



Remarks to the Press at the American Center in Mumbai

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

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UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a great pleasure for me to be here with you in Mumbai. I am beginning a tour of South Asia. I was in London earlier this week for talks in which the United States, the European-3 countries, Russia and China discussed the situation in Iran and of course our very strong view that Iran should cease and desist in the course of producing a nuclear-weapons capability. I am now here in Mumbai, obviously, for discussions with local authorities and the business community. I'll be going on to Delhi for two days of talks with my Indian counterpart, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, and then on to Pakistan and on to Sri Lanka before returning back to Washington.

I am delighted to be here, mainly because the United States Government and, I think, American society as a whole have so much of faith in our new relationship with India. As you know, President Bush will be here shortly; he'll be visiting India this year. We had a very good meeting with Prime Minister Singh in Washington in July. Our two governments have committed to a global strategic partnership between India and the United States which will be quite new. If you look at the history of the India-America relationship, this will be a new and significant step forward.

We are building that on several foundations. The first is the promise of new cooperation between our governments, and that cooperation is very broad. It begins with the fact that both of us are democracies: multi-ethnic, multi-religious democracies; that both of us have a commitment to the health of democracies not only in our own countries and regions but around the world. We are the first two contributors to the Global Democracy Fund begun at the United Nations and started by Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

We are also, of course, interested in trying to promote as close a bilateral economic relationship as we can. That's why I'm in Mumbai, because this city is the center of India's commercial and financial sectors. And it is no secret that we are interested in developing our trade relations, investment of the United States in India, investment of India in the United States. We've seen tremendous growth in this area in recent years, and very satisfactory to both of our countries. We look forward, of course, to furthering that growth: we've just had a series of American high-tech firms announce new investments in India. We've had recent announcements of sales of significance in the aviation sector; for instance, the Boeing sale, of significance to India. I think both of us realize that India and the United States, together in the future, will comprise part of the engine for global economic growth, not only regionally but around the world.

I also should say that we are developing our military relationship. Defense Secretary Mukherjee and Secretary Rumsfeld had a very good visit together in June, and I think when the President does visit India, we'll see a great emphasis on security ties. And of course, we are partners together in trying to promote peace and stability in South Asia. We have an active dialogue with the Indian government. I will pursue this in the coming days on Bangladesh, on the situation in Nepal, on our common hope for peace in Sri Lanka, and for maintenance of the ceasefire agreement in Sri Lanka. Of course, the United States wishes for the best possible relations between India and Pakistan. And of course, India and the United States have a lot to talk about concerning Iran, because Iran is so much a subject of the attention of the world these days.

And last, I should just say by way of introduction: we are in the middle of negotiations for an agreement between the United States and India on civil nuclear cooperation. This was a commitment -- to achieve that cooperation -- that the Prime Minister and President made to each other six months ago. Foreign Secretary Saran and I have been negotiating together for the past six months. I'm looking forward to my discussions with him. We're confident that an agreement between the two governments can be worked out. This is not easy: it's actually quite challenging, it's quite complex, but it is an agreement that's going to be in the interests of both our countries.

And so, I am looking forward to the discussions in the days ahead. I would just conclude by saying, based on my previous visits to India in 2005 and certainly based on what I heard today from many of the Indians with whom I met, there's a great deal of optimism and confidence that the United States and India are in a new stage in our relationship. And I'm proud to be part of that and very happy to be here. So I will be happy to take any questions you have on the issues that I have mentioned and any others that are on your mind.

QUESTION: Could you elaborate on your meetings in Europe recently, and how will the U.S. and its allies proceed in dealing with Iran and its nuclear program?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We had very good discussions in London hosted by the British Government on Monday. The discussions included France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, China, and I represented the United States. All of us agreed that Iran should turn back from its quest to build a nuclear future for itself. All of us agreed that Iran should return to negotiations with the EU-3. All of us agreed that Iran should suspend its current nuclear activities. All of us agreed that the announcement last week by the Iranians that they are seeking to now begin research and development on centrifuges in Natanz at the enrichment facility, that they should suspend that. And all of us agreed that they should heed the words of Dr. El Baradei of the IAEA, that Iran has to listen to the international community. And so, there is a great deal of consensus and agreement on those points.

