1998 nuclear tests at Pokhran further created a sense of disconnection between the two. Given this background, India's reconciliation with NSG members during the Indo-US nuclear deal marked a dramatic turn as it acknowledged India's nuclear weapons status (Horsburgh 2015; Mistry & Ganguly 2006; Pant 2007).

The Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation shared three policy objectives: to reinforce a strategic relationship that was motivated by the rise of China, to boost economic cooperation based on India's economic development, and to enhance cooperation on counter-proliferation. In keeping these strategic calculations in mind, the Bush administration took a major step to make serious changes in the US non-proliferation policy. The deal required an amendment to the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which lays down conditions for nuclear trade with other countries and is informed by IAEA's full-scope safeguards. After an intense debate in Washington DC, President George W. Bush acquired a waiver authority from Congress to assume civil nuclear cooperation with India under three conditions: the conclusion of the India-specific IAEA safeguards agreement, consensus on the deal from the NSG's participating governments (PGs), and documentation of the US commitment to the NPT regime (Boese 2008). In India, the Manmohan Singh government also withered a lot of domestic opposition to the deal; it had to undergo a vote of confidence in the Parliament for complying with the condition to separate military nuclear facilities from the civilian ones (Paddock 2009, p. 8). In lieu of the Separation Plan and the condition of IAEA safeguards, India bargained for a 'clean and unconditional waiver' from the NSG that was not welcomed by the US and the majority of NSG members (Kazi 2009, pp.96-98).

The issue of India-specific waiver in the NSG led to a split among the member countries into three distinct groups. The first group, which included major nuclear exporters such as Russia, France, and the UK, strongly supported the waiver for India. The second group including countries such as Germany, Japan, and Canada supported the process of India's accommodation in the global non-proliferation regime but required some more persuasion. The last group was highly reluctant

to grant the waiver and sought to keep the non-proliferation principle intact. It included nations such as Austria, China, Ireland, New Zealand and Switzerland (Bano 2014, p.122). Those in the last group raised broad questions as to the effects of the India-specific waiver on the nuclear non-proliferation regime, which invariably invited fundamental and technical questions regarding the sustainability of the NPT regime in respect to India's entry (Hibbs 2011). The key points during the discussion for the waiver revolved around a number of demands: India should have a legally binding moratorium on nuclear tests, to establish an individual monitoring system in order to be vigilant about India's commitment and to incorporate a clause reaffirming NSG's strong support for NPT.

Even when the third group resisted the India-specific waiver, New Delhi received strong support from Russia, France, and especially the US. This generated intense pressure on the holdout countries, eventually leading to a unanimous consensus for an India-specific NSG waiver (Heinrich 2008). As David Mulford, the US Ambassador who played a key role during the NSG waiver process reminisced later, 'it was the biggest diplomatic effort I have witnessed in my experience since the 1980s' (Kumara and Jayasekera 2008). In response, India agreed to a Separation Plan that put 14 of its existing nuclear power reactors and all future nuclear power reactors under IAEA safeguards. India also agreed to shut down the CIRUS research reactor by 2010 and to replace the French-origin fuel core in the APSARA reactor (IAEA 2005). Yet, the controversy about India's Separation Plan continued over of India's fast breeder reactor program (Robertson and Carlson 2016).<sup>3</sup> The Indian scientific community vehemently opposed any suggestions to put the fast breeder reactor program under IAEA safeguards. As the former chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission Anil Kakodkar argued, 'both from the point of view of maintaining long-term energy security, and for maintaining the minimum credible deterrent, the fast breeder programme just cannot be put on the civilian list' (Pomper and Harvey 2012, p. 157).

As a result, India gained a NSG waiver in 2008. This allowed New Delhi to trade in all nuclear or dual-use items on the NSG Trigger List. The waiver granted to India was clean but not absolute. First, India was prohibited from accessing ENR technology, and second that NSG members would consider India's non-proliferation commitment before any nuclear trade (Kessler 2008). The resulting NSG waiver took immediate effect, granting India a unique status. India is the only non-NPT nuclear weapon state to possess a legal sanction for both a military and a civilian nuclear program.

