



## Interview by Shivraj Prasad of New Delhi Television (NDTV)

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

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**QUESTION:** Under Secretary of State, thank you very much for speaking to NDTV. Of course you are here to look at a timetable to implement the civilian nuclear deal with India. Are you sure that it is running on schedule?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think it is. You know it is a very complex arrangement between the United States and India, and quite historic. For 30 years now we have not had civil nuclear energy cooperation. In fact, sanctions have been placed on India and it's very important that we return to a situation of normalcy. Prime Minister Singh and President Bush have committed themselves to this. There are obligations that both sides have made to each other. We are in the process of doing that.

I had an excellent conversation with Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran today. I think we are heading in the right direction. It may take us a few more months to get there. It is going to be worth it. We'll do this the right way. We'll meet the obligations to each other. We'll have a better arrangement between our two countries.

**QUESTION:** But there has been a lot of debate within India. And also have you been reassured by the fact that India might just stick with its position on Iran vis-à-vis the IAEA resolution, because there has been debate? Coalition partners are saying they want the Indian government to maybe change their position by the next meeting on the 24th of November.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, first of all, I am certainly assured that the Indian government will be as committed to the civil nuclear energy deal with the United States. On the question of Iran -- I think Iran is isolated in the world today. When India voted with Asian countries, African countries, Latin American countries, with us, it was voting with the majority of countries around the world. Iran has very little support and it's because Iran for 17 years -- according to the International Atomic Energy Agency -- did not tell the truth about its nuclear research. Most countries in the world assume Iran is trying to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Nobody thinks that would be a positive step forward. Everyone is concerned about it. And so, I think there is a wider grouping of countries now that are coming together to try to convince Iran to come back to the negotiations that Iran left unilaterally and abruptly in August. And India is part of that large group of countries recommending that. So, I don't find that surprising. I would think that the democratic countries would react to a situation where India (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** But aren't you worried that the Left Parties, which is a very major constituent of the present coalition government, may just pressurize New Delhi to take a re-look at its position on that resolution?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think what you will see over the next month or two is a concerted attempt to try to convince the Iranians to deal peacefully and constructively with this problem. No one wants to see unnecessary confrontation on this issue. We all want to see the problem worked out. But Iran has to be reasonable. Its President went to the United Nations in September and banged his fist on the table and said, "Iran has rights. Here are our rights." But we all have rights. We also have obligations. And Iran has obligations. No one in the world wants to see Iran enrich uranium or reprocess uranium. No one wants to see Iran develop a nuclear weapon. What is the answer to this problem? It is for like-minded nations around the world to say to the Iranians: "there is a different way forward and you ought to choose that path and you ought to be more reasonable." I can't speak for the Indian Government. But I can certainly speak for my own government. I think there is a growing concern in the world about Iran, a growing sense that all of us need to use our influence to get Iran back to the negotiating table.

**QUESTION:** But interestingly enough, isn't that a consideration in the Congress right now? There is all that debate on whether they should back changing domestic laws. That, in fact, there is this internal pull and push in India to maybe go softer on its stand on Iran given our own strategic ties with Tehran?

**Under Secretary Burns:** I will tell you I think the Iranians were disappointed by the vote in the International Atomic Energy Agency because only Venezuela voted with them. Russia did not vote with them. China did not. South Africa did not. India is a very big country. So India will decide what's in its best interests. Only India gets to decide that. We think the application of diplomatic pressure against Iran is beginning to have an effect. We think the Iranians are reconsidering their options. They have to be a little bit more reasonable. They are so isolated in the world. They are so harsh and uncompromising, this new government. There is a new government, new people, they are relatively inexperienced in government. They tend to have a very conservative view of the world. And we would hope that they would learn over time that countries can't always do exactly what they want. Countries have to cooperate with other countries, they have to listen, they have to compromise. We need to see more of that in Iran in the future.

