

Russia Ships Nuclear Fuel to India

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In apparent violation of its non-proliferation commitments, Russia followed through in February with a deal to ship low-enriched uranium to India's nuclear power station at Tarapur. The Tarapur site, located in the state of Maharashtra, contains two U.S.-built 160-megawatt light-water reactors that the United States supplied with fuel until 1980.

The deal, which was reportedly made in August, has raised objections from Washington. A February 16 statement by State Department spokesman Philip Reeker expressed deep "regret" over Russia's "violation" of its commitments as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The group, a 39-nation regime of nuclear supplier states, has undertaken not to transfer nuclear materials or technology to non-nuclear-weapon states without International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards at all their nuclear sites. While the Tarapur reactors have been under IAEA safeguards since 1994, other Indian nuclear sites are not safeguarded.

Under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India is considered a non-nuclear-weapon state, despite its nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998.

Reeker added that at a December NSG meeting the "overwhelming majority" of members expressed their "strong concerns" about the then-pending transfer, which "they regarded as inconsistent with Russia's commitments." He said that Washington joins "other nuclear suppliers in calling on Russia to cancel this supply arrangement and live up to its non-proliferation obligations." Reeker further said that Russia's transfer of "sensitive technologies to other countries" would be an "important item" on the Bush administration's agenda.

Moscow claims that it is not violating its NSG commitments, contending it is supplying the fuel for the reactors' "safe operation." NSG guidelines do permit nuclear material transfers to non-nuclear-weapon states without all their facilities safeguarded if the shipment is essential for safety purposes.

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