

# AN NSG MEMBERSHIP CAN OPEN NEW DOORS FOR INDIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India- Other groupings and agreements

As it has in the past, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) will hold its second half-yearly plenary in December. In diplomatic lockstep, New Delhi will lobby in the months beforehand, seeking to get a consensus on India's joining the international rules-making nuclear technology body. Given India's repeated failure to gain entry to this exclusive multilateral club, there will be more than a little scepticism about the worth of so much diplomatic effort.

There can be little doubt that NSG membership is a prize worth aspiring for. India won an exemption from the NSG's layers of nuclear technology sanctions, thanks to the India-US nuclear deal. However, in theory, such an exemption can be revoked by the NSG. Becoming a full-fledged member remains the best guarantee against such a reversal. In part, India's determination to get NSG membership reflects the scars left behind by decades of nuclear sanctions. There is a more pragmatic reason to join. India is unique in being a recognised nuclear country exempt from NSG sanctions but is not a signatory to the comprehensive test ban treaty. This grey legal status has hampered its ability to access higher-end nuclear technology from Western companies. NSG membership would resolve this problem.

Given the implacable opposition showed by China to India's joining the NSG, however, there is a feeling that seeking membership is the political equivalent of tilting at windmills. While it makes sense to keep reminding the other 47 members of the NSG that India remains interested in full membership, it is not clear whether it is worthwhile for New Delhi to strike diplomatic deals over this issue.

The only possible reason for India to put its back behind such efforts is a hope that Beijing may have become more flexible on the issue. There might be some reason to believe this is the case. The Chinese system has been rattled by its escalating trade war with the United States. There are even a few signs of dissent within Beijing at Chinese leader Xi Jinping's aggressive foreign policy stance. China has signalled a desire for a less confrontational relationship with India this year. There is no evidence that any of the underlying causes of Sino-Indian rivalry are being addressed, but if even a temporary truce between the two countries possibly means Beijing can be pressed on NSG membership, it is worth the effort. Diplomacy is as much about making opportunities as it is about seizing them.

First Published: Aug 29, 2018 14:50 IST

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