

**NMF Article**  
**Jun 24, 2010**



Varuna Complex, Airport Road,  
NH - 8, New Delhi - 110010  
Tel: +91-11-2615 4901  
Tele fax: +91-11-2615652  
Website: [www.maritimeindia.org](http://www.maritimeindia.org)

**NSG meeting: China as 'responsible' nuclear power**

*By C. Uday Bhaskar*

The June 24 meeting of the 46 member NSG (Nuclear Suppliers Group) at Christchurch, New Zealand is an important event for many reasons but is likely to be over-shadowed by the defiant posture being adopted by China over the supply of two additional nuclear reactors to Pakistan -without the concurrence of the NSG.

It is understood that the U.S. and some allies have conveyed their dismay to Beijing over this development - but in vain. China is reported to have taken a stand that this deal had been 'grandfathered' six years ago in mid 2004, when the details of Sino-Pak nuclear cooperation were first made public.

The argument being advanced by Beijing is that this deal is for civilian nuclear energy -and similar to that arrived at between the U.S. and India in late 2008. While it is true that both India and Pakistan (as also Israel) are not signatories to the NPT, the comparison is not valid. India has been accorded an exceptional status by the NSG after many months of arduous negotiations when its non-proliferation track record and other attributes were closely scrutinized - and only then was the U.S. able to conclude its bi-lateral agreement with India for civil nuclear cooperation.

The U.S. no doubt expended considerable effort to prevail upon the NSG members and even China - which had deep reservations - went along with the majority who were in favour of according India the exceptional status.

The world today faces complex nuclear related challenges - and some of them came up for scrutiny at the Obama nuclear summit in April that was followed by the NPT Review Conference later in May this year. It was conceded that while Iran and North Korea posed a challenge to the NPT, the greater challenge was the non-state entity and the exigency that the latter would acquire nuclear weapons or fissile material.

The worst-case WMD scenario for the U.S., which finds mention in the apex security review, is that the Al-Qaida or its affiliates would acquire lethal nuclear capability. How could this

happen? And here the elephant in the world's nuclear drawing room that nobody mentioned is the mysterious AQ Khan iceberg.

Nuclear proliferation is a complex and contradictory challenge and despite the rhetorical commitment to the provisions of the NPT, all the major nuclear powers have been culpable in one way or the other.

In private meetings Chinese analysts often refer to Pakistan as the equivalent of Israel in relation to the U.S. apropos covert nuclear assistance - but this analogy is also not valid beyond a point.

Covert Chinese support to the Pakistani quest for a nuclear weapon goes back to the Mao years and acquired traction in the 1980's. More recent disclosures reveal that Beijing did something tectonic that no other major nuclear weapon power has done - namely it supplied and tested a full nuclear weapon design for another state. In May 1990, China carried out a nuclear weapon test for Pakistan and altered Islamabad's strategic profile in a definitive manner.

As has been often reiterated, India has never objected to or questioned Pakistan's right to acquire a nuclear weapon. This is a sovereign right which every nation accords unto itself. The problem for India and the rest of the world is that Pakistan's military establishment has chosen to use this nuclear capability to embark upon a revisionist agenda that includes support to terrorism and trying to change the territorial status quo in its favour.

The brief Kargil war in the summer of 1999 is case in point. China to its credit was not unaware of these developments and remained visibly neutral in that war and allowed the U.S. to privately admonish Pakistan.

However in 2010, as part of an opaque Asian WMD matrix – Beijing appears to be embarking upon a unilateral path of cocking a snook at the U.S. and the rest of the NSG with its intent to go ahead with the supply of additional nuclear reactors to Pakistan. By themselves these reactors may be interpreted as benign and even beneficial for Pakistan's energy grid - but the backdrop is intriguing.

China which is on the ascendant is determined to be perceived as a 'responsible' great power which seeks to manage the world with a U.S. that is in relative decline. With greatness comes the attendant need to exude a sense of responsibility and rectitude by word and deed. And the current Beijing leadership has often laid considerable emphasis on working towards 'shije datong' (a world of grand harmony).

The world cannot help but notice that on current evidence, Beijing's closest allies in Asia are Pakistan and North Korea - listed at the 10th and 19th places respectively in the Failed State Index released this week. Is this how China wishes to build harmony and convey its own index of 'responsibility' at Christchurch on Thursday?

\* \* \*

(C. Uday Bhaskar is Director, National Maritime Foundation. This piece first appeared as a Reuters Column on June 24, 2010).

\*\*\*\*\*