



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The NSG, Non-NPT States, and the Future of Nonproliferation Norms in South Asia

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Abstract

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The global nonproliferation regime's ability to adapt to changing geopolitical conditions and uphold established rules is essential to its integrity. A fundamental requirement for membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group is adherence to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Addressing concerns of nuclear states that are not signatories to the NPT is a significant challenge for the NSG. It would also be inappropriate to exclude these countries from nonproliferation agreements, as laws not mutually agreed upon do not establish a stable social order. India's nuclear warheads increased from 172 to 180, while Pakistan's stockpile remained steady at approximately 170, as per the 2025 yearbook of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This shift underscores the necessity of addressing disparities in nuclear development when developing fair and inclusive nonproliferation norms for non-NPT states seeking NSG membership. To objectively evaluate the inclusion of non-NPT nuclear states, this paper comprehends a criteria-based, balanced approach to NSG membership. If one state is given preferential treatment or selection outside of the NPT framework, the NSG could become politicized, lose credibility, and have implications for the nonproliferation regime. To maintain the efficacy, legitimacy, and long-term stability of the global nonproliferation regime, this paper concludes that NSG membership requirements must be modified to reflect universal and unbiased norms while taking into account the valid concerns of non-NPT governments. This research will contribute to the nonproliferation literature by examining the NSG's preferential treatment through a South Asian-centric lens, discussing how discriminatory norm implementation will restructure NSG integrity and strategic stability. This research also suggested strengthening nonproliferation norms through transparent, impartial, and criteria-based engagements with non-NPT states for inclusion in the NSG. The study employs realism as the theoretical framework to guide analysis of the case study and uses a qualitative research method to collect primary and secondary data.

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Introduction

This paper critically examines the case study of Pakistan and India to analyze the lack of consistent standards for the non-NPT Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Only one official treaty can be used in this study, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). It is an international agreement that prevents the proliferation of nuclear weapons, promotes the peaceful use of nuclear technology and disarmament, and was established in 1968. To monitor trade in technologies and nuclear-related materials, states mostly have their own national export control systems. The three non-NPT nations, Israel, Pakistan, and India, do not have membership in the treaty, so they are not bound by its standards (NPT) and regulations, making it a non-universal treaty. North Korea is the only country that was party to the NPT before testing and acquiring nuclear weapons. North Korea is no longer part of the NPT. Since India and Pakistan are designated nuclear states and are non-signatories to the NPT, it can be argued that they are not legally bound against the violation of any of its standards or regulations.

The NPT created a hierarchical power dynamic and discrimination by acknowledging only those states as nuclear powers that had conducted nuclear tests before 1967. In this regard, the P5 states are the United States, the United Kingdom, China, France, and Russia. Whilst the treaty forbade other states from developing nuclear weapons. Adding non-NPT states to the NSG, especially those with nuclear weapons, would be difficult. The NSG could mutually agree to lower the requirements acceptable to both Pakistan and India as non-NPT members. Under the IAEA's comprehensive safeguards without compromising their vital interest as nuclear-weapon states, this would allow Pakistan and India to join the group at the same time and enjoy the same rights for the civilian use of nuclear technology. Islamabad's application for membership in the NSG is strengthened because its consistent track record of maintaining the safety and

protection of its peaceful nuclear program enhances legitimacy, particularly in light of India's history of proliferation.

This research examines Pakistan and India's NSG membership bids in light of the discussion on expanding membership to non-NPT signatories. Both nuclear-armed nations and non-NPT signatories ought to be treated equally. However, India enjoys favor with several NSG member states due to US pressure and influence within the organization. However, Pakistan does not receive equal treatment. Considering this discussion, this paper will focus on India and Pakistan's NSG membership. First, the history, founding, and membership requirements of the NSG will be covered. Furthermore, it will analyze the respective membership cases of India and Pakistan. It will also be discussed why NSG is willing to surrender its NPT signatory rule for India's membership but not for Pakistan. Third, the Future of Nonproliferation norms in South Asia will be discussed. Finally, in conclusion, it is necessary to revise the conditions for NSG membership to reflect impartial and universal principles while also taking into account the legitimate concerns of states that are not NPT states.

