

Israel's Nuclear Trade Proposal in the Context of the U.S.-Indian Nuclear Deal

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[Documents surfaced this week](#) outlining an Israeli proposal for criteria that nuclear suppliers should use in determining eligible recipients for nuclear commerce. That "criteria-based" approach contrasts sharply with the Bush administration's pursuit of "India-specific" exemptions to existing U.S. and international nuclear commerce rules. Not only does the Israeli proposal underscore that bending rules for one state will increase pressure from others for similar favours, Israel's dozen criteria highlights shortcomings in India's bid for special treatment.

Israel tendered its proposal to the voluntary Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in March 2007. The group's 45 members, including the United States, aim to coordinate their nuclear export policies in order to prevent the spread of materials and technologies that could aid nuclear weapons programs. In 1992, the group adopted a rule significantly restricting nuclear trade with any non-nuclear-weapon state that does not subject all of its nuclear facilities and activities to international full-scope safeguards, such as inspections. That rule currently constrains India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan from engaging in international civilian nuclear trade because they do not allow such comprehensive safeguards and, despite possessing nuclear arms, they all are classified as non-nuclear-weapon states under the 1968 nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

In July 2005, the Bush administration committed itself to nullify for India that full-scope safeguards rule, which was originally promoted by the United States. Pakistan has indicated that it wants a similar arrangement and Israel's March proposal suggests it does not want to be left out. If any one or all three succeed, the result would be that current nuclear-armed NPT outliers would reap benefits previously reserved for countries abjuring nuclear weapons. That could have severe consequences for global efforts to stem the spread of nuclear weapons. Other states might re-evaluate their policies to forswear nuclear weapons or conclude that global norms and treaties have little value.

Israel's proposed criteria illustrate some of the reasons why India does not deserve preferential treatment. For instance, one criterion notes that non-NPT states should be "in full compliance with any nuclear cooperation agreement previously entered into." India had a previous agreement with the United States but blatantly broke it by testing a nuclear device in 1974 that was partially derived from U.S. materials supplied solely for peaceful purposes. India's government still insists that test was a "peaceful" nuclear explosion, and it also maintains that it has a "right" to conduct future nuclear tests. Other criteria also raise questions for India because of its ongoing relations with Iran, which has violated its international safeguards and is charged by the United States and other countries as illicitly pursuing nuclear arms.

The Israeli proposal, however, fails to include as criteria two other essential measures of good nonproliferation behaviour: signature and ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which outlaws nuclear explosions, and cessation of the production of fissile material, plutonium and highly enriched uranium, for nuclear weapon purposes.

When pondering changes to existing nuclear rules, governments should proceed with extreme caution to avoid undermining the global nonproliferation regime and maintain common sense

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conditions on nuclear trade that enshrine standards for and require responsible behaviour by all.

A copy of the Israeli proposal and additional information on the proposed U.S.-Indian nuclear cooperation agreement are available at <http://www.armscontrol.org/projects/india/>.

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