



## Briefing on London Conference on Afghanistan

Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

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**MR. MCCORMACK:** Good morning, everyone. We have a special guest briefer, somebody who's very familiar with the briefing room, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nick Burns. He's here to talk to you a little bit about the Secretary's upcoming trip to London and specifically about the Afghanistan Conference, so I will turn it over to Under Secretary Burns for opening statement and then he'll be ready to take some questions for you.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Good morning. Thank you very much, Sean. I'm pleased to be with you. I'm going to have a few words to say about the Secretary's travel to London, what she intends to do there. I want to take you through what we're hoping to accomplish at the Afghan Conference in London on Monday and Tuesday and then I'll be happy to take your questions.

The Secretary is going to be leaving over the weekend. She'll be in London for the Afghan Conference, which is going to run over two days on the 31st of January and the 1st of February. She also has a meeting, as you know, of the Quartet slated for Monday late afternoon and then a dinner with ministers from the EU-3 countries: Britain, France and Germany, from Russia and from China. And that dinner's going to be devoted to the question of Iran. You'll remember that this group has met before at a lower level, at political director's level, both in November and also ten days ago in London to discuss that Iran issue.

In addition to that, there will be a meeting, a contact group ministerial meeting on Kosovo on the afternoon of the 31st of January to discuss the United Nation's negotiations that are considering the future of Kosovo. So it's going to be a very active few days for the Secretary and for those of us going with her and also an important conference on Afghanistan and let me take you through that.

You know that U.S. policy towards Afghanistan since 2001 has been to support the development of a democratic government, to see elections in that country, and we've seen both of that -- both of those things occur, to have a very substantial U.S. military assistance program to train an Afghanistan National Army and the police and to provide, through Operation Enduring Freedom, the coalition security along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and to assist NATO. We've also been focused on trying to help the Afghans develop a market economy, to rebuild the infrastructure of the country, to focus on the narcotics problem, which is a severe problem which limits all the national goals of Afghanistan. And you'll remember that several years ago there was an international meeting in Berlin, the Bonn I should say, designed to produce international economic and military support for Afghanistan and provide a structure for that support. This conference in London is the logical successor to the Bonn conference, but it takes place at a very different time.

There have been presidential and parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. There is a fully formed sovereign government in place. There's been a real revolution in terms of the security situation of the activities of the international security forces, and so the idea that President Karzai and Prime Minister Blair and President Bush and Kofi Annan had is that we all should get together, all the nations assisting Afghanistan, for another conference to look forward at a different time and to design a different type of international assistance to Afghanistan.

The United States, Secretary Rice leading the U.S. delegation, will announce a major financial contribution for the next fiscal year for our economic and our military support to Afghanistan. That builds on the extensive support, nearly \$10 billion that the United States has given in all respects to Afghanistan in the past five years: 2001 to 2006. In the London -- at the London conference we'll see, I think a number of countries step forward, including our own, to commit to a certain level of economic and military assistance over the year or two ahead.

Secondly, the London conference is not going to be a traditional donors conference, because at that conference the Afghan Government is going to present to us its concept for how it intends to move forward in the future and that will be memorialized in the form of an Afghanistan compact, where the Afghan Government will commit itself over five years to specific goals in three broad categories: in security, in governance and in economic and social development. The compact is going to be issued by Afghanistan, by the United Nations and by the leading countries like the United States in support of Afghanistan. And it will create also a new international structure to help convey economic and military assistance to the country.

You remember over the last five years, it's principally been in the G-8 countries that have been the organizational structure for international assistance. And at the London conference we will be creating a coordinating and monitoring board that will now oversee all international assistance to Afghanistan. That will be led by the Afghan Government, by a minister of the Afghan Government and by the United Nations. And for the first time, the UN will appoint a single official to be the person who coordinates all international assistance along with the Afghan minister, our counterpart. And I believe that Kofi Annan will be designating that official on Monday and introducing that official to the international community.

So this compact is important because it's going to represent the totality, both of what the commitment is by the international community. It's going to be led by the Afghan Government and it will also provide for this new structure which has worked well in the past in places like Bosnia and Kosovo. We've lacked that in Afghanistan over the last four or five years. We had the degree of coordination, I think that all of us would have liked and we hope this new structure will provide for that. I think you'll see then substantial commitments. I think you'll see action on debt relief for our Afghanistan and we're very proud about that.