Literature review

Mark Hibbs highlighted in his article that the NSG is the world's most important tool for governing nuclear trade. Participation by non-NPT nuclear-armed states in the group would create obvious resistance within the NSG and among participating governments, as well as among the larger NPT membership. It would undermine the objectives of inclusiveness and strengthening nonproliferation norms and practices. In 2008, these tensions were increased when the NSG exempted India from the group's ban against nuclear trade with non-NPT states. Many states then highlighted the essential difference between

lifting a trade embargo against a state and allowing that state to participate in making the rules.¹

Nazir Hussain discussed that the efficiency of NPT has been seriously eroded, as the confidence of member states has been shattered in the wake of South Asia's nuclearization. Because of the US double standards and discrimination in the implementation of NPT and nuclear non-proliferation policies, the situation has further declined. The US policy is dual; on the one hand, it has turned a blind eye to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by non-NPT signatories India and Israel, and on the other hand, it has adopted a preemptive doctrine to restrain the nuclear efforts of some NPT signatory states, such as North Korea and Iran.²

Rubina Waseem and Abeer Iftikhar Tahirkheli argued in their paper that it is imperative to bring Pakistan into the nonproliferation regime by admitting it to the NSG, as it has always played a productive role in nuclear non-proliferation and is also part of many nonproliferation initiatives. The international community can play a constructive role in helping states join hands toward the common goal of nuclear nonproliferation. It is the right of all states to access civilian nuclear technology, and states may build nuclear reactors to meet their energy needs.³

Theoretical Framework and NSG

Realism provides a critical lens through which it sees the NSG as a cartel established by strong countries to protect their hegemony in the global nuclear

¹ Mark Hibbs, "Admitting Non-NPT Members: Questions for the NSG," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 15, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2016/05/admitting-non-npt-members-questions-for-the-nsg?lang=en>

² Nazir Hussain, "Nuclearization of South Asia and the Future of Non-Proliferation," *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2007), <https://jps.pu.edu.pk/6/article/view/146/146>.

³ Rubina Waseem and Abeer I. Tahirkheli, "Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime: The Significance of Pakistan's NSG Membership," *Margalla Papers*, No. 2 (2019), <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk>.

trade and preserve their national interests, thereby restricting access for other states. Realist theory highlights how states value power and self-interest, making the international system anarchic. Therefore, the emphasis on export guidelines for nuclear technology and material control is seen as a way for its influential members to control the security risks and financial benefits of nuclear power, frequently putting them at conflict with non-member states that regard such controls as a breach of their right to peaceful access to nuclear technology.⁴ Realists view that NPT nuclear weapon states used the NSG and non-proliferation regime as an instrument to safeguard their influence and monopoly on nuclear technology while denying other access. The nuclear deal between the US and India in 2008 and the special exemption for India in the NSG are examples of major powers like the US influencing NSG rules for their own strategic interests. While Pakistan, which is also a non-NPT nuclear state, denied similar treatment, this indicates the idea of power politics and selectivity in an anarchic system.

According to the Realist perspective, power determines how each state behaves in the anarchic international system. South Asian states in this context, particularly India and Pakistan, view nuclear weapons as essential tools for deterrence and safeguarding national interests. According to Hedley Bull, nations must be self-sufficient to thrive in anarchic environments. Nuclear acquisition reflects this imperative in South Asia. States need power to defend themselves against other states. The idea that states can be forced to take specific activities by threatening to use force defines the anarchic system. In addition to other domestic and prestige-related reasons, governments purchase nuclear weapons for security reasons. Each state interprets threats according to its own national interests. NSG and broader nonproliferation norms often rely on power

⁴ Saira Bano, "The India–US Nuclear Deal: Norms of Power and the Power of Norms," *The Social Construction of State Power*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781529209846.005>

politics, as they granted special preferential treatment to India while ignoring Pakistan's plea, complicating the future of nonproliferation norms in the region.⁵

Historical Context of NSG and Nuclear Proliferation

New Delhi's first nuclear explosion in 1974, which was termed by the government "Smiling Buddha", prompted the formation of the NSG and currently has 48 members. The US and Canada provided India with a reactor to produce plutonium, assuming that India would use it for peaceful applications. But India's nuclear test signaled a conversion to nuclear weapons development from the peaceful civilian nuclear program. Ironically, India portrayed this test as a peaceful nuclear explosion because it was not a party to the NPT.⁶ This case spurred discussion about further restricting access to technology, equipment, and sensitive/dual-use materials. The discussion evolved into a series of meetings in the United Kingdom from 1975 to 1978, and as a result of the talks, NSG was established in 1975. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also published guidelines for controlling the export of materials used in nuclear weapons activities, including INFCIR/254, and the Trigger List, which lists items requiring physical protection measures, export control, and other safeguards. The IAEA listed materials that can be transferred to NPT NNWS members in the Trigger List.⁷

