



## Interview With Jyoti Malhotra, Diplomatic Editor of Star News

**R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

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**QUESTION:** Ambassador Burns, thank you so much for talking to Star News.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** It's a pleasure to be with you. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** I will start by asking you about this very fulsome praise that the Bush Administration has been heaping upon India. Somewhat bewildering, I might add: strategic power, rising power, strategic partnership. What accounts for the Bush Administration's discovery of India?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, it's not bewildering to us. I am not sure that we discovered India. But I should tell you that United States believes that India is a natural partner for our country and I think that many Indians believe the same thing about the United States, because both of us have a global perspective, both of us have global responsibilities and we stand for the same things. We want the world to be peaceful and secure, we want democracy to the extent that (inaudible) there is a natural intersection of issues where we can work together.

**QUESTION:** Well, India has been around forever as well as America. So what accounts for this very recent, if you like, compliment?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think what accounts for it is that in the modern world in our century, great countries, countries with influence, countries that have the ability to affect events obviously want to stand for the same thing. They want to stand for, in the case of our bilateral relationship, increasing trade between our two countries. We certainly feel the beneficial impact of what India contributes to our economy, with all of the Indians working in our hi-tech sector in the United States. We have a natural, I think, inclination that in this part of the world we'd like to see stability. And the Indian-American relationship stands on its own. It's not a singular relationship. I think what you will see when the Prime Minister comes to Washington in just under a month's time, you are going to see both of our countries working on a wide range of issues and cooperation – economic, agricultural, science, environmental, defense. Mr. Mukherjee is just going on to the United States to see Secretary Rumsfeld. We have never had cooperation like this before.

**QUESTION:** Are you concerned about the rise of China? Has this something to do with it?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We understand that China is going to be for the foreseeable future a major Asian country in the world with major influence in the world and we seek a peaceful relationship with China. Now we do compete with China obviously in economic ground, but we hope very much that China will respect the fact that the Asia-Pacific region has been secure and has been in balance, and has been peaceful for the most part for the last 50 years, in part because of the positive influence of the United States and our military deployments in the region, so that we don't fear China, we don't seek any kind of strategic competition with China. But there's no question that the great majority of Asian countries want to see a continuation of American power and presence in the region because we are a force for stability and for peace.

**QUESTION:** Would you say that or do you think that India and Japan in Asia could in some way be a counter balance to China?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think all of us are seeking good relations with China. And I can't speak for the Indian government certainly, but my own government. And that's also true of course of the other major powers in Asia. Let's get back to the U.S.-India relationship. That's why I am here. I have come to speak to the Indian government about how we can make sure that we are doing everything we can to make the Prime Minister's visit successful and have other successful visits here in India in the future. And we are very optimistic that our two countries have emerged from a period of time beginning in the late 1940's and 50's where we were in different parts of the world, had different views of the world, especially in terms of strategic power. And now we have a greater confluence of interests in our views that make it possible for the first time to consider the real emergence of a strategic partnership between the two of us.

**QUESTION:** You speak of a confluence of interests. The Prime Minister's visiting your country next month. Nuclear cooperation, or cooperation on nuclear energy, is expected to be a major theme. What is America willing to do? Are you opposed to supplying nuclear power reactors to India? Civilian use nuclear reactors, I mean....

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well we've been talking to the Indian government for sometime about this and we understand that India has great energy needs. We do, too, by the way, in the United States of America and we have a discussion going on with the Indian government. I can't get into the details at this point and we ought to let the Prime Minister and President settle this, but it's an important part of our dialogue, because it does speak to the need that both countries have for the future. And we hope for progress. There are a number of challenges, of course, to it, but we are on working on it.

**QUESTION:** But what can India do? Do you think it might help, since we are not a signatory to the NPT, do you think it might help if India differentiates its civil and nuclear plants from its military ones? Do you think that would help?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, I think we will continue discussing this with the Indian government. It's complicated. But we see the possibility of progress in the future. And India, of course, is a country that's got to consider its energy needs for the future. We understand that, we are very good with a constructive dialogue and it's multi-faceted. It's not just a part of the discussions I am having here, but our Energy Secretary has been involved in this, so we'll keep working on it.

**QUESTION:** But would in some ways the WMD Bill that India has now passed in parliament -- is that enough for you or do you want India to go further in this area?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We are impressed by the fact that the Indian parliament passed that Bill in record time. It's certainly positive that the WMD Export Control Bill was passed. There may be other measures that both sides can take in order to have a better sense of what is possible in that particular field. That's certainly an important issue for this visit, but there are others that are going to be important as well. Yesterday I had a chance, and I'll do it again today, to review the Indian government's cooperation in a wide variety of fields. So, we are hopeful that this will be a very positive visit.