There'll be a major focus on the narcotics problem. Everyone knows that nearly half of Afghanistan's gross national product is now taken up by the production and sale of narcotics. President Karzai has termed it one of his major objectives. In office he said that it undermines the very existence of the Afghan state. The U.S., Britain and many other countries are working very hard. We have a lot of people on the ground. We have a lot of funds committed to this and resources to help them devise a greater counter-narcotics strategy. There are going to be -- there will be an emphasis at this conference in London to looking at how we, with the Afghan authorities, are able to limit production of opium and specifically how we can also limit the trafficking, the transit moves out Afghanistan into Central Asia and to Russia and Western Europe, which is the big problem. And we've had very good talks with the Russian Government over the last couple of months to see if the United States and Russia can work more closely in trying to interdict some of those transit -- those northern transit routes that have been such a problem for many years. And of course, Russia will be represented by its foreign minister at this conference.

In addition to talking about economic support, the new international structure and narcotics, there's going to be a major focus on security for Afghanistan. And of course, we in the international community will reaffirm our commitment to maintain our troop presence in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. As you know, the United States continues to provide the greatest number of forces. We currently have, roughly, 16,500 American troops in Afghanistan. They are principally in the eastern part of the country, along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. They are also deployed in Kandahar province, in Uruzgan province in the south.

What you're going to see at this conference and what you'll hear is that in the next several months NATO, through the ISAF force, will be extending its presence now to the southern part of Afghanistan. You remember that three years ago, NATO went into maintain peacekeeping responsibilities in Kabul and then NATO moved to the northern part of the country to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz and then NATO last year moved to the western part of the country to Hirat.

In the next few months, Britain and Canada and we hope the Netherlands, will be moving their forces south to Kandahar and Uruzgan to essentially take over for the American troops that have been there. That will allow the American troops to deploy to the eastern part of the country, which is where the greatest threat from the Taliban and al-Qaida is emanating. That's a very significant transition in the security assistance.

We maintain the very vigorous U.S. military presence. We maintain the leading role in terms of troops numbers of the United States and yet, we see our European allies and NATO agreeing to play a larger role, and in this case now, coming down into the most difficult part of the country in terms of security threats, the southern part of the country and the eastern part of the country. And we're very proud that NATO has decided to do this and, of course, the U.S. through our provincial reconstruction teams and through our cooperation with NATO has played a lead role in designing this new strategy.

You'll also see at this conference finally on the security side, a continued emphasis on the need to train and to sometimes even undertake missions together with the Afghan National Army. And over the last four years, the United States and Britain and other NATO countries have been able to train 27,000 Afghan troops. And we do have joint operations, as you know, with those troops throughout the country. We've also trained more than 57,000 Afghan police over the last several years and that effort has been led by Germany and by the United States. So there's significant allied input in the security side. And I think you'll see the United States and all of our European partners make a commitment that we're going to stay in order to provide security for the Afghan Government, so that they can concentrate on the nation building, on the extension of the authority of the central government, from Kabul out to the provinces and on these exceedingly difficult problems of infrastructure development and of coping with the narcotics problem. That is the focus of the conference that will take place on the 31st of January and the 1st of February.

One more note. In addition to this conference, we have invited the Afghan Government to send a delegation here to Washington in March to begin a new strategic dialogue that Vice President Cheney announced when he made his trip recently to Afghanistan, and that strategic dialogue is designed to have the United States help Afghanistan to create new links for itself internationally. For instance, we hope that Afghanistan will become a partner nation of NATO. And there are all sorts of links, social and economic, political and security, that can and should take place between Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia as well as with the countries of NATO and the EU.

So I wanted to go into that level of detail because we haven't had an international meeting concerning Afghanistan of this consequence in a number of years, and I think you can see the importance we attach to it by the fact that the Secretary, Secretary Rice, will be leading our delegation.

Having said that, I'll be happy to take any questions that you may have.

**QUESTION:** Is Iran participating in the Afghan conference? And if so, what, if any, dealings will the Secretary or the rest of the U.S. delegation have with their delegation?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I believe, as Iran is a neighbor, is going to send a representative. I'm not quite sure at what level that person will be. I do not anticipate -- and I'm 100 percent sure about this -- any contact between whichever official is sent by the Iranian Government and our delegation, including Secretary Rice. It's not foreseen; it won't happen.