The NPT nations adhere to the IAEA safeguards while transferring specially designed or prepared equipment to NNWS for manufacturing, handling, or use of nuclear materials. If there was a security exemption, including the IAEA in

⁵ Zulfqar Khan and Rubina Waseem, "Multilateral Export Control Regimes: State of Affairs and Prospects," *Policy Perspectives: The Journal of the Institute of Policy Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2017), pp. 83–104.

⁶ Mohammed B. Alam and Muzaffar A. Ganaie, *India, US and the Nuclear Deal: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: Ess Ess Publication, 2015).

⁷ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), *Communication received from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the International Atomic Energy Agency regarding Certain Member States' Guidelines for the Export of Nuclear Material, Equipment and Technology*, (Vienna: IAEA, 2016).

the framework was necessary. The goals of the NPT and NSG are the restraint of nuclear production and the regulation of the transfer of peaceful nuclear technology. The NPT and NSG differ in their rules, purview, and traits. The NSG is an unofficial cartel based on consensus that lacks a formal enforcement mechanism, while the NPT is a formal, legally enforceable treaty but lacks transparency and impartiality. The capacity to supply specialized nuclear commodities is the primary prerequisite for joining the NSG.⁸

NSG Politics and the Non-NPT NWS

In contradiction to the NSG's vision and charter, India received a clean waiver on September 6, 2008, due to vigorous US diplomacy. The basic requirement for a member state seeking to acquire nuclear-related materials from NSG members is NPT membership. This move of giving India a waiver constituted a blatant breach of a basic article. The inherent tension between international norms and state power is highlighted by the fact that, despite the NSG's efforts to control nuclear proliferation, its rules are shaped by the power dynamics of central states, which seek to use their influence to grant exceptions, such as the one for India, to advance their own goals.⁹ The special waiver to India highlights that strategic interests can undermine nonproliferation norms, and maintaining equilibrium and a safe nuclear order in South Asia will be complicated.

India formally registered to join the NSG in 2016, and Pakistan followed suit in the same year. China made a principled statement at the NSG Plenary session in 2016, stating that: "based on discrimination, any formula regarding the inclusion of non-NPT NWSs will not be acceptable." Beijing also restated its position in the 2017 plenary session. With India's participation in the NSG,

⁸ Rubina Waseem, "Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) Membership and Mainstreaming Non-NPT Nuclear Weapon State (NWS): Case Study of Pakistan and India," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2020), pp. 78–100, <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.040.02.0078>.

⁹ Siddharth Ramana, *The Nuclear Suppliers Group Waiver*, (London: BASIC, 2008), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/92364/gtz08.pdf>.

many nations have recently changed their perspectives, including South Africa, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Turkey, Mexico, and Switzerland. The only participating country that prevents India from joining the NSG is China. China argues that all new applicants should be subject to the same procedures that apply to membership in India, and that membership in the group should be awarded in accordance with existing norms.¹⁰

To make non-NPT NWS eligible for NSG membership, Rafael Mariano Grossi put out a nine-point proposal in 2016. Nine requirements are outlined in this formula for the non-NPT signatory governments to meet to join the NSG. According to the formula, non-civilian nuclear facilities and civilian nuclear facilities must be kept apart and identified in an IAEA declaration. Facilities should be deemed protected by the IAEA; additionally, the formula sought to include a pledge to refrain from conducting nuclear weapons tests.¹¹ Zamir Akram, a former Pakistani ambassador, contends that Grossi failed to fulfil his obligation to create a fair membership for those not signatories to the NPT. Instead, the formula was designed to make it easier for a few chosen nations, primarily India, to access all nuclear facilities in beneficiary states, both present and future.¹² According to the explanation above, the NSG's platform reflects the shifting global order and the ensuing convergences and divergences between nations. Such realistic politics, however, cast doubt on the legitimacy and objectivity of the nuclear export control systems, reducing their efficacy. Establishing consistent standards for all states hoping to join the NSG is essential to advancing international nonproliferation efforts. Furthermore, to advance the goal of nonproliferation, India and Pakistan ought to be included in global nuclear regimes. This study argues that it is imperative for all nuclear

¹⁰ SVI Administrator, *27th NSG Plenary Meeting: Challenges and Prospects, 23 May 2017* (Islamabad: SVI, 2017).

