



Special Briefing
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Ongoing Efforts To Implement the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement



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(12:00 p.m. EST)

MR. ERELI: Hello, everybody. Our first briefing today is going to be with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who's here to talk -- give you all an update on U.S.-Indian civilian nuclear cooperation. He'll start with some comments and take your questions.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Good morning. We're very pleased that on Capitol Hill today Senator Lugar on the Senate side and Chairman Hyde and Congressman Lantos on the House side will introduce legislation designed to grant exceptions for India to U.S. law that would permit the Administration to go forward and fulfill the terms of the civilian nuclear agreement that President Bush agreed to -- with Indian Prime Minister Singh. We hope that this debate in the Congress will proceed swiftly. Secretary Rice was up on Capitol Hill last week. President Bush met with congressional leaders last week to discuss our hopes for congressional agreement on the India legislation. I have spent the better part of this week talking to members of the Senate and House about this.

We think this is a very important agreement for the future of U.S.-Indian relations and also the future of our country. Because if the Congress will agree to grant these India-specific exceptions to U.S. law and should the Nuclear Suppliers Group then agree to change international practice, we will be able to bring India into the mainstream of a nonproliferation regime and we believe this will be a strong net gain for nonproliferation, for our hopes and beliefs in nonproliferation. And all of you know, I think, the terms of this agreement so I won't review them in detail except to say this, that India has agreed that roughly three-quarters of its nuclear system we've put under safeguards, India has agreed that all future civilian reactors, whether they're thermal reactors or breeder reactors, shall be placed under international safeguards. India has agreed that all of these safeguards shall be permanent. So once a nuclear plant is put under IAEA safeguards, it will be in perpetuity.

India has also agreed to align itself with the other international regimes concerning proliferation: The Australia Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement. India has agreed to maintain a moratorium on nuclear testing. India has also said that it will try -- in fact, it was announced this week that it will tighten up its own restrictions on the export of any technology associated with this industry. And in fact India has an excellent record over 30 years of not diverted its nuclear technology.

So we're convinced this is a good deal, both for India and for the United States. We've also been in touch with a lot of countries around the world, particularly those that are members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. We've been very pleased that Dr. ElBaradei, who in essence is the protector and defender of a nonproliferation system, he has spoken out positively, in writing, on behalf of this arrangement and that the French and British and Russian Governments have also supported it.

We do think that this deal can go forward -- should go forward in the next several months. I know that there will be hearings on Capitol Hill and the Administration will be very happy to testify in those hearings. There'll be a series of briefings. I think for those of you from India who are here to report this, you should expect that this is going to be a somewhat lengthy process. It's likely to take several months, because that's the way the American process works as the Legislative branch reports -- excuse me, the Executive branch reports to the Legislative branch and seeks congressional approval. But we are encouraged by the number of members of the Senate and the House who have spoken out publicly in favor of this agreement. And I think you'll see as the weeks go along, there'll be a number of cosponsors in the Senate and House side to the legislation that is being introduced on Capitol Hill this afternoon.

There have been a number of objections made by members of the American public, the nonproliferation community, to this agreement and I'd be happy to talk to you about them. But we're confident that the Administration can answer the critics and respond to those objections. We certainly don't believe that in asking the international community to essentially treat India as an exceptional case, we don't believe that that is going to have a negative impact at all on other issues. For instance on the case of Iran, you have seen that the issue of Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability is now in New York at the United Nations.

And there'll be some important discussions early next week in New York, among the members of the Perm-5 and the German Government and others, about how we move forward with a presidential statement. And the whole world is focused on the Iranian nuclear question. Not a single country has come to us to say -- not a single one -- that this India nuclear deal has had any kind of impact on their thinking on how to deal with Iran, because we look at those two countries and we see a peaceful democratic India that is inviting the International Atomic Energy Agency to come into India and to place safeguards on the majority of its nuclear facilities. We see in Iran that it is essentially saying to the IAEA, get out of our country. Give us relief from the Additional Protocol. Give us relief from the inspection regime. So one country inviting the IAEA in, the other country trying to kick it out and that's quite a stark juxtaposition of views.

