



Interview by Pramit Pal Chaudhury of The Hindustan Times

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

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QUESTION: I think the key question I always get from people when they talk about the present Indo-U.S. strategic relationship is that you guys in your speeches, you talk about the values, you talk about the issues, but as far as I can see, these issues and values have been around for very long time and there haven't been any major, Indo-U.S. differences on these issues or these values. But, suddenly now these seem to be triggering special relationship that didn't exist before. So, everybody still asks in India why is America doing all this? Why do they talk about making us a great power of 21st century? And they still don't believe it.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think two things have changed. First, the Cold War has really ended, and the unusual, unique structure in the balance of power globally produced by the Cold War has broken down. The United States was the ultimate aligned nation. India was the ultimate non-aligned nation during the Cold War. And now we are under a new phase of history -- what you call the globalized world, the 21st century world -- where our interests are converging.

And here is the second reason why. The greatest challenges we Americans see in the near future are going to be transnational challenges -- global climate change, the proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, the proliferation of terrorist groups world wide, trafficking in women and children, international crime, international narcotics. All those problems are rising and they are facing all countries, and we have to have a way to overcome them. We, the United States, cannot approach these problems on our own, unilaterally, because that won't work. No country has that much power. We need partners. We need strategic partners that have the ability to operate on a global basis. India is a country that has that global basis.

And so, the second reason is that our interests are converging on these issues. All the issues that I just mentioned, on every single one of them -- democracy promotion is another, HIV/AIDS is another -- India and United States have identical interests. And plus, we share the values that underwrite those interests. So, I think that's what's changed, those two factors. The Cold War has broken down. There's a new international structure emerging. And on the major issues of the day, our two countries have a common interest in seeing these problems overcome.

QUESTION: On all these issues other than democracy promotion, it could also be argued that China also has a convergence of interests with the United States. But the relationship there is clearly different.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: The relationship is different. You know, China is a very important country with which we have a good relationship. I wouldn't say it's a strategic partnership. What's different is that, you get back to the values that unite us. [The U.S. and India] are both large democracies: multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious. We are the two great personifications of globalization in the world in terms of our societal structures, and we know what kind of country India is going to be 25 or 50 years from now. India knows what kind of country we are going to be -- we, Americans, the United States. So I think there is a foundation to the relationship, which is very strong because of that reason. You know, we have different relationships with other countries around the world. But our strongest relationships are with democratic, pluralistic societies with liberal economies: India, Japan, Britain, France, Australia. These are strong relationships all with the same type of foundation.

QUESTION: That takes us to another issue. Everything that we have heard indicates that President Bush personally is driving a lot of this. This is a man who has never even visited this country and has never shown any interest in India before he became President. Why?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I think President Bush appreciates the fact that India is a rising power in the world, that it is a democracy, that its interests are converging with ours, and that the world balance of power has shifted, and India is the personification of the kind of friend we would like to have. President Bush is looking very much forward to visiting India in early 2006. Despite the fact that he may have not traveled here before, he is someone for five years has been thinking about our foreign policy and America's place in the world. And he has clearly articulated that India is a priority and building this relationship is a priority for us. We, who work for him, have that clear instruction. So, he and Prime Minister Singh on July 18th, actually in their Joint Statement, provided the framework for this new strategic partnership and one of the reasons I am here in Delhi is to begin working on the implementation of that.

QUESTION: So, but then Bush is already into his last two and half years as a President. He has an approval rating that is relatively low right now, the lowest in his presidency. What makes you think all of this will survive him as the President?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, first of all President Bush is going to be President for three more years. And his party controls both Houses of the Congress. And, so he is going to have major impact on our foreign policy for the next three years. Our President, and our constitution gives the President very strong powers in foreign policy. Beyond that, there is no strategic difference between Democrats and Republicans in our system about India. It was President Clinton who made the first opening to India in the mid-late 1990s. It was President Clinton who made his historic trip here in 2000. And I appreciate among Democrats very strong support for this opening to India. That's the members of Congress and members of the Democratic establishment who are the foreign policy mandarins in the Democratic Party. So there is no difference of opinion in our country. And I think after President Bush leaves office, whoever follows him, I think you are going to find very strong support strategically for this new relationship that we have with India.