The United States, for its part, very strongly supports the decision of the European Union and the three governments of the EU to call for an emergency meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors on February 2 and February 3. We support that. We support a decision by the Board of Governors to refer the issue to the UN Security Council. We believe, as Secretary Rice said last week, that the votes are already present -- the majority votes to make that possible -- and we wish to see Iran listen to the international community, heed the strong and united advice of the international community that it ought not to pursue centrifuge research, it ought not to pursue enrichment, and it certainly ought not to proceed down the path towards a nuclear weapons future, which we believe Iran is intending to do.

So, [there was a] consensus on some points on Monday. Other points need to be worked out. I think that there were a variety of views as to how we should proceed in the future but very strong American support for Britain, France, Germany, for the European Union in their quest to see this issue proceed to the United Nations Security Council.

QUESTION: Does this mean, then, that China and Russia -- which, as far as we can tell, are pretty clear that they're not supporting the U.S. position on this issue -- have they shifted position on Monday?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I noted -- thank you for the question. I noted the points that we agreed upon, and I think that all of us have been consistent over the last few days in saying that we agreed. I can't speak for the Government of Russia or the Government of China, obviously, and they will have to speak for themselves as to what they intend to do on February 2 at the IAEA Board of Governors vote or in the Security Council. And there was not unanimity on all points on Monday, but there was unanimity on the significant points that I mentioned. And it would be advisable for the Iranian government to listen to the voice of the international community and to feel the sense of frustration, that Iran has turned away from perfectly reasonable offers made by the European Union and, indeed, by Russia.

The European Union made an offer in August that would have provided for a continuation of negotiation. The Russian Federation made an offer in October that would have provided for peaceful civil nuclear power in Iran but no access to the sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle on the territory of Iran, and we thought at that time -- President Bush, Secretary Rice said in October -- that we could support elements of the Russian proposal, and we encouraged the Russians to go forward. But we saw

Iran turn away, not only from the European Union negotiations but also from the negotiation of Russia. And we thought that that was unfortunate, and we think the Iranians should think twice about their strategy.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you a question about China. You had mentioned democracy in your statement. How important is the India relationship, not just because India is a democracy but also because China is not? How important is India as an exemplar of growth and democracy being compatible, in your view?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I think that our relationship with India stands on its own. The development of the much closer relationship of India and the United States is not directed at any country. It's not a function of our relation with any other country. It stands on its own. India is a global power. India will soon be the largest country in the world by population. It is the largest democracy in the world. And I think what we are beginning to see is that while India and the United States are very different countries, obviously, our global interests are beginning to intersect. We both wish to see stable democratic regimes appear in all regions of the world. We want to see the spread of democracy. We both want to see a peaceful South Asia. And we both want to see a peaceful and stable East Asia in the future, and both of us have an interest in stability in that part of the world. We have a commitment and a self interest, both of us, to open trading relationships and to growth in the global economy. And India has done so well in recent years and should be so proud of its economic development along those lines, and the United States has a similar stake in the global economy. We both are working together again common problems, such as HIV Aids, against trafficking of women and children.

And so, I think what's happening is that there's a confluence of several trends. One is that India and the United States have the same value systems as multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracies. And we also have a converging set of economic, political and security interests. And these two trends have provided the foundation for this new relationship, which has been emerging over the last decade, which is now advancing quite rapidly over the last several years. So, I would say that it's important to look at interests and values in discerning why the U.S. and India are coming together as partners globally. And I hope that answers your question.

QUESTION: My question is more that India (inaudible...) Could you draw a comparison between India and China....?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, we do... we have, of course, a very important relationship with China. I wouldn't want to draw any comparisons. We're not... we don't often do that in our diplomatic parlance. I think it is more appropriate for us to talk about the U.S.-India relationship and, separately, the U.S.-China relationship. I wouldn't draw comparisons between the two. But I would say that one of the reasons why we describe India as a global strategic partner is because we do have the unifying bond of democracy. And that is an elementary bond and, of course, the most important bond between us.