Since then, India has tried to build upon the success of the Indo-US nuclear deal and to further expand its accommodation in the NPT based global nuclear order.

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<sup>3</sup> Robertson and Carlson raised the possibility that India's breeder reactor programs excluded in Separation Plan could produce fissile materials using imported uranium.

An NSG membership is critical to India's full accommodation. In this effort, she has found a strategic partner in the US. New Delhi has continued to reinforce its strategic partnership with the US, ensuring continuous support from Washington D.C. in exchange for economic and defence deals (Ghoshroy 2016). During President Obama's trip to New Delhi in November 2010, the India-US Joint Statement clearly indicated US support for India to join four multilateral export control regimes (NSG, the Missile Export Control Regime, the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement) (Gibbs 2010). US support for India's entry into the NSG was apparent when the former submitted a 'Food for Thought' paper on India's NSG membership in 2011. The aim was to provoke a discussion about NSG membership guidelines concerning new applicants (NSG 23 May 2011). The paper identified NSG as the consensus-based decision-making body and thus argued that new members could be accommodated in reference to the NSG guidelines. Membership application required the new applicants to be compliant with NSG's control lists; to follow and act in respect to the NSG guidelines; to have a legal domestic export control systems in effect; to support international efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); and to be party to the NPT, Pelindaba, Rarotonga, Tlatelolco, or Bangkok Treaty or any equivalent international non-proliferation treaty (Ibid).

The US set out to ensure that India met some of these conditions, especially being "supportive of international efforts toward the non-proliferation of WMDs" and "[having] in force a legally-based domestic export control system" in accordance with its commitment under the conditions of the NSG waiver (Ibid). India in fact enacted new laws to ensure strict export controls which was codified in the Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Delivery System (prohibition of unlawful activities) Act of 2005 and was passed in Parliament. It is even more stringent than the requirements under the NSG guidelines (Bano 2014, p. 124).

As with the India-specific waiver, on the question of India's NSG membership, the group once again appears to be a divided lot with three distinct groups of member-states: those in favour, those neutral or non-committal, and those opposed. Since 2008, India has collected more partners by concluding civil nuclear agreements with the UK and France that was designed to further persuade NSG members. The opposing camp comprised of members reluctant to grant the NSG waiver and included countries such as Austria, China, Ireland, Netherlands, and Switzerland. The opposition raised apprehensions regarding India's position with respect to not signing the NPT, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or accepting a moratorium on producing fissile materials. The opposition also held several technical concerns including the durability of India's nuclear testing self-moratorium, the continuity of fissile material production and the exception from full-scope IAEA safeguards on several of India's nuclear facilities (Williams 2016).

Prior to the NSG Plenary meeting in Seoul on June 2016, India made an intensive push for the membership based on a political calculation that at least 24 out of the 48 members were strongly in favour of its membership bid. New Delhi also believed that the several of the hold-out states may shift their position in favour of India given it makes a firm diplomatic push to convince them (Haidar 2016). From April to June, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Ireland, Mexico, and Switzerland, while Indian President Pranab Mukherjee flew to China and New Zealand. The Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, also contacted 26 NSG member countries (PTI 2016a; PTI 2016b). Believing Switzerland's stance had swung from opposition to support, India expected a domino effect on opposing NSG members that would leave China isolated. However, Switzerland ultimately remained unconvinced, joining eight other NSG members (Austria, Brazil, China, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa and Turkey) in opposition.

In its application, which included 300 pages of reference material, India requested that NSG to adopt a merit-based approach given New Delhi's clean proliferation record and its commitment towards nuclear non-proliferation (Mitra 2016). India credentials included its domestic export control laws, cessation of nuclear testing, ratification of IAEA and additional protocols fulfilled the conditions defined in the NSG guidelines. This is to prove India's voluntary compliance with the NPT regime. Most NSG members who had supported the civil nuclear deal with India, including the UK, Russia, Germany, Australia and South Korea, supported India's merit-based approach. Those in opposition argued that the NSG's Procedural Arrangement needed to be more stringently applied towards non-NPT applicants.