We also think it's very important to recognize that the only possible country that could achieve the kind of agreement that we'd like to see in the NSG would be India because other countries have proliferation problems. Countries like Iran and North Korea have so clearly violated their commitments that they wouldn't ever stand a chance of receiving exceptional treatment at the Nuclear Suppliers Group. So does India create a precedent that would somehow dilute the proliferation regime? Clearly not. In fact, I think a lot of countries around the world with which we have spoken believe that if India can come into the system, if the safeguards can be put into place, if India can meet these commitments to the international community which we think it can, it's going to strengthen that regime, not weaken it. So we're confident that this is a deal that is good for our country, as well as India, as well as a nonproliferation regime. And with that, I'll be happy to take any questions.

Barry.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. willing or agreeable to talking to Iran about its nuclear program -- the senior negotiator (inaudible) talks and is that something that the U.S. will pick up on?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well --

QUESTION: Direct talks?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yeah, we've taken note of the statements made this morning by Mr. Larijani. There have been earlier Iranian statements. You know, the problem here, Barry, is not the absence of discussions between the United States and Iran. The problem is what Iran is doing in its foreign policy. We see an Iranian Government, particularly since Ahmadi-Nejad came to power in August, that seems bound and determined to create a nuclear weapons capability. Why else would they

be undertaking the actions they have at the plant Natanz on enrichment research and development?

We see an Iranian Government that continues the 25-year Iranian preoccupation with supporting the major terrorist groups in the Middle East which have directed their fire at the United States, at American citizens, at Lebanon, at the Palestinians and at Israel. And we see a government that has unleashed, if you will, a much more aggressive foreign policy in its own region which I think has many countries in that region quite concerned.

So the problem here is not the absence of discussions between the Iranian Government and the American Government. The problem is and has been, for quite a long time, the actions of the Iranian Government.

QUESTION: But there's opportunity to talk. I mean, you haven't responded to that. Why limit any discussion with them to their meddling in Iraq? Why not talk to them about their nuclear program if it's that awesome problem you've just outlined? Why -- what harm would it be in talking to them?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Barry, we have made the calculation, particularly since the Ahmadi-Nejad government came into being a couple of months ago, that it is better to try to isolate the Iranian Government. And so, you have seen and -- what we've tried to do on the nuclear issue, for instance, the construction of this coalition of countries that voted against Iran on February 4th at the IAEA, Russia and China and Brazil and India, the United States, the Asian countries, the European countries. We believe that that has the attention of the Iranian Government. You see now Iranian envoys going to all sorts of capitals, throwing up into the air all sorts of ideas about how this problem can be resolved. But the Iranians haven't answered the central question that was raised on February 4th at the IAEA, and that is, will they be willing to suspend their nuclear activities at Natanz, to roll back the nuclear steps that they've taken since January and even before that and will they be willing to return to negotiations.

Why can't the Iranians accept the proposal made by the Russian Government many months ago for an offshore fuel arrangement? So this is where the international debate is and it's now in New York and that's a very serious forum. It's a more political forum than the technical nature of the discussions at the IAEA in Vienna.

And we're concentrating our attention on that multilateral forum, convinced that if the coalition of countries that is together in New York can send a united message to Iran that it has to roll back its nuclear activities and return to negotiations, that's the best way to deal with Iran. And so we choose that course. (Inaudible) trying to isolate, shine a spotlight on the Iranians and to ask the Iranians to respond to the clear role of all these countries around the world that spoke with one voice a month ago and continue to insist on the same behavior by the Iranian Government.

QUESTION: Follow up, Nick?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Carol.

QUESTION: How do you read the timing of the --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I just wanted to call on my friend Carol Giacomo --

QUESTION: I'm sorry.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: -- who is seating here.

QUESTION: I wanted to talk about India so --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay. Why don't we stay in Iran and then we'll go back to India.

