Established in 1975, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is comprised of 48 states that have voluntarily agreed to coordinate their export controls to non-nuclear-weapon states. The NSG governs the transfers of civilian nuclear material and nuclear-related equipment and technology. The participants are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The NSG aims to prevent nuclear exports for commercial and peaceful purposes from being used to make nuclear weapons. In order to ensure that their nuclear imports are not used to develop weapons, NSG members are expected to forgo nuclear trade with governments that do not subject themselves to confidence-building international measures and inspections. The NSG has two sets of Guidelines listing the specific nuclear materials, equipment, and technologies that are subject to export controls.

History

Negotiated in 1968, the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) granted non-nuclear-weapon states access to nuclear materials and technology for strictly peaceful purposes.

Recognizing peaceful nuclear programs could turn into weapons programs, several NPT nuclear supplier states sought to determine the conditions for sharing specific equipment and materials with non-nuclear-weapon states. In 1971, these supplier states formed the Zangger Committee in order to require states outside the NPT to institute International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards before importing certain items that could be used to pursue nuclear weapons—referred to as the "Trigger List."

India's explosion of a nuclear device in 1974 reaffirmed the fact that nuclear materials and technologies acquired under the guise of peaceful purposes could be diverted to build weapons. In response to India's action, several Zangger Committee members, along with France—who was not a member of the NPT at that time—established the NSG to further regulate nuclear-related exports. The NSG also added supplemental technologies to the original Zangger Committee's "Trigger List," becoming Part I of the NSG Guidelines. In addition, NSG members agreed to apply their trade restrictions to all states, not just those outside the NPT.
The **NSG Guidelines** require that importing states provide assurances to NSG members that proposed deals will not contribute to the creation of nuclear weapons. Potential recipients are also expected to have physical security measures in place to prevent theft or unauthorized use of their imports and to promise that nuclear materials and information will not be transferred to a third party without the explicit permission of the original exporter. In addition, final destinations for any transfer must have IAEA safeguards in place. The IAEA is charged with verifying that non-nuclear-weapon states are not illicitly pursuing nuclear weapons. To prevent nuclear material or technology from being stolen or misappropriated for weapons, IAEA safeguards include inspections, remote monitoring, seals, and other measures.

The Guidelines are comprised of two parts, each created in response to significant proliferation events that highlighted shortcomings in the export control systems.

**Part I** lists materials and technology designed specifically for nuclear use. These include fissile materials, nuclear reactors and equipment, and reprocessing and enrichment equipment. First published in 1978, Part I responded to India’s 1974 diversion of nuclear imports for supposedly peaceful purposes to conduct a nuclear explosion. To be eligible for importing Part I items from an NSG member, states must have comprehensive IAEA safeguards covering all their nuclear activities and facilities. In the case of Part II goods, IAEA safeguards are only required for the specific nuclear activity or facility designated for the import.

**Part II** identifies dual-use goods; non-nuclear items with legitimate civilian applications that can also be used to develop weapons. Machine tools and lasers are two types of dual-use goods. NSG members adopted Part II in 1992 after discovering how close Iraq came to realizing its nuclear weapons ambitions. Iraq had illicitly employed dual-use imports in a covert nuclear weapons program before the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

At a May 2004 meeting, NSG members adopted a “catch-all” mechanism, which authorizes members to block any export suspected to be destined to a nuclear weapons program even if the export does not appear on one of the control lists.

Because the regime is voluntary, NSG members may ultimately make a political calculation to proceed with a transfer that violates the guidelines. For instance, Russia transferred nuclear fuel to India in January 2001 even though 32 of 34 NSG members earlier declared that the shipment would contradict Russia’s **NSG commitments**.

Members are supposed to report their export denials to each other so potential proliferators cannot approach several suppliers with the same request and receive different responses. NSG states are expected to refrain from making exports identical or similar to those denied by other members.

In 2008, the NSG agreed to exempt India from its requirement that recipient countries must have comprehensive IAEA safeguards covering all nuclear activities. The United States pressed for a three-year exemption to allow nuclear trade with India, but some NSG members were reluctant to agree to such a reversal. The waiver commits each NSG member to regularly inform the group of approved transfers to India and invites each country to share information on their bilateral nuclear cooperation agreements with India.

As part of the organization, NSG members periodically review the Guidelines to add new items that pose proliferation risks or to eliminate goods that no longer require special trade controls. An annual plenary, which is chaired on a rotating basis among members, is held to discuss the regime’s operation, including possible changes to the Guidelines. All NSG decisions are made by consensus. Members also participate in regular meetings of separate standing bodies—the Dual-Use Consultations and the Joint Information Exchange—devoted to reviewing Part II of the Guidelines and exchanging pertinent information.

The Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organisations in Vienna serves as the NSG point of contact. It receives and distributes NSG documents, schedules meetings, and assists with other administrative work.
Membership

Any state that conducts exports appearing on the Guidelines may apply for NSG membership. A potential member is evaluated on its proliferation record for national export controls and adherence to international nonproliferation treaties and agreements. All existing members must approve an applicant for admittance to the regime. There are several countries with nuclear programs outside the NSG, most notably India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea.

In recent years, India has advanced its bid to join the NSG. Although President Barack Obama expressed support for India’s membership to the NSG in 2010, the group remains divided, in part because, as a non-state-party to the NPT, India doesn’t meet a core criterion for membership.

At the June 2016 NSG meeting, the United States and India pushed for acceptance of India’s bid for membership. All of the participating states, except for China, support allowing India to join the NSG without signing the NPT. China noted that other non-NPT states in addition to India had expressed desire in joining the NSG, and therefore India should not receive an exclusive exemption. As China’s ambassador to Vienna, Shi Zhongjun, explained in June 2016, as “NPT membership constitutes one of the prerequisite factors for consideration of NSG participation, [m]ore discussions are needed before the Group is in a position to review...participation by any specific non-NPT state at the meetings of the Group.” China’s aim is to define non-discriminatory guidelines for membership that would remove the possibility of political bias.

In response to India’s bid, Pakistan also expressed a desire to join the NSG. On May 20, 2016, Pakistan’s ambassador sent a letter to formally apply for NSG membership, arguing that it also has the credentials to join.

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