**QUESTION:** Do you anticipate a healthy representation of Islamic countries there?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We do. This is not a conference just of NATO and the EU; it's an international conference of all the friends of Afghanistan. So Pakistan will be there, India will be there, Russia and China will be there, and I believe most of the Arab countries will be represented as well. And that's an important part of this conference because Afghanistan now, now that it's been able to overcome many of the acute challenges it faced in 2002 just after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan is now trying to, in essence, become a normal state and create international linkages for itself. And of course, that's very much in our interest and we're assisting them in doing that.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** In your discussions with P-5 on Iran, are you going to be looking more closely at the Russian proposal? Because the Iranians seem more interested in that. Or will the focus still be on referring to the Security Council?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think there's a clear focus for the dinner that Secretary Rice will have with Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, the foreign ministers of those countries, on Monday evening. Those countries met ten days ago in London and it was agreed at that meeting, at the political director level, that all of us felt that Iran should suspend its nuclear activities. All of us believe that Iran should resume negotiations with either the European Union or with Russia. All of us felt that Iran should meet its commitments to the IAEA. And of course, Iran has done nothing of the kind. So I'm quite sure that the meeting on Monday evening will focus on that question, the fact that Iran is in arrears to the international community, that it's violated its pledges to the European Union, that it's not in synch with its IAEA commitments. And obviously the ministers will talk about that.

They'll talk about the IAEA Board of Governors vote on February 2nd. Secretary Rice has said repeatedly this week that we believe that the Board of Governors should vote to send the report on Iran from the September Board of Governors meeting to the Security Council, and the Security Council should then become seized by this issue. That's the American position. I think there's agreement on those three major objectives that I listed at the beginning of the answer. There's still further work to be done tactically among these six countries on the tactics of how we use the IAEA Board of Governors vote, and of course then what we do at the Security Council. But the clear view of the United States is there should be a positive vote on February 2nd and there should be referral to the Security Council. We believe it warrants that.

And it's interesting that you said that somehow Iran may be interested in the Russian proposal. President Bush and Secretary Rice said in November publicly that we found great interest -- we found great interest -- in the Russian proposal. The Russian proposal has been very specific, as we understand it. It is to obviate the need for any kind of sensitive fuel cycle activity to take place on the territory of Iran but to ensure fuel supply for civil nuclear power reactors in Iran itself. So it's an offshore fuel supply arrangement.

And the Iranians have had months to look at that proposal and they've never embraced it. And the interesting thing about Mr. Larijani's travels -- and he's been in Europe and he's been in Russia and he's been in China this week -- is that he keeps saying Iran has a right and Iran intends to exercise the right to have these sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities take place on the territory of Iran. They've talked about -- they have recommended uranium conversion at their plant at Isfahan, they have unilaterally broken the seals that the IAEA placed on their facility at Natanz so they can engage in centrifuge research, and they have talked about their right and their intention to proceed towards enrichment.

All of those activities are fundamentally contradictory to the Russian proposal. So when Mr. Larijani says we're interested in the Russian proposal, it's a little hard to take that seriously when the Russian proposal would not allow those activities to take place in the territory of Iran.

So I actually think the diplomacy in London at the foreign ministers meeting on Monday is going to focus on the transgressions of the Iranian Government -- and there's a great deal of unity in the international community about those transgressions -- and try to see if we can have a consensus to move forward on a tactical basis together to move the issue to the Security Council.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** You've just come back from India. What can you say about India's -- how India is leaning on this issue? There's a story out today that says it also thinks the Russian proposal is one that should be pursued, but they haven't committed to voting with the U.S. and EU at the IAEA.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I was in India for three days last week and, of course, in addition to the bilateral issues, including our civil nuclear negotiations, we had discussions on this issue. I would say just a few things.

First of all, India is one of the great countries of the world. It's a sovereign country. It's obviously going to act in its own national interests. It will make decisions, as all other countries do, based on its national interests, and I think we all have to respect that and we do respect that.

Secondly --

**QUESTION:** That's not what your Ambassador said.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I'm just going to complete my answer. Can I do that?

Secondly, as Ambassador Mulford said the other day -- and he is an outstanding American Ambassador, by the way -- it's very clear what the United States believes. The U.S. has been clear with India and with Brazil and with South Africa, with China and Russia, all the other countries, that we believe that Iran has been giving throughout the whole course of 2005 many, many months to conform to the IAEA's wishes, to negotiate on the basis of the European proposals or the Russian proposal. It's turned them all down. So the U.S. position is there has to be a vote at the IAEA and the referral should go to the Security Council.

Third, there's no question that many members of Congress, including senior members of some of the relevant committees in Congress that look at foreign affairs, have made their views very clear on the Iran issue. And I think Ambassador Mulford was simply trying to indicate that the other day.