QUESTION: How do you read the timing of the Iranian acceptance to this offer, I believe Ambassador Khalilzad six months ago, said they're willing to talk about Iraq. Do you see it as linked to what's happening in New York? And secondly, what do you expect to come out of these talks if they happen on the Iraq issue?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, two separate questions. And the first question, as you know, I think Secretary Rice and other U.S. officials have said before that Ambassador Khalilzad had been authorized to undertake these discussions. However, these discussions have not taken place.

On your second question, which is what's happening in New York, we're hopeful that there will be an agreement on a presidential statement. Now these things take time in a multilateral organization like the United Nations. That was your question, right?

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: And we're hopeful that presidential statement can be put together and that the Iranians can then take note of that and hopefully adjust their behavior.

QUESTION: I was interested in your interpretation of why the Iranians picked today to say we're willing to talk to the United States about Iraq?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I have no idea why the Iranians chose today. But I would just say they've made similar statements for many months now.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, my name is (inaudible). I represent the *Daily Jang* in Pakistan. You made a contrast between India and Iran that one country has invited International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect and the other country has kicked them out and that is fine, as far as the current government goes. But let me go back the -- for eight years, the Khatami , government which was recognized as a reformist government by the United States and which had invited IAEA and had allowed them not only to inspect the facilities, but to put their seals on the Iranian nuclear facilities. Can you cite maybe two or three or even one encouraging economic concession that the U.S. government made to that previous government to show support for its willingness to open its government facilities and to be reformist and to take on the fundamentalists?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, the --

QUESTION: What did the United States do to encourage that government and to prevent people like Ahmadi-Nejad to come into power?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: The American Government is not in the habit of making concessions to countries that direct and fund terrorist groups that strike at American citizens and at friends of the United States, like Israel or Lebanon or moderate Palestinians. We're not in the habit of doing that and so we haven't done that. And the previous Iranian Government continued the long Iranian tradition of funding and directing terrorist groups in the Middle East. We believe a previous Iranian Government also had as a strategic long-term objective the creation of a nuclear weapons capability. And so you have to choose in diplomacy your tactics. And the tactics of the United States and most other countries have been to tell the Iranians that that kind of behavior is unacceptable. And so we've done that.

Now with the appearance of the Ahmadi-Nejad Government, if you will, the problem has worsened. It's been exacerbated by the statements of that government concerning Israel, by the aggressive foreign policy towards some of its other neighbors and by now the provocative and quite dangerous steps that they've taken since January to cross the international redlines at their plant at Natanz to begin research and -- centrifuge research and development. So we just have to judge countries by what they do, not just by what they say. And the previous Iranian government was engaged in all of these nefarious activities.

Now we did see on March 11, 2005, a public statement by Secretary Rice a year ago, that the United States would support the EU-3 negotiations with Iran. And that to show our interest in those negotiations, although we didn't participate in them, we would agree to the sale of spare parts by United States -- American firms to Iran's aging fleet of airliners. And we would not object to Iran's application to begin the application to join the World Trade Organization. So, you know, we put those two forward but what happened? We saw the Iranian Government unilaterally end its negotiations with the EU-3. We saw them reject the Russian proposal and we saw them cross the international redlines on centrifuge research and development. So for all those discussions the Iranians have spurned all the offers. They've gone on unilaterally and it's in a direction that the entire international community has condemned.

And so we think the policy of the United States, which is to be tough-minded and expect that Iran will meet its commitments and to try to align ourselves with other countries in a large coalition to send one message, we think that policy is succeeding and we hope the Iranians hear this message.

QUESTION: Just one follow-up. Mr. Burns, one follow-up.

QUESTION: How is the policy succeeding?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh, I think if you look back, Carol, a year ago --

QUESTION: The Iranians are continuing their program.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: -- a year ago, there was a very limited international discussion about Iran's nuclear program. It had to do with three EU countries -- been going on for some time with Iran. If you look at the last 12 months, we have been able to put together a much larger international coalition of countries. It is not insignificant that Russia and China and India and the United States are in one place on this issue. We were not in one place a year ago. And we're betting that Iran is not going to want to isolate itself. It's not a country like North Korea, which seems to thrive on isolation. It's a country that needs investment. It needs the kind of diplomatic ties that have been produced between Iran and some countries.