**QUESTION:** So, are you confident that Congress will, within the timetable, actually pass or back the deal and maybe help you change domestic laws so you can get on with civil nuclear cooperation with India?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We are very hopeful that will happen. That is the intention of President Bush. He thinks we are at a historic turning point with India. We are developing a strategic partnership in political and foreign policy, in business and trade, investment; and now we need to make that same leap forward in the civil nuclear energy field. And I hope very much that Congress will, once India and the United States have fulfilled their obligations to each other, Congress will act to change our legislation and make it permissible to have this historic opening in nuclear energy.

**QUESTION:** New Delhi now seems to also be making it contingent on that vote by Congress on its own obligations. There has been that statement by the Prime Minister that, in fact, once those restrictions are lifted, then only India would look at that clause that they separate their civilian from their military nuclear facilities and then go ahead with the whole process.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We know it's a bit of a chicken and egg situation right now, the sequencing of who does what first. I think we can work this out. We're diplomats after all, we're paid to devise creative solutions to tactical issues like this. I'm not very worried about it. I think that we've made sufficient progress so far and it would give us a lot of confidence as we head into 2006. And we'll find a way forward that's consistent with the aims and interests of the U.S. Congress as well as of the Indian government.

**QUESTION:** What about the international considerations? There has been the NSG, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, meeting that was deferred. There was disagreement there, bitter disagreement, and you had made it a campaigning point. Are you confident that you will be able to also meet those obligations, surmount them, when you finally go ahead with the deal?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We think the meeting went well. The majority of countries there were very positive. There was maybe some disagreement; there were more countries in the middle. Some of them wanted to know more about the Indian developments and about the plans to separate the military and civilian nuclear facilities. So, I think when that information comes out, when India has had a chance to give countries a sense of their plan of how this transition is going to work and how India can meet its commitments, I'm confident there will be support from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There already is strong support from a number of the European

countries, from Russia and China, and that's very positive to start with that strong base.

**QUESTION:** But for the Indian public, of course, which is why I'm pressing home the same question over and over again, is, of course, deliverables. I mean when and how soon are you confident that this will actually take place.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, we hope it'll take place as soon as possible. I think it won't be until early 2006 -- there's just not time enough in 2005. But we have confidence. This agreement is a very good agreement, for both countries. It's very sound. It was negotiated -- I had the great pleasure of negotiating with Foreign Secretary Saran, who is an outstanding individual, and we're convinced that this is the future for the United States and India, to engage in this type of cooperation, to overcome some of the barriers that we erected against each other in the past.

What intrigues me about the U.S.-India relationship is how much it's changed. You know during the Cold War, the United States was the ultimate aligned country, India was the ultimate non-aligned country. But in the 21st century, we're seeing this great lapse of those old artificial barriers that separated the two of us in past decades, and we're seeing how much we have in common. We've got burgeoning...you have a burgeoning information technology sector here in India, in Hyderabad, in Bangalore; you have major influence in science and technology, in space launching, in agriculture. These are all areas where we can work together, the United States and India. So, I'm confident we've got the basis of a really historic opening in this relationship and we're two great countries, we believe essentially in the same things about how the world should be: it should be democratic, it should be peaceful. And we want to work together in the future.

**QUESTION:** And lastly, would you like a greater say in how India also lives up to its obligations because there has been a lot of debate on India's own obligations vis-à-vis the (inaudible) MTCR, also the NSG, and would you like to maybe even see more, have a greater say in which facilities are safeguarded or not?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** You know, I don't think it's appropriate for the United States to assert or somehow have a say -- should have a say in how India does it. India is a very proud, sovereign country, it can decide things on its own. We have agreements that we make, but we have great faith and trust in India and we have no interest in trying to intervene in issues where we should not be intervening on.

**QUESTION:** So, lastly, are you confident that by maybe early next year you will have a deal that will be announced, that will actually be implementable?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We hope to have a deal. We hope to have a deal that will cement this cooperation. I think that there is every reason to believe we will be able to pull it off through good, hard negotiating. We've got a good partner in the Indian government. There's a lot of trust between the two governments and a growing knowledge about each other, friendships forming on both sides of this relationship. You know, we have a better relationship now, India and the United States, than any time since 1947. And we're confident that this will be a good, productive relationship in the future.

**QUESTION:** Right, Under Secretary Burns, thank you very much for speaking to NDTV.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I enjoyed it very much.