QUESTION: Then, how do you account for the degree or the sounds of opposition we hear in the U.S. Congress on the fact, for the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal, for the legislative requirements on that, and the fact that you have essentially, I mean, the Indian position seems to be that in many ways America has moved the goal post? Instead of saying, coming in and saying, look we need some help, Iran vote, to get the votes in Congress, now you are saying civilian nuclear military separation would help us also to get the same votes. None of this seems to indicate a consensus within the U.S. Congress on the nuclear deal.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, first of all, if you go back to the July 18th statement and read it, it talks about India's obligation to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities. This is not a new condition. We are not moving the goal post. This is an original obligation of India in the agreement. Both of us have obligations. The United States has obligations, which we are meeting. This week we led the discussion in the Nuclear Suppliers Group and we advocated that all the Nuclear Suppliers Group countries consider the same type of nuclear energy cooperation that we are going to be developing. I wouldn't agree that somehow there is substantial, overwhelming opposition in our Congress to the civil nuclear energy agreement. On the contrary, I have been up and I have testified before Congress and I have met many members individually. I think there is support for it across the board. There is some criticism -- we have over 500 members of our Congress. It is not surprising that there will be some who will be against this in a democratic system. But I think that once the U.S. and India have implemented the obligations that both of us have, this will receive the support of the Congress and it will be implemented into American law.

QUESTION: There is an argument among skeptics here that flows from the fact that we are still trying to understand what America, why America is doing what it is regarding India, that this is essentially part of an attempt to bring us into a future Cold War against China. How do you react to that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think that is a completely inaccurate understanding of American foreign policy. We don't seek to contain China. We do not seek to

isolate China. China is too big and too powerful a country, and frankly too intertwined with us economically, and now in the terms of foreign policy, for us to even contemplate such a construct in 21st century. You have seen, actually, the U.S. relationship with China improve over the last four or five years. I think most people objectively would say that that is true. You have also seen a constant call from Washington for an American engagement with China. So we don't seek to contain, we seek to engage. We hope that China, both in its economic, foreign-economic policy, but also in its security policy, will be a country that seeks to work with us in finding solutions to problems.

Secretary Rumsfeld was there just this weekend. He called on China to, for instance, to explain and clarify its military policy in Asia and its rapid increase in military spending. And our Deputy Secretary of State, Bob Zoellick, has called on China to be a more cooperative country in terms of its trade practices. So there are problems in the relationship, but strategically we would rather see an Asian environment in the 21st century where there where the major countries work together for peace and stability -- Japan, Australia, India, United States and China. We are an Asian-Pacific country as well. We, our entire West coast economy and, of course, Hawaii and Alaska, are oriented towards the Pacific and Asia in terms of trade. Our fleet and Air Force have been a fundamental part of the security structure in Asia since the end of the war in 1945. And so, we are confident that we can work out a constructive relationship with China.

QUESTION: What you are describing seems to be a concert of Asia, but your Secretary of State likes to talk about the balance of power for freedom, which seems to be pushing it slightly differently.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: No, I am not describing some kind of 21st century version of what existed in the 19th century in Europe -- not at all. I am simply saying that, of course, American foreign policy under President Bush is focused on democratization. That is why we have objected to the authoritarian policies of the Burmese government in this region. That is why we have been concerned by the lack of commitment to political party rights in Nepal. That is why we want to see authoritarian governments in other parts of Asia modify their practices. That is a big part of America's foreign policy. But it is also obviously a central interest of ours to work constructively with China. There is no contradiction there. But the reality is that China is the country that cannot be ignored and we have a vast interlocking relationship with it, especially in the economic field, and I think we have had some success in pursuing this policy with China.

QUESTION: During the Cold War, as you well know, the Indo-U.S. relationship tended to founder on the fact that you also had a relationship with Pakistan, which was in many ways our strategic rival in this area. And in all of your speeches you praise India, talk about strategic relationship, and then also add that Pakistan is going to be part of that same. How are you going to square the circle in the 21st century?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Maybe we won't have to square that circle any more. In the 20th century, in the last few decades, going back to the 1950s and 60s, American governments tended to have a policy towards South Asia that was hyphenated. Our relationship with India hyphen Pakistan. We would like to de-hyphenate the relationship. We have a strategic relationship with India. It's a very full and comprehensive relationship. We are now working together in agriculture, in education, in science, in space launch, in putting an Indian astronaut into our space shuttle, in trade, in business and investment -- a wide variety of fields because that builds on the strengths of two large pluralistic countries.

We have a different relationship with Pakistan. We have a very good friendship with the Pakistani government and people. It is centered in security and counterterrorism work, support for Pakistan's ability to be effective in that realm. And that relationship stands on its own. I think we have gone beyond the time when America has to somehow always balance very carefully and calibrate what we do with both Pakistan and India. We should have singular relationships with both. Those relationships should stand on their own. And I think you have seen us develop different types of relationships with both countries; given the fact that they are very different countries.