¹¹ Muhammad W. Qutab, "NSG Membership for India and Pakistan: Debating 'Critical' Aspects," *IPRI Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019), pp. 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.31945/iprij.190101>.

¹² Malik Qasim Mustafa, "NSG Membership Debate: Recent Developments," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2017), pp. 1–15, https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final-Issue_Qasim_dated_05-1-2017.pdf.

powers, particularly those with sufficiently developed nuclear technology, to provide equal opportunities for membership to achieve nonproliferation goals. Addressing the concerns of the NNWs would reduce mistrust within the global community and arms control problems for the group.

India's Case of NSG Membership

New Delhi's nuclear ambitions date back to 1945, with the establishment of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Under the guise of peaceful use of nuclear technology, India conducted a nuclear test in 1974. This test led to a discussion about the transfer of nuclear-related materials and technologies for peaceful applications, which could later be diverted to achieve nuclear weapons.¹³ The NSG was established in 1975 to address this concern, but a special waiver granted to India in 2008 raised serious questions about the group's credibility. India declared its ambitions to become a part of the NSG after the successful nuclear test in 1998. As a result, Pakistan was pushed to respond to maintain deterrence and power equilibrium in the region. However, a discussion about bolstering nonproliferation measures began following the display of their nuclear capabilities. India's stance on the main tools of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, including the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT), remained consistent. India has consistently opposed the NPT, claiming it is an arbitrary treaty that divides nuclear states into haves and have-nots.¹⁴

To maintain its hegemonic position and counter and contain China, the US has signed an agreement on the civilian nuclear program with India. It strengthened its ties with the country by exchanging cutting-edge military

¹³ Ashley J. Tellis, *Reclaiming the Promise of Nuclear Power in India* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2024), <https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Tellis%20-%20India%20Nuclear%20Power.pdf>.

¹⁴ Zafar N. Jaspal, "Comparative Analysis of India-Pakistan Proliferation Contours," *Journal of Security & Strategic Analyses*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2018), pp. 1-18.

technology. India's report card on nuclear safety and security is questionable, with several cases of nuclear theft and accidental firing of missiles; however, despite these vulnerabilities in Indian nuclear command and control, the US chose to sign this deal only to facilitate its geo-political ambitions. India used this as the foundation for their justification for applying to join the NSG. India also pledged to place its 14 nuclear reactors under the IAEA protection, but the remaining eight were neither identified nor subject to any safety measures.¹⁵ The 2008 extraordinary trade waiver granted to India compromised the principles of nonproliferation. The blatant breach of Article I of the NPT has resulted in thirteen cases of horizontal proliferation. Interestingly, the Indo-US lacks a full-scope protection agreement, which calls into question the US commitment under NPT Article I. Without comprehensive protection, the US lacks a non-combative means to ensure that technology transfers eventually advance military capabilities. The complicated implementation issues of the Indo-US agreement, the US has so far been unable to provide India with even a single nuclear reactor due to disagreements over nuclear liability, tracking of materials, and dubious Indian commitments to atomic testing and nonproliferation.¹⁶

The US policymakers contend that the issue with India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) 2010 rendered the Indo-US agreement "dead at the very beginning."¹⁷ The primary obstacles to operationalizing the US-India nuclear deal were as follows: the CLNDA was considered to be departing from the international accountability system. After it arrived in India, there were unresolved issues with the systems for tracking and monitoring the provided

¹⁵ Muhammad Azmat, Muhammad Ahsan, and Sana Asghar, "Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Implications for Pakistan," *Global Foreign Policies Review*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2022), 14–25, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023\(vi-iv\).02](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023(vi-iv).02).

¹⁶ Strategic Vision Institute (SVI), *Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Politics of the NSG and Its Implications for Pakistan* (Islamabad: SVI, 2016), <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Final-July-Report-2016-In-House-Seminar-NSG-Indo-US-Deal.pdf>.