But I want to go back to the first part of the answer. We respect India's sovereignty, obviously, and India is going to make its own decisions. What is interesting about the U.S.-India relationship is that we are developing a global partnership, and when Secretary Rice meets with her Indian counterpart and when the President goes later this year, what you'll see is our relationship is fundamentally different than at any time since 1947.

We now have very close cooperation between India and the United States on Sri Lanka trying to stem the violence there; on Bangladesh, trying to give advice to the government to stem the Islamic extremism. We're trying to work together on Nepal to give good advice to the King, to allow political democracy. This is fundamentally a different type of cooperation. It extends to Iran. We've had a lot of good discussions with the Indian Government. And the Indian Government can speak for itself, but I'm confident that we're moving in the right direction in the IAEA. And we certainly have a majority of votes already, if we want to exercise that next week.

**QUESTION:** So why would you be upset then if you didn't have India's vote and why would the civilian nuclear program be at stake if they didn't vote with (inaudible)?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I didn't say I was upset. Actually, I spent three days in --

**QUESTION:** You -- the Administration, you wouldn't have said that.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** -- I spent three days in India last week and we had very, very good discussions about the civil nuclear agreement that President Bush and Prime Minister Singh helped to put together. We have not come to the end of those discussions. But as Secretary Rice said yesterday, we believe we're making progress on that. We've had very good discussions with the Government of India on Iran, but it's obviously up to the Indian Government to decide how it's going to vote on that particular issue. You're looking at the development of a full relationship and it's a significant event in geopolitics.

**QUESTION:** How far along will the nuclear deal be when the President makes his trip to India?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** It's hard to say. It's very hard to say. Our hope -- the President and Prime Minister agreed on the basic outline of the civil nuclear cooperation back on July 18th here in Washington. Our hope has been that we'll be able to conclude a bilateral agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, which would include a plan by the Indian Government to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities, that that would happen as soon as possible. And that that might happen before the President's visit. That remains our plan and I've been in touch with the Indian Government this week. I expect to be in touch with them in the coming days and we hope to reach that goal. If we can reach it, then of course, that will be part of what the President discusses in Delhi. If we cannot, I assume then we'll keep on working, as diplomats do, to resolve the problem.

**QUESTION:** What are the difficult choices that Secretary Rice has been talking about?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, I think some of the difficulty in the civil nuclear negotiations between India and the United States stem from the fact that this is a unique arrangement. India, of course, has developed its nuclear power industry in isolation over 30 years. The United States is now saying it's much better to have India take part in the international nonproliferation regime and to have IAEA safeguards on the civilian aspect of its nuclear facilities. Defining what is civilian and what is military and separating the two is a function for the Indian Government -- that sovereign government. And so they have to develop that plan. We obviously have to be reassured that that plan is ambitious enough that it will meet the test that the Congress will certainly want to give in looking at this plan and also the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

So I think that's an accurate assessment of where we are. I think we've made a lot of progress over the last six months. I was not discouraged by my talks in Delhi last week. One assumes that things like this that are so, frankly, esoteric and complex take time and we are committed to conclude this deal with the Indian Government.

**QUESTION:** What's the basis or the hope that a separation plan could be done before the President's visit?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, it's my assessment and I'm the one negotiating this for six months is that we're very close to an agreement. Oftentimes in negotiations when you get to the end, some of the most difficult issues arise. And I think we made some progress. I think we need to see further progress. There are a few issues. I shouldn't go into them because they should remain confidential, but remain barriers to an agreement. I don't believe they're insuperable. And this is obviously an agreement that would be good for India, as well as good for the United States and the rest of the international community that cares about nonproliferation.

**QUESTION:** The United States has already made a major concession to Iran in accepting, at least on its face, the Russian proposal and that is agreeing to allow Iran to continue operating the Isfahan facility, uranium facility -- the uranium hexafluoride facility -- which was supposed to have been shut down under the agreement with the EU-3, yet they started it up last summer. The Russian proposal is predicated on allowing that to continue. So hasn't the United States, in effect, encouraged the Russians and the Iranians, in particular, to continue looking for other concessions and, in particular, the Iranians are looking for a concession on the centrifuge plant in Natanz, their pilot plant, the 1,000-centrifuge pilot plant. They want to continue being able to operate that. Why isn't -- why would you not expect the Russians, having the United States already made the concession on Isfahan, to look to the United States to make more concessions?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I don't accept the basis of your question. The United States has not been party to any negotiations with the Government of Iran. We've not had a single conversation with any official in the Government of Iran about these negotiations. We have stood back from the negotiations. What happened in 2005 is that the President and Secretary Rice announced in March of 2005 that we would do one thing: We would give our diplomatic support to the EU negotiations. The EU countries have been the ones sitting and negotiating with the Iranians and that we made our declaration that we would not object to Iran's bid to begin its process of

joining the WTO and that we would allow the sale of civilian spare parts to Iran's aging airline fleet. That's what the United States did in March of 2005.