And I think what's at stake is the normalcy of those relations with part of the rest of the world should Iran not respond to this united that has been put forward.

QUESTION: I don't -- that the diplomacy has certainly been more deft until you got to the UN and now the Russians are throwing up huge roadblocks to moving forward on something that arguably, given what's gone before in the IAEA, should have been a rather pro forma presidential statement. But the facts on the ground remain the same, and that is, Iran's program moves inexorably forward if all the opinions of world leaders are to be believed.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think it's going to be difficult for the Iranian nuclear program to move inexorably forward as you say, if they have to do it in isolation and if there is opposition from some of the friends of Iran, the countries that have dealt with Iran economically. The Russians, of course, have been engaged in the construction of a nuclear power plant in Bushehr for a number of years. All of that's going to be at stake if the Iranians don't respond to the message that they have to be hearing these days. So you know, we have to stay focused on a patient, determined, diplomatic course and that's what we're on.

You know, in New York, things do take time at the United Nations, but we're confident that we'll get to a presidential statement and confident that Iran's going to feel that pressure from the United Nations Security Council.

QUESTION: A question about India.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes.

QUESTION: Sorry.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Ladies first. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you. Well, you're obviously having to do a lot of convincing about this nuclear deal with the Congress, also the think tanks. Now with this news of Russia wanting to sell fuel to India and saying that it's not in violation of any law -- not in violation of the NSG, do you think future hearings and briefings -- this is going to make it more difficult for you? What have been the real roadblocks here? When you go out and make your pitch, when you give your explanation for wanting to do this exclusive deal with India, what is it that they come back and tell you? You have spoken so many times. What are the doubts that still remain?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, there's -- I now have been back from India for two weeks and I've had -- gosh, I've met a countless number of senators and congressmen. This is a very complex agreement and it's quite esoteric in some respects. And so I think the Congress has a right to expect full briefings by the Administration, which we are now in the course of under -- of doing, further testimony so that we can spell out, in some detail, exactly what has been agreed to and what the ramifications of this might be for the nonproliferation regime and for our relations with other countries.

And as President Bush said the day this deal was made in New Delhi, it is a difficult set of negotiations and what we're essentially doing here is establishing a new course, a new way of trying to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. So, we expect a vigorous debate on Capitol Hill because there's a lot at stake. We're confident that what we'll put forward is right for the United States, is right for our nonproliferation concerns, and we've been gratified that there have -- that a considerable number of senators and representatives have spoken out publicly in favor of the agreement.

Very few members of Congress have spoken out against the agreement. There's a large group of members of Congress, a large group, who I think are waiting to hear the briefings, to hear the testimony, to be able to ask the questions that they have a legitimate right to ask. And so I think the debate -- you know, hasn't been fully joined on Capitol Hill, but will be fully joined in a couple of weeks as the House International Relations Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee schedule the briefings and hearings that they tell us they want to have at the end of March and the beginning of April.

And I think it's quite legitimate for members of Congress to expect that we will have to present these views in some detail before they pronounce themselves and we expected that, given the nature of this agreement and given the fact that it is a departure from 30 years of orthodox thinking, conventional thinking in our own country about how best to achieve proliferation. But the argument we're making is this is not just good for the strategic relationship between India and the United States. It's not just good for jobs in the United States, and it will produce jobs in the United States.

It's good because we had a nonproliferation regime that wasn't working well, because the largest country in the world -- in a few years' time when India overtakes China in population -- was outside the system. And yet, that country had not diverted its nuclear material, wanted to come into the system partially, at least in civilian aspects, and wanted the kind of open trade that had been denied it for 30 years. We think it is an obvious gain to bring that country into the international system. Now, it takes a change in U.S. law, which we're asking the Congress to consider, and a change in Nuclear Suppliers Group practices.