QUESTION: On today's meetings in Mumbai, could you tell us something more about them? Did you meet, for instance, the Atomic Energy Commission Chairman? Did India's nuclear separation plan come up for discussion? Could you tell us what happened in these meetings today? Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. I'm primarily meeting members of the business community. I will not be meeting with the nuclear officials here. I will be meeting with atomic energy officials and also Foreign Secretary Saran in Delhi. But today I have met with a variety of people from the think tank community, the strategic community, from the business community. I'll be meeting Mr. Tata and his associates later this afternoon. Of course, he is the leader of the Indian part of the CEO Forum, which is a part of the initiative that Prime Minister Singh and President Bush initiated last July and which will be part of the future of this relationship.

So I'm just trying to get a sense -- a better sense, a more refined sense -- of what is possible in building a better economic relationship between us. There's a lot of work that can be done. Of course, most attention has been drawn to India-U.S. cooperation in the high-tech sector, and we've seen over the last two months major announcements by Microsoft and by Intel and by Cisco in the Indian high-tech sector. We've seen the announcement of the Boeing sale of civilian aircraft to the Indian authorities. And we obviously want to fill out that economic relationship, so today we have been talking about what we can do to increase U.S.-India cooperation in the agricultural sector, which is so important to India and my country. We had, in the 1950s, at the beginning of the U.S.-India relationship just after independence, a very full cooperation in agriculture. That has waned. Can we resuscitate that? And can we elevate our agricultural cooperation, say, between our universities, our land grant universities in the United States and the technical institutes that are so celebrated here in India? Can our two governments do more to see if we can work together in agricultural research?

Energy is the second field which is going to be very important for the future of the Indian economy and for our economy, and you've seen in recent weeks how important energy is on a global basis, looking at the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, thinking through the problem of Iran, which is becoming a pariah country of sorts in the international community. So, energy is the second and infrastructure is the third. So, those are the issues we've been focusing on today and that I will continue to focus on in my discussions in Delhi on Thursday and Friday.

QUESTION: There are certain differences between the two countries about civilian nuclear cooperation? Have these differences been ironed out now? These negotiations have taken a lot of time. What are the outstanding issues? Where is the problem coming from? What are your apprehensions regarding this?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I wouldn't say there's any problem whatsoever, but this is very challenging, and what we have embarked upon, India and the United States, is an absolutely unique venture in international diplomacy. The United States has committed, along with India, to try to achieve a civil-nuclear agreement between the two countries. That will entail talking about issues that we haven't talked about for the last 30 years. We're now bringing them to the surface, and we are trying to implement the July 18 agreement as faithfully as we can, in a way that will benefit both countries. So there's no problem that is insuperable, but we have embarked on a unique diplomatic venture that does require, I think, the full six or eight months that it going to take to decide on how best to proceed, to put that into a bilateral agreement that President Bush and Prime Minister Singh can then agree upon finally as the way ahead. And I have -- of course, there are a number of differences as you go along; there are a number of complications -- but I have confidence that we will reach this agreement and I think that there has been consensus on both sides, as well.

QUESTION: What about the differences over the separation between India's civilian and military nuclear energy facilities? (Inaudible...) Have you sorted them out, and can we expect some announcement during President George W. Bush's India visit in March?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, if you look back at the July 18 statement that was issued at the White House, the joint statement, it does talk about India achieving a separation between its civilian and military nuclear facilities. And that is an enormously complex task. And that is at the heart of these negotiations, and I will be getting into details of that with my friend Foreign Secretary Saran tomorrow morning.

QUESTION: The U.S. has expressed apprehensions over the Iran-India gas pipeline through Pakistan, following which there has been a re-think on the Indian side. Do you see any problems in this now?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I think we had discussions, obviously, from time to time about this issue in diplomatic circles. I think... I know Secretary Rice has commented upon this in the past. I will obviously support what she said on this. And I think that it is an issue that is -- the issue of Iran in general has become a major issue in global politics just over the last several months.