QUESTION: When President Bush comes to India in February will he also be visiting Pakistan?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We haven't announced the other countries that he will visit. I know we'll announce that when we have the dates together for the trip -- we don't have dates agreed on yet. Then, of course, we will announce where else he is going.

QUESTION: When you talk about India's economic rise, your government still has expressed disappointment in some aspects of Indian economic policy. FDI in retail is just one, but there are whole slew of other issues that you have not been all that pleased with. How big a concern is this for you? That India has not been fulfilling the economic potential that seems to be underwriting this strategic partnership.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I would say this. We have an increasingly improved economic relationship with India. It is not without its difficulties and not without its disagreements. But that's true with every relationship we have: with the European Union, with Japan, with Australia, with Canada, Mexico. There are always economic differences. So what are the challenges here? What's gone well is the private sector development. We have two million Indian-Americans building businesses in the States and bridges back to India. 85,000 Indian students in the United States -- the largest foreign student population of any country in the world, in my country. Two-way trade has increased, exports are up on both sides in just over the last six months. That is going well. Hi-tech investment in Bangalore, Hyderabad, in Calcutta and Mumbai.

We would still hope that, as I said in my speech to the Asia Society the other day, that India might open up its economic system to further facilitate foreign direct investment. We would hope for a more modern and mature military industrial co-operation between our private sectors. Obviously, there are trade issues that we sometime find common ground on, and sometimes do not. Our trade representative is coming here in a couple of weeks. The Secretary of the Treasury is coming in two weeks. So, I think the relationship is good, but further liberalization of the financial sector and the defense sectors, I think, would be a good step forward.

QUESTION: But do you think that the present seven to eight percent economic growth rate we are getting is enough?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, countries...they are at seven, you probably want to have nine. And that is true of my own country too. It's very impressive if you look at growth rates around the world of the major countries, India being one, say the 20 major countries in the world. This is one of the highest growth rates. I just came from living in Europe for eight years and I was the Ambassador to two countries there. The growth rates in Europe are far lower than they are in India. So I think that the Indian government and people should be fairly happy and proud of what they have been able to accomplish in a rather sluggish world economy over the last couple of years.

QUESTION: You say an Indian astronaut in the shuttle is that being announced during the press conference?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I did, and we announced it in July. But I think a lot of people had forgotten about it. I also announced that we are contributing an additional \$500,000 dollars to the nongovernmental organizations working in Jammu and Kashmir for earthquake relief. We felt we should do this given the fact that India has lost nearly 1,200 people. While India is fully capable of handling the situation on its own, we wanted to express our support for some of the non-governmental organizations, the Indian ones, as well as some of the American ones, working to help the victims of the earthquake.

QUESTION: Two areas you have talked about actually building the Indian industrial capability, which is in military production and space. Wouldn't that be a problem for America in the long run?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We believe in a free market. And we believe in international competition. On space launch, for instance, we would like to have a government-to-government agreement. It may turn out that India will become an alternative in space launch, but there are other alternatives already existing in the world. Europe is one. In fact, we think of this as a joint venture where the advantages accrue to both countries. So, we are not afraid of it. We believe that that kind of collaboration is the best way to work in the modern world.

QUESTION: That's true for space launch, but military production tends to be not a free market area?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, put it this way. If India decided to purchase American fighter aircraft -- and India's going to release a tender in a couple of months time for a major purchase of fighter aircraft -- the way America does, the way American firms do business these days, with most friendly countries, is not just sell the airplanes and fully produce them in our country. But there's a lot of co-production as part of the arrangement in the home country, in this case in India. And given the very impressive scientific technological capabilities of Indian firms in the private sector, as well as the state sector, one of the most attractive parts of an aircraft deal involving the United States would be the offsets, what we call the offsets. It would be the ability of Indian firms to have the subcontracts that would benefit them. And then when that happens, of course, then you begin to create linkages between firms and begin to have longer lasting relationships that will go on and on into the future. And I've seen this happen. When I was Ambassador to Greece, the U.S. firm Lockheed Martin sold 50-60 F-16s to Greece. Some of the contracts went to Greek firms, as subcontractors. This kind of interaction and synergy that you'd like to try to build in defense sector, its already happening in the information technology sector.

QUESTION: Immigration H-1 B Visas, is it likely 60,000?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh God, that's the question I can't answer. That's Congress. We have a separation of powers. Congress makes the laws.

Pleasure to see you. Thank you.



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