¹⁷ Gorremutthu M. Vidyasagar, "India's Nuclear Civil Liability Act: A Paradigm Shift from International Nuclear Civil Liability Regime," *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2021), pp. 2320–2335.

nuclear material. India thinks the agreement excludes the tracking and accounting of nuclear material. India's 2010 CLNDA requires all suppliers to cover the costs of nuclear accidents. This is something that the US government and companies, along with many governments and businesses worldwide, consider incompatible with current international standards, especially the Convention for Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage, which assigns responsibility to nuclear plant operators. Despite protests from foreign governments, reactor vendors, and Indian suppliers, the Indian government refused to change the liability law.¹⁸

2010 CLNDA has caused supply chain firms to impede these endeavors. Ironically, India regarded itself as eligible despite its history of widespread vertical expansion. Additionally, the two significant events of 2008, the India-US nuclear deal and the NSG clean waiver, paved the way for India to apply to join the NSG, and it also became a Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) member in 2016 and, in 2017, joined the Wassenaar Arrangement.¹⁹ China also requested membership in 2004, but Washington accused Beijing of being reckless with its export controls; thus, the application was denied. The 2025 Yearbook of SIPRI also highlighted the expanding nuclear arsenal of India, which has grown from 172 to about 180 warheads, along with a record of nuclear security lapses, including theft and loss of nuclear material.²⁰ This created a precedent of disparity within the international community, which ignores essential security and safeguard concerns in the South Asian region. India's pursuit of nuclear-powered submarines and a range of ballistic missile systems, including short-range to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), strongly indicates its hegemonic intentions. India's Agni-V, with a range of over

¹⁸ Ashley J. Tellis, *Completing the U.S.–India Civil Nuclear Agreement: Fulfilling the Promises of a Summer Long Past* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2023).

¹⁹ Rubina Waseem, "Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) Membership and Mainstreaming Non-NPT Nuclear Weapon States (NWS): Case Study of Pakistan and India," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April 2020), pp. 78–100, <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.040.02.0078>.

²⁰ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Nuclear Risks Grow as New Arms Race Looms—New SIPRI Yearbook Out Now* (Solna: SIPRI, 2025).

5,000 km, can reach parts of Europe. This factor is particularly significant for the European states that advocate India's entry into the NSG, as India is not even close to becoming a credible nuclear state.

Regarding the Indian safety and security regime, the post-NSG waiver safeguard agreement that India has approved for the transfer of nuclear-related systems and fissile material is a loose arrangement between India and the IAEA. India's record on nuclear proliferation, safety, and security is appalling. Illicit heavy water purchases, centrifuge information leaks, illicit procurements, the black diamond incident, and the diversion of international peaceful cooperation for weapons use are a few examples of past activity. Despite all these, an increasing number of nuclear theft incidents and nuclear arsenal are steadily expanding in the present. In the NSG waiver case, the US violated its own laws in favor of India; also, the US has never condemned India for its poor record of nuclear safety and security. In contrast to other non-NPT NWSs, India is receiving special treatment, as the debate above indicates. This biased approach seriously calls into question the NSG's standards, impartiality, and credibility.

Pakistan's Case of NSG Membership

Pakistan's peaceful nuclear program started in the 1950s when, as part of the "Atoms for Peace" initiative, some of its scientists received training. New Delhi's 1974 nuclear test compelled Pakistan to consider the pursuit of nuclear weapons as a means to deter India's military and nuclear aggression. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the prime minister of Pakistan at that time, launched a clandestine nuclear program immediately to obtain nuclear weapons. Pakistan created nuclear technology in the early 1980s so that it could produce nuclear weapons in a scenario where India threatens or attacks.²¹ After the New Delhi 1998 nuclear tests, Islamabad established the "Minimum Credible Deterrence" stance,

²¹ Zafar Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014).

which it later modified to the Credible Minimum Deterrence policy and, more recently, the Full Spectrum Deterrence, falling within the broader ambit of credible minimum deterrence. Pakistan formally asserts that because of India's conventional and nuclear capabilities, it was necessary to rely on its own nuclear weapons capacity for its self-defense, as Islamabad was not the first country to conduct nuclear tests in the South Asian region.²² India and Pakistan have been involved in three full-scale wars since gaining their independence. Therefore, the goal of Islamabad's quick nuclear weapons manufacture was to eliminate the threats from India and restore deterrence in South Asia.