Although China was not the only state opposed to India's entry in the NSG, its opposition combined with Pakistan's application for NSG membership complicated the process for India (Lalwani and Mason 2016). Pakistan made two specific demands: first, that all non-NPT membership applications are considered together (the all-or-none principle) and that the membership process should not be discriminatory (Paracha and Leah 2016). From Pakistan's perspective, the Indo-US deal was a breach of promise as stated in the 1992 NSG Plenary meeting at Warsaw: 'there was a recognition by all participants of the need to ensure that supplier cooperation does not contribute directly or indirectly to nuclear proliferation, as well as the need to ensure that commercial competition does not compromise their mutually shared non-proliferation objectives' (Qutab 2016).

That the case for Pakistan's membership was a difficult one was obvious from the very beginning given its proliferation history especially the AQ Khan affair. For China and Pakistan, it was more of a strategy to complicate India's application. India however held direct negotiations with Beijing to resolve these differences. New Delhi was persistent in holding official and unofficial bilateral talks uninter-

ruptedly with Beijing until the November NSG meeting in Vienna. Although India failed to accomplish its bid at the Seoul and Vienna NSG meetings in 2016, India's bidding process for NSG membership reflects upon the expanding scope of its participation in the NSG process and discussions with other member states. India's commitment to join the nuclear non-proliferation regime is no longer based on the past arguments of non-discrimination. Rather, it is based upon a normative standard of India being a responsible nuclear power. This has helped India not only to increase its influence on the NSG members but also distinguish itself from other states like Pakistan (Kumar 2014).

Notwithstanding the failure in Seoul and Vienna, India has reiterated its determination to pursue the NSG membership (Special Correspondent *The Hindu* 15 December 2016). The Minister of Atomic Energy and Space, Jitendra Singh, provided a written answer to the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian Parliament) on 14 December 2016: 'India is currently engaged in nuclear trade with international partners based on a waiver from the NSG in 2008. The waiver is in the form of concession without according India the status of a full member and therefore has an element of unpredictability and attendant risks in the long run for India's long-term nuclear power programme' (Ibid). India perceives that full NSG membership would provide strategic and tactical benefits, including international prestige and stable, enhanced access to export nuclear components, fuel, materials and thorium-based reactor technology in the future.

### **India's Rise Through NSG**

India's bid for the NSG membership helps us understand the behaviour of rising powers towards existing global order. In having the clear policy objectives of joining the NPT as a nuclear weapons state, and acquiring a seat on the UN Security Council, India aims to acquire a veto power in a small constituency within the 'existing institutions and norms of global governance order' (Narlikar 2011, p. 1607; PTI 2014). The NSG is a bridge institution that enables India to seize the equivalent right of other member states in a consensus-based decision-making body. As the NSG guidelines dictate, its members review agenda items, including membership applications, on a case-by-case basis and determine them by consensus. The principle of consensus confers veto-power to NSG members.

Compared to the first seven members that started the 'London Club', the current 48 member has a more complicated bargaining process to reach consensus. Each member holds an equitable veto power. Thus, India's membership application requires a unanimous consent of all members. Theoretically, even one member in opposition could neutralize the support of the rest. This means that if India's membership is approved, it would have a similar veto power over the application of any new entrant as well as over other matters subject to NSG vote. This

surely would increase India's influence over the consensus practised by the group. The prestige that comes with this veto power would identify India as a nuclear-weapons state trusted with NSG membership, as NSG guidelines comply with NPT Article III. 2.

