

## **Rudd sticks to line on Israeli nuclear checks**

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Kevin Rudd's apparently unscripted call on Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to submit its facilities to International Atomic Energy Agency inspection has puzzled more than a few observers and commentators.

At least one Israeli official is quoted as saying that Israel cannot open its doors to the IAEA because it is not a member of the NPT. Israel still maintains official ambiguity as to its weapons status, though some Israeli officials have admitted Israel does possess a nuclear weapons arsenal.

We need to unpack Rudd's comments a bit. He told The Australian's John Lyons that "our view has been consistent for a long period of time, and that is that all states in the region should adhere to the NPT, and that includes Israel".

This is consistent with long-standing bipartisan Australian policy. We voted at the general conference in favour of the IAEA resolution entitled Safeguards in the Middle East, which was again adopted this year. This resolution calls on all states in the Middle East to adhere to the NPT.

But we voted against a more specific IAEA resolution entitled Israeli Nuclear Capability.

Australia has also called on the other nuclear weapon states outside the NPT, India and Pakistan, to adhere to the NPT. However unrealistic this might be, it represents longstanding bipartisan Australian policy. The real challenge is how to involve these three states in collaborating with the international community in global non-proliferation efforts and bolstering the NPT.

The US-India agreement and the Nuclear Suppliers Group decision to waive its supply restrictions to India was based on the view that India was a responsible player. A similar argument could be made for Israel. Even Pakistan, whose proliferation record is poor, needs to be drawn in somehow.

Rudd's comments are also consistent with international opinion. One of the key results of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, supported by the US as well as all other NPT members, was the endorsement of a set of steps to convene a conference in 2012, under the auspices of the UN and the US, Britain and Russia, and to be attended by all states of the Middle East, on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear weapon states, whether members of the NPT or not, can and do submit their peaceful nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards. The nuclear co-operation agreement the US struck with India was premised on India submitting all its peaceful nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards. As imperfect as this agreement is, and notwithstanding that it has not yet been totally honoured by India, it confirms the fact that NPT membership is not a prerequisite to nuclear facilities being placed under safeguards. Even Pakistan has some of its non-military facilities subject to IAEA safeguards agreements.

In Israel, the IAEA also conducts inspections under a trilateral US/Israel/IAEA agreement, with the IAEA verifying nuclear material of US origin is not diverted for non-peaceful purposes.

So while Rudd's call on Israel to submit its Dimona facility to IAEA safeguards is the first time an Australian official has made such a direct call, there is not that much distance between this statement and what Australia and most of the international community have already called for. If Israel proceeds with its nuclear power plans, one would assume it too would be called upon to submit its peaceful facilities to safeguards, including, perhaps the "peaceful" part of the Dimona facility.

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