So, I think you should expect -- we expect it's going to be several months of debate, both in the United States and in the NSG, before we can complete this process. We

expected that. So, my initial sense of two weeks of talk on Capitol Hill is that we've made our presentation, at least the first round of it, we're encouraged by the support that we have, but we also know that there's a great number of members of Congress who need to have further discussions and further testimony and that's ahead of us.

QUESTION: But how confident are you that it will eventually go through with (inaudible)?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, that's up to the Congress to decide. We have a separation of powers in the United States and I wouldn't want to predict what Congress is going to do, but we're very hopeful that Congress will support the deal. We're asking members to support it. We think we're putting a good case before the Congress, but I want to be respectful of the prerogatives of the senior members of Congress who run these committees and I would leave -- you know, the decision is to them, but we're hopeful and we think this is a good deal for our country.

QUESTION: If I could follow on that, Nick. Neither chairman in the House or the Senate has yet spoken out in favor of this and some Republicans have told me that Chairman Hyde, in particular, had some very serious concerns about it. Is that a fair assessment of things? Senator Lugar, clearly, from reading his statement, has taken a wait-and-see attitude. How hard were you working on them and how essential are they, particularly Senator Lugar's backing, to the process of moving forward?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You know, I don't think it would be appropriate for me to discuss our conversations with individual members, particularly the senior members. And I just think it wouldn't be -- this is not the right place to do that.

I will say, however, that President Bush met with the congressional leadership last week and had a very good discussion with the leadership. Secretary Rice was able to have good meetings with the committee chairs last week. When she returns from Australia early next week, she intends to pick up where she left off and have a series of conversations on Capitol Hill next week. We are not discouraged by our contacts on Capitol Hill. We are encouraged by the numbers of senators and representatives who tell us, "You are on the right track. We like the agreement."

Now, a lot of them have technical questions or they want to see the full development of our argument and testimony, and that is to be expected and welcomed in our system. But what I'm trying to signal here is not discouragement. I think that we are in -- you know, round one of a 15-round match and -- because there's a lot that's ahead of us in terms of debate with the Congress and we want to be respectful of that process, but we're encouraged by the number of people on Capitol Hill who tell us, "Go ahead with this. This is a good idea and we'll support you."

QUESTION: Nick, I have a follow-up to that particular question. You mentioned right at the outset that it will be Senator Lugar and Congressman Lantos who will be dropping the bill. Is there any significance to the fact that --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think I said -- just to be accurate, as I understand it, Senator Lugar on the Senate side, Chairman Hyde and Mr. Lantos on the House side will introduce the bill for debate.

QUESTION: Okay. No, I thought -- you hadn't mentioned the name Hyde, you said --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I did -- I believe I did in my opening comments.

Joel, yes.

QUESTION: When you're talking to the senators and congressmen, what are the most common concerns you're hearing?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, let me -- that's an unbalanced question and I'll give you a balanced answer. We're hearing --

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Which is my prerogative -- well, I'll answer your question -- which is my prerogative. We're hearing a lot of support for the fact that we're trying to take a very difficult issue, how to have a functioning and effective nonproliferation system, and include in that this very large country that has a nuclear power industry and wants to expand the nuclear power industry, a lot of support for that and a lot of support for the design of the approach that we've made.

One of the issues, I think, that senators and representatives have been asking about is what happens in the future. Because the agreement announced in Delhi two weeks ago is a snapshot of the current situation: 14 to 22 power reactors to be put under safeguards; all future civilian reactors under safeguards, permanent safeguards.

Our assessment is this, that if Congress changes the legislation, approves this deal, if the NSG does so as well, India is going to embark on a massive expansion of its civil nuclear power sector and that the great majority of Indian investment in the nuclear industry will fall on the civilian side. The Indians tell us that eventually, they believe that 80 or 90 percent of their nuclear system is going to be under safeguards, because the imperative in India is to increase power production, electrical power production through the growth of nuclear power plants.

And so some of the critics say this deal is going to lead to an expansion of India's nuclear weapons arsenal. We disagree with that fundamentally. Our assessment, based on one year of negotiations with the Indian Government, is that, of course, while they have a sovereign right to continue to modernize their nuclear weapons sector, and obviously, like any country, they will maintain and modernize it, we believe the great majority of the growth -- not all of it, but the great majority is going to be on the civilian side.