Significantly, Pakistan has been adhering to its international commitments, including the voluntary code of conduct required to maintain standards of nuclear trade, in contrast to Indian regulations. The Export Control Act (ECA) of 2004 allows the government to regulate the export, re-export, and transshipment of materials, technologies, and equipment associated with nuclear and biological weapons and their delivery systems. After being first announced in 2005, the Control lists were updated in 2011, 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2022. The MTCR, NSG, and the Australia Group are examples of the global export control regimes with which Pakistan has improved its cooperation over the years. The listings of these export control regimes and their standards are aligned with the updated Control listings.²³ Pakistan, as a responsible nuclear state, remains dedicated to maintaining its obligations and advancing the common objectives of nonproliferation.

Pakistan remains dedicated to working with the international community as a partner to achieve nonproliferation goals on an equal basis. It seeks a non-discriminatory, inclusive, principle-based international nonproliferation regime

²² Feroz Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Notifies Revised Control Lists under the Export Control Act of 2004* (Islamabad: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2022), <https://mofa.gov.pk/pakistan-notifies-revised-control-lists-under-the-export-control-act-of-2004-9>.

grounded in the fundamental idea of equitable and sustained security for all governments. Adequate disarmament progress requires the settlement of long-standing issues and conflicts and a favorable regional and international security environment. India and Pakistan share similar views on the NPT. They contend that the treaty separating the NWSs and the NNWs is discriminatory. Regarding the CTBT, Pakistan and India insist on signing it simultaneously. At the Conference on Disarmament (CD), Pakistan raises significant concerns about the proposed FMCT since it does not consider the existing stockpiles of all other nuclear-capable states. It viewed it as a treaty that was centered on Pakistan. The established NWSs already possess extensive inventories of fissile elements, but they refuse to make them available to any accounting, auditing, or verification systems. Therefore, only future manufacturing of fissile material would be covered by the proposed FMCT. According to Pakistan, this would jeopardize the South Asian regional stability and its ability to construct a strong deterrence against India because of its smaller stockpiles of fissile material. The FMCT, which Pakistan offered, would restrict the future production of fissile material and verify current stockpiles through a verifiable process.²⁴ Pakistan's stance is also supported by the US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) 2018, calling on the country to ensure the capability to produce and maintain nuclear weapons, to boost investment to strengthen its nuclear triad, and deter nuclear and non-nuclear attacks.²⁵

Since the NSG relies on consensus, Pakistan's chances of joining would be permanently blocked if India were to join. Pakistan has highly emphasized maintaining its nuclear safety and security, taking it as a national responsibility. It has guaranteed the safety of nuclear and radioactive materials, as well as all

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan's Positions & Policies on Arms Control, Non-Proliferation & Disarmament Related Issues* (Islamabad: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2025), <https://mofa.gov.pk/arms-control-and-disarmament#:~:text=Pakistan%20considers%20nuclear%20safety%20and,through%20various%20IAEA%20Expert%20Missions>.

²⁵ Malik Q. Mustafa, "US Nuclear Posture Review 2018: An Overview," *Strategic Studies*, March 2018, https://issii.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IB_Qasim_March_02_2018.pdf.

associated infrastructure, across Pakistan. The autonomous Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority (PNRA) has established response and recovery systems for radioactive sources and a sustainable nuclear safety regulatory framework for power reactors. In light of the IAEA safety requirements and the abundance of national expertise, the PNRA continues to review and update its regulations. Through several IAEA Expert Missions, specialists from other nuclear regulatory agencies have peer-reviewed PNRA's regulatory supervision program, which is founded on globally recognized norms. Pakistan has joined the Nuclear Security Contact Group (NSCG).

It has been actively involved in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) since 2007 to promote the implementation of nuclear safety obligations. An ISO 9001:2015-accredited organization, the National Institute of Safety and Security (NISAS) was designated as the IAEA Collaborating Centre in 2022 to acknowledge Pakistan's proficiency in nuclear safety and security. Pakistan released an updated pamphlet detailing the general parameters of its Nuclear Security Regime (NSR) in May 2024 during the IAEA International Conference on Nuclear Security. Additionally, Pakistan is a signatory to International Nuclear Safety and Security Conventions and Treaties (INSSC&T), including the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS), the Convention on Assistance of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (CANARE), the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (CENNA), the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) and its Amendment, and the IAEA code of conduct on the safety and security of radioactive sources.