Since then, what we've said is we're in favor of a diplomatic solution to the problem, but we believe that Iran is in fundamental violation of the commitments that it made in negotiations. We never made any concessions about -- let me just finish my answer, because you asked a very serious question. We never made any concessions about what was happening at Isfahan. We never said we were happy about the resumption of uranium conversion. In fact, I'm very sure, if you look at what Sean said that day - - whatever day that was, a couple of months ago -- we criticized the resumption of uranium conversation at Isfahan and we have said very clearly since then we don't believe that Iran should engage in centrifuge research at Natanz. We certainly don't believe they should have the ability to enrich and reprocess because that would give them ability to produce fissile material which leads to a nuclear weapon.

Our objective is to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability. And all of our diplomatic efforts have been designed to do that.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) by accepting the Russian proposal, the Russian proposal is predicated on allowing Iran to continue operating Isfahan and then to take the uranium hexafluoride gas from Isfahan and ship it to Russia for further enrichment. So by accepting the Russian proposal, you have essentially accepted to continue the operation of Isfahan.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** The United States has said that we find the Russian proposal to be interesting and it might be a good way to proceed with negotiations. We've never said that we accept, you know, every detail in that proposal. Our statements have been quite general. But they've been clear. But they've been clear.

And what's behind the U.S. statements made by our leadership in November is that we don't believe that Iran should have the ability to exercise any process along the nuclear fuel cycle inside Iran itself. That's a fairly tough position and that's been a consistent position of our government.

And so yes, we want the Iranians to negotiate, whether it's with the EU-3 or Russia or any other country, on a serious basis; and we've said that we believe that this kind of proposal has promise, but we've never blessed every article of the proposals. I think if you ask the Russian Government, they'd tell you the same thing.

And by the way, we respect the fact that this has been a complicated diplomatic scenario, but we don't see Iran responding to the Russian proposal, to the European proposal or to any other proposal. They seem to be obfuscating.

**QUESTION:** When the President --

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) the U.S. and Iran and what you said about the London conference even on Afghanistan, why is the position of the Bush Administration so antagonistic to even -- I mean, you give us a 100 percent guarantee that there won't be any contact whatever.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** There won't.

**QUESTION:** And my question is: Why is that? And perhaps, given Iran's positions publicly stated and the fact that you're on a collision course with them, why not take the possibility that perhaps an Iranian delegate in London might have something interesting to say?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Charlie, it's been the policy of every American administration since President Reagan not to have diplomatic relations with the Iranian Government, so this administration has been very consistent with all of its predecessors, going back to 1980.

**QUESTION:** I'm not talking diplomatic relations.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** And as you know, as you know, in legal channels and through the Swiss protecting power, there have been contacts from time to time over the last 25 years. But in an environment where the new Iranian President has called for the destruction of Israel, has denied that the Holocaust happened as a historical fact, has put Iran on a more radical course on its nuclear policy, has continued Iranian support for terrorism, there is not a lot to talk about.

What we want to do is create an international environment where a strong coalition of countries, including the ones meeting on Monday evening, get together and send one signal to Iran: Stop support for terrorism in the Middle East and stop your nuclear activities.

**QUESTION:** Well, the --

**QUESTION:** But not the --

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** And so that message is not hard for the Iranians to understand and Sean communicates it, any number of us can communicate it to them every day through --

**QUESTION:** Are you --

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** -- through press briefings like this.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I think we have time for one last -- one last question.

**QUESTION:** Are you confident then that you will have a vote on referral and that you will win that vote?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think there's every reason to believe there's going to be a vote on February 2nd and there's already a majority of countries assembled to vote positively.

**QUESTION:** Could I just ask one on the Quartet meeting, Nick, before you go? Is the Secretary going to press the Europeans to halt their funding for a Hamas-led government? Is that the U.S. position and are you worried then, if that happens, then the Iranians or the Saudis would then fill in the gap?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I know Sean's going to be briefing you in a couple of minutes. There was a Quartet conversation yesterday, there was a public statement made by the Quartet, and I think I know the Secretary will be speaking publicly around that meeting.

Thank you.  
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