**QUESTION:** Just on the nuclear question, when the Prime Minister visits the U.S., what is the state of dialogue? Is there going to be an announcement on the nuclear issue?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** You know, I've learned one thing in diplomacy in a quarter century: that you let the leaders decide these things, certainly announce them. But it's an issue that is quite complex, but an issue on which we hope to make progress in the future.

**QUESTION:** So, you're saying no nuclear reactors.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Excuse me?

**QUESTION:** Are you saying no nuclear reactors?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I didn't say that at all. What I said was that we're working on this issue. It's obviously an issue of great importance to both of us.

**QUESTION:** Our Defense Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, is on his way to the U.S. and he's going to have a big visit. Do you think it might help the strategic partnership if India were to buy sophisticated military hardware like the F-16s or the F-18s if they're on offer?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think it's up to India to make its own decisions, and I wouldn't presume to give public advice to the Indian government, but I do believe this: that it's very important that any modern military have access to advanced weapons, because the qualitative edge that militaries have is the most important factor in how a military can perform and be of service to its citizens in our time. And, we're very much hopeful that the Indian government might consider greater cooperation with the United States. We've not had that, in the history of our relationship going back to 1947, but we're in a different era. We saw after the tsunami disaster how well the Indian military performed in extending assistance to its neighbors. We saw how well the American military did. And our two militaries can be a positive force for stability, for peace. We think they can work together, perhaps a greater number of exercises between us. This is an area of increased importance in our relationship, so Mr. Mukherjee's visit is a very important one, right before the Prime Minister comes to visit us, as well.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask you about a subject that has gripped the popular imagination in India, about the UN Security Council seat, an expanded Security Council. You've laid out certain criteria. Does India meet those criteria?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Oh, I think India meets the great majority of those criteria. India -- the interesting thing, if we Americans look at India -- is to see the emergence of India not just as a country with influence in its own region, but a country of influence around the world. And we're looking at the question of how to modernize the UN Security Council. We haven't really modernized it in 60 years and we want the Security Council to represent the world as it is in 2005, not the world as it was in 1945. And, therefore, countries like India, and the other members of the G-4 of course, have put forward their interest in joining the Security Council. But it's a big question. Because when you add a member of the Security Council, you've got to make sure that that country is supremely well qualified and that the Security Council will have retained its effectiveness, and so...

**QUESTION:** Do you think India meets the....

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** And so, what we've said, what our President has said, our Secretary of State, is that right now we're supporting Japan; it's a long-standing position of the United States government. We are open to further debate and discussion about the expansion of the Council and we'd like to see that unfold in a pragmatic way, in a way that will be effective for the UN system. And so, we're not in a position today to say that we'll support any other country. But this debate evolves, and we certainly have a very good discussion underway with the Indian government.

**QUESTION:** Can I just bring you to Iraq, which is my last question. The Indian Foreign Minister said at the reconstruction conference on Iraq in Brussels a few days ago that we're willing to have security cooperation with Iraq. What would you like India to do?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We're very impressed by the Foreign Minister's statement in Brussels the other day at the Iraq conference and he offered advice, of course, for India to help Iraq draft their constitution and the kind of training and technical assistance that the Indian government can give. We're very grateful for this. It's a breakthrough. That was a terrific conference because 80 countries came together to say we may have argued about whether the war should have occurred, but we're not arguing about the fact that the current Iraqi government, which is elected, needs the assistance of democratic countries around the world. And as the world's largest democracy, India ought to be involved, and in the way India chooses, and so we're very happy that the Foreign Minister announced this the other day.

**QUESTION:** So is there talk on what India and the U.S. can do on Iraq, together or separately? What can India do in Iraq -- are you talking about that?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, I think the Indian government has already made clear what it can do to support the Iraqi government. The Iraqis are grateful for that. So are we.

**QUESTION:** Can I just ask you about Guantanamo Bay? There has been talk about it closing down? Do you think that....

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think you've seen statements from my government over the last week that that's not the case, and obviously the United States, as the world's oldest democracy, has the responsibility to uphold high standards of human rights and we try very hard to do that all around the world, everyday.

**QUESTION:** I know you're rushing to meet Mr. N.K. Narayanan. I just want to ask you -- your own CIA Chief, Mr. Porter Goss, has said that he has a very good idea where Osama bin Laden is. Do you have a very good idea where he is?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We have, of course, as a major national priority the defeat of Al Qaeda and we've made tremendous inroads in that. We've been helped by many countries in the world and we'll continue at it. Thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** Thank you so much. Thank you for talking to Star News.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** My pleasure. Thank you.

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