In pursuit of becoming a veto-power player in the NSG, India's strategy is to create a convergence of interest – common club goods – with other partners. Broadly, India's strategy combines flexible coalition-building and selective partnerships on a case-by-case basis (Schaffer 2002). Compared to the other coalition-building strategies in India's foreign policy – for instance on climate change or in the World Trade Organization (WTO) where India often maintains close relationship with developing countries to challenge developed countries – India's approach to NSG is allied with major nuclear exporters like the US, Russia, the UK, France, Japan and South Korea (Basu 2009). India has sought to further consolidate bilateral relationships with these partners, anticipating a spill-over effect that would grant India global recognition in exchange for providing a profitable nuclear and defence market for its coalition partners (Ghoshroy 2016).<sup>4</sup>

India's flexible coalition-building has allowed its partners to rally behind India's interests as was the case during the India-specific NSG waiver in 2008. Those strongly opposed to India's bid, such as Austria, Ireland and China, for instance, publicly raised strong reservations on an India-specific waiver; however, their concerns could not be translated into collective action due to asymmetric diplomatic power on the Indian side. India and the US agreed to pursue selective coalition-building that would include support from major nuclear exporters and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board of governors, which was sufficient to quell the opposition in the NSG. However, at the same time, India and the US continued to dispute liquor taxation and retail rules in the WTO during this time (Barbé Izeul, Costa, & Kissack 2016, p. 38; Ranganathan 2014, pp. 282–355; Zeigler 2010, p. 266). Thus, India's coalition-building for NSG membership is independent of other issue areas in its foreign policy where its interests may not align with the same coalition partners. It is also highly selective. Foreign Secretary of India Shiv Shankar Menon said during the talk of Indo-US nuclear deal, the deal was “about the merit of trusting the [United States] or the consequences of a particular line of policy rather than about the substance of the agreements themselves” (Feigenbaum 2010).

The emphasis on the responsibility of nuclear weapons state's behavior is to create additional push for India's nuclear status. In the India-US deal, India's stress on

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<sup>4</sup> Ghoshroy argued that Indo-US nuclear deal was built up on the expectation of expanding economic and defense ties. The “126 for 123” affixed to Indo-US nuclear deal – India's interest expressed to purchase 126 fighter aircraft from the US to push for the civil nuclear deal – captured how the bred broader convergence of interest to allows the strategic collaboration on the India's rise.

its voluntary commitment to nuclear non-proliferation was not merely an announcement to an international audience but also a symbolic gesture to its partners in the NSG. India's move to increase agenda-setting power to propel its rise in the nuclear order is rooted in such collective interests with its partners.

The Indo-Japan nuclear agreement, which was signed on 15 November 2016, demonstrates a similar pattern. The positive change in Japan's position on the issue of nuclear trade with India suggests a steady increase in India's coalition partners. Such nuclear agreements only create more legitimacy for India's unique nuclear status and further expand its influence on the NSG. Beginning with the Indo-US nuclear deal, bilateral nuclear agreements which India has been able to sign with countries such as Britain, Australia, Japan, France and Russia attest to the fact that India has been quite successful in selling its normative agenda of being a responsible nuclear power. This is in stark contrast to Pakistan, whose candidature is solely supported by China. India's achievement is therefore far more significant on the global stage. Though support for India is not without limits, the convergence of interest between the status quo powers and India's rise suggests some degree of coexistence on a quid-pro-quo basis.

## **Conclusion**

This research focuses on India's bid for NSG membership as a test case for understanding how a rising power engages in the global nuclear order. It argues that India's attempt to be a veto-power challenges the notions of classical revisionism often attributed to all rising powers. As a veto player has significant authority to influence policy change, India attempts to establish an adequate agenda and effective coalition-building to ensure its entry into the NSG. The selective partnership initiated under the Indo-US nuclear deal has become the foundation for expanding the coalition with other like-minded states.

Though NSG non-proliferation agenda and India's nuclear ambitions remained antithetical for a significant period of time beginning in 1974, India NSG membership bid has gained immense traction in recent years. If NSG members no longer see India as a nuclear outlier, India has also reconciled with the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The process which began with the Indo-US nuclear deal has made significant progress. Yet, India's bid for NSG membership remains inconclusive and it would be premature to judge if India can be fully accommodated within the system. However, India's partial acceptance into the consensus-based, decision-making body, as shown by the NSG waiver and the vibrant discussions regarding India's entry, attests to its rise in the global nuclear order.

## **Bio**

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