When visiting Pakistan in 2023, DG IAEA Rafael Grossi also appreciated Pakistan's nuclear safety record as world-class and impeccable. Additionally, Pakistan endorses the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540. According to UNSCR 1540, all parties must pass

laws to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, and it also compels the parties to protect atomic material security guidelines, the IAEA norms, and activities. Non-state actors are the primary subject of the resolution, as the NPT did not include them. Pakistan has also provided the UN Committee that oversees the implementation of Resolution 1540 with several reports as a responsible state.²⁶ Pakistan's strong command and control systems are widely recognized. This demonstrates that the group will fortify the larger NPR framework by allowing Pakistan to join the NSG.

Benefits of Joining NSG for Pakistan

Pakistan possesses the infrastructure, workforce, and experience necessary to offer NSG-controlled commodities, services, and items. Advanced nuclear technology that may be used to enrich uranium and recycle plutonium for peaceful uses would be available to Pakistan if it were granted membership in the NSG. By doing this, Pakistan would have greater access to cutting-edge technology than the other 48 group members. Pakistan will benefit especially from this, as its energy needs continue to expand. Also, it would enable Pakistan to manufacture nuclear power equipment for civilian use on a commercial basis, which it could then export to other nations, greatly benefiting its economy. Pakistan plans to generate 40,000 MW of power and increase the share of nuclear energy to 25% in the coming years under the Nuclear Energy Vision (NEV) 2050. Global collaboration in peaceful nuclear technology is required to achieve this potential plan, and by joining the NSG, Pakistan can get closer to its 2050 goal. Pakistan thus seeks international cooperation in the peaceful

²⁶ Adil Sultan, *Universalizing Nuclear Nonproliferation Norms: A Regional Framework for the South Asian Nuclear Weapon States*, (Basingstoke: Springer, 2018), https://www.academia.edu/125580048/Universalizing_Nuclear_Nonproliferation.

applications of nuclear technology through the NSG membership platform to meet its growing energy needs.²⁷

On the one hand, India demands that the NSG adopt a merit-based approach. At the same time, Pakistan emphasized that the NSG considers the application requirements in light of the track record of nuclear safety and security of both states. Under this approach, countries that have significantly advanced their disarmament or nonproliferation efforts may be eligible for membership or participation. This strategy is discriminatory because it allows subjective evaluations of a country's contributions and activities, which could lead to inconsistent and skewed decision-making.²⁸ Gaining greater access to the nuclear market may allow one state to expand its nuclear arsenal. This would jeopardize strategic stability between Pakistan and India and disrupt the already unstable regional power relations in South Asia, which have worsened by the recent May 2025 escalation between the two states.

Future of Nonproliferation Norms in South Asia

Despite these initiatives, such as the IAEA, the NSG, and the MTCR, as well as multilateral arms control and disarmament treaties like the NPT, the CTBT, and the FMCT, South Asia's Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime is facing difficulties for various reasons. Firstly, India and Pakistan are not party to the NPT. They declined to become members at the outset because it was discriminatory and divided the world into haves and have-nots. NPT Article VI requires NWS to engage in good-faith negotiations toward nuclear disarmament. Still, the US and Russia, along with other nuclear-weapon states recognized by the NPT, are not fulfilling their commitments. However, the only reason Pakistan has not signed

²⁷ SVI Administrator, *India's Quest for NSG Membership and Pakistan's Stance on 26 June 2019*. (Islamabad: SVI, 2019), <https://thesvi.org/svi-in-house-seminar-panel-discussion-report-26thjune-2019-indias-quest-for-nsg-membership-and-pakistans-stance/>.

²⁸ Nazia Sheikh, "The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG): Pakistan and India's Competing Bids," *Eurasia Review*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09092025-the-geopolitics-of-the-nuclear-suppliers-group-nsg-pakistan-and-indias-competing-bids-oped/>.

the treaty is that India has refused to sign it. Secondly, India and Pakistan worked on drafting the CTBT, but they chose not to sign it in 1996 because India claimed it would not sign until the US and China signed and ratified the CTBT.²⁹ In 2023, Russia also withdrew from the CTBTO. However, Pakistan may decide on India's signature and ratification of the CTBT after critically analyzing the costs and benefits. In contrast, the FMCT has not yet been drafted.³⁰