All of us need to think about our relations with Iran. Here is a country that, since August, has a radical government in place; a government that very recently has called for the destruction of a member-state of the United Nations, Israel; that has denied the historical basis of a holocaust that occurred during Second World War; a country that insists on its rights to enrich and reprocess uranium but doesn't talk much about its obligations and responsibilities in the international system. And I would just refer you to the remarks made by Dr. El Baradei in his "Newsweek" interview published on Monday and the statement issued by the Russian foreign ministry last week, as well as the statements issued by my government and the European governments.

There is a great deal of frustration in the international community right now, and I think that there is a consensus that Iran should turn back, should return to negotiations, suspend its nuclear activities and discuss this issue in a rational and productive way. And that is not the course that Iran is on right now. And thus the great concern in my government and in my country and around the world about Iran.

QUESTION: I have two questions, one related to Iran only. Unfortunately, if Iran does not come to the negotiating table, then what will be the options left for the U.S. and the world? And secondly, have you identified the civilian and military nuclear structures of India?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: On the first question, Secretary Rice said the other day that we haven't left diplomacy behind, we've simply entered a different phase of diplomacy. There was an attempt made over the last two years, by the European Union governments, to negotiate with Iran in a peaceful and productive way, and the Iranians walked away from those negotiations unilaterally. And then last week they unilaterally took the seals off their nuclear plant at Natanz and said they would engage in centrifuge research, which we think is a quite dangerous step. So now we are suggesting a new phase in the diplomacy, and we are dedicated to a diplomatic solution to this problem -- and that is to have the International Atomic Energy Agency refer the issue of Iran to the Security Council, because the Security Council is the supreme international multilateral body. It is the place where questions like this should be discussed, and a bright spotlight should be put upon the Iranian regime. And the Iranian regime should answer questions that all the world has about its nuclear intentions. And so, this is the next phase of diplomacy that we are embarking on, and as I said before we are very strong support for the European-3 in their quest to see these negotiations resumed.

On your second question: I really don't want to get into the details of the discussions that I'll have with the Foreign Secretary Saran, because I think that they're best left to the diplomatic...left to the privacy of the diplomatic conference table in the next couple of days, except to say that these are serious issues and they've got to be addressed seriously by both of our governments. I think they are, and we hope very much for a successfully conclusion.

I should also say that, in addition to discussing the civil-nuclear issues, Prime Minister Singh and President Bush agreed upon a number of, in essence, joint ventures between the two governments in July. We now need to advance in those joint ventures: in agriculture; in higher education; in space launch; in welcoming an Indian astronaut into the American space program for the shuttle missions; in energy; in business promotion; in education. We have 80,000 Indian students in the United States, the greatest number of foreign students of any country. And so there's a lot that we can build on, and all of these initiatives are important. So I'll be discussing all those issues with the Foreign Secretary and his delegation.

And finally, we find India to be a very effective and very reliable partner in trying to work together to promote stability in South Asia. Both of us are concerned by the situation in Nepal. Neither of us wants to see a return to violence in Nepal by the Maoists. Both of us want to see the King, His Majesty the King, return to a democratic foundation. In Sri Lanka, I think it's fair to say we want to see a strengthening of the cease-fire agreement, an end to the violence that we've seen over recent weeks, in the attacks in recent weeks. In Bangladesh, we'd like to see the government respond vigorously to the challenge of violence and of religious extremism that have been all too evident in Bangladesh over the last several months. In Afghanistan, we wish to support President Karzai, and we will both be attending, India and the United States, a major international conference in London on January 31 to support the Afghan people and to pledge additional economic assistance and support for the government. And, of course, the United States wishes for the best relationship between Pakistan and India. And so, we will be discussing all of these issues in Delhi over the next couple of days because they are a big, growing and, I think, increasingly important part of this relationship.

Thank you very much. Thank you for your attention and thank you for the questions you have asked. It's been a pleasure.

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