Future nonproliferation in South Asia is contingent upon the effectiveness of the NPT and the robustness of the Nonproliferation Regime. The NPT's effectiveness has been severely damaged after South Asian nuclearisation, and the scenario is worsening due to prejudice in the application of the NPT and the uneven application of the US nuclear nonproliferation policies. The country that contributed to the nonproliferation regimes is also violating its own rules and standards, including the US-India nuclear deal of 2008 and a special waiver for India at the NSG.³¹ The US policy is twofold: on the one hand, it has implemented a preemptive doctrine to limit North Korea and Iran's nuclear ambitions, while, on the contrary, it has ignored India's expanding nuclear arsenal. South Asia cannot remain peaceful and stable as long as India continues to increase its nuclear weapons, as the SIPRI report 2025 also indicates. South Asia is experiencing persistent challenges to strategic stability due to India's irresponsible nuclear actions, most recently in the May 2025 attack on Pakistani soil. It is recommended that the international community compel India's participation in a regional conversation with Pakistan and discourage its hegemonic ambitions. The international community must take a suitable stance in light of the current South Asian security situation and act decisively to fortify

²⁹ Muhammad A. Ijaz, "Challenges to Nuclear Non-Proliferation in South Asia since 1998: A Case Study of India and Pakistan," *Regional Studies*, November 2024, <https://irs.org.pk/Focus/FNov24.pdf>.

³⁰ Khalid A. Kidwai, "The Pakistani National Perspective on Nuclear Non-Proliferation," *Springer Proceedings in Physics*, 2018, xx, doi:10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2_21.

³¹ Henry Sokolski, *Reviewing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013).

the NPR and explore more realistic alternatives for these nations. Because of the possible risk of escalation, Pakistan and India must work together to investigate prospective areas where collaboration with their opponents is likely to advance global efforts towards arms control.

Conclusion

The pattern of selective approaches in the evolution of the global nonproliferation regime undermines its credibility. Despite conducting a nuclear test in 1974, the special exemptions granted to India by the US contradict the Group's own regulations, which are meant to restrict cooperation with the non-NPT states, thereby weakening its normative standing as a body committed to impartiality and non-discrimination. Against this backdrop, Pakistan has consistently demonstrated a stronger record of nuclear safety and security compared to India, aligned closely with the IAEA standards. The strong support for India's NSG bid, despite its expanding missile capabilities, some with ranges extending to Europe, also poses a threat to Europe itself. While Pakistan remains committed to nonproliferation initiatives, consistent with its export-control mechanisms with global standards and the responsible use of peaceful nuclear technology, India's history of proliferation and recurring incidents in nuclear safety and security highlighted the discriminatory nature of privileging its NSG candidacy over Pakistan's. Such selective treatment not only undermines the principle of transparency and non-discrimination but also risks destabilizing the South Asia region. Pakistan's consistent track record of maintaining the safety and security of its peaceful nuclear program enhances legitimacy and strengthens its bid in the NSG. As a nuclear-supplying state, adhering to NSG guidelines and best practices for the supply of controlled products, goods, materials, technologies, and services can help advance Pakistan's membership in the NSG and its non-proliferation objectives.

For NSG to preserve its credibility and normative authority, it must adopt a transparent, criteria-based membership framework that treats all non-NPT nuclear-armed states on equal terms. Incorporating Pakistan into the nonproliferation system through fair access to civilian nuclear cooperation would enhance its role in global initiatives, establish stronger checks on dual-use technologies, and reinforce the universality of nonproliferation norms. Conversely, privileging India while excluding Pakistan would weaken the nonproliferation regimes and cast doubt on rules that have been developed over decades. The resolution of these disparities is therefore vital not only for South Asian strategic stability but also for the future credibility of the global nonproliferation order.

Without losing normative consistency, the non-proliferation regime is a litmus test for whether it can adapt to contemporary nuclear realities and handle the non-NPT nuclear states in the NSG. An approach to strengthening the NSG is based on effective non-proliferation, which increasingly depends on obedience, behavior, and institutional capacity to adopt the NPT. Continuous exclusion of responsible non-NPT nuclear states would erase the trust in export control regimes. It is recommended that NSG propose a mechanism as an optimistic middle-ground approach between unconditional entry and inclusion for the non-NPT nuclear states. This research also indicates that the NSG's preferential treatment of India has resulted in unequal implementation of non-proliferation norms in South Asia. While India has gained extended access to the civilian nuclear trade, Pakistan remained excluded despite significant compliance with NSG export control standards. This discriminatory approach has weakened the normative consistency of the global nonproliferation regime and also has implications for regional strategic stability.