Now, the Indian commitment to us in the separation plan, which I believe you probably all have a copy of, is that all future civilian thermal and breeder reactors will come under safeguards. So, as they add 1000-megawatt power plants, which we believe they will do in the near future, they will come under safeguards. And therefore, the percentage of increase, whether it's the number of reactors or megawattage under safeguards, is going to increase over time. And I think that's been an impressive argument, as I perceive it, from members of Congress to understand. And you'll note that the critics, when they write their op-ed pieces from the ivory towers or the think tanks, don't focus on that.

I think, Joel, to answer your question specifically, now that I've given you a balanced presentation, I think that -- you know, members -- as I said before, I don't want to be needlessly repetitive. This is a very complex agreement and it does break from the rep -- the conventional wisdom of the past. So I think members are looking for testimony that will lay out this plan in some detail. They're going to want to ask questions. Some of them have suggestions that they've already made to us.

Now, we've said to members of Congress we do not wish to renegotiate this deal, because if you tried to open it up and renegotiate it, you probably wouldn't be able to put it back together again. But we have said to members, we would be -- if you can get us ideas that do not require us to renegotiate the deal, but that might strengthen it by asking the United States or, for instance, to certify certain things that may happen in the future, that would be welcome. And we've already received such ideas.

And I think a lot of the -- you asked -- I think a lot of the questions coming from Congress are in that realm. And I think there is also a sense, you know, are the United States and India committed to a fissile material cut-off treaty. The answer is yes. We said that on July 18th when the Prime Minister was here; we've said it again in Delhi two weeks ago. Do we believe that it's possible to restrain an arms race in South Asia? And the answer to that is yes. The United States believes that India and Pakistan should continue with a very good composite dialogue that has taken place before their foreign secretaries, that both countries have an interest in minimizing any sense of competition. So we're trying to deal here with the questions that have been asked and somewhat criticisms that have been made. And we think we're responding effectively.

I don't know if you saw Secretary Rice's op-ed piece in *The Washington Post*. But I think she laid out there and she said that we sent that to every member of Congress. She sent a letter to every member of Congress. We gave factual detail in a package we sent to them two days ago. I think we're beginning to answer, one by one, all these questions that have been posed, whether it's on the Hill or in the press. And I think we're heading in the right direction in that respect.

QUESTION: Can I follow-up on the nonproliferation --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) he may put conditions on this legislation. Do you think that you can prevent conditions from being put on? I heard what you said about the President certifying certain things. A lot of lawmakers want to see the peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement before they tackle this legislation. How long will it take you to negotiate that agreement and are you willing to hold this legislation until that agreement is negotiated? And thirdly, you make and you repeat over and over again what a wonderful nonproliferation record India has. David Albright last week, as you may be aware, put out a report which calls into question, raises some serious questions about India's record. How do you respond to that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay. Thank you, Carol. Pertaining to the -- what we call the 123 Agreement, the bilateral civil nuclear agreement. We have gone through a year of negotiations with India on the really tough issues and we've worked them out. The bilateral agreement is a largely technical agreement that will not entail a tremendous amount of give and take between the two governments because we've resolved the issues. They will simply be reflected in the bilateral agreement. So we gave the Indian Government a draft copy of the text two days ago. And I think that that agreement should proceed expeditiously. It would surprise me if it took much time at all and what we've assured members of Congress is we're happy to share the text with them. We're happy to talk through the details of that agreement. But the bigger conceptual agreement is a separation plan that the 123 is largely technical. So I don't see those as a real problem.

QUESTION: I'm just raising that because it's a concern of --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Understood. And I've heard the same request from members of Congress.

QUESTION: How about --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: On David Albright, let me just -- on David Albright. I actually have not read through all of his briefings, so I don't want to be unfair to him and, you know, try to discuss it without being fully informed of everything he said and I'd be -- I know we're happy to sit down with him and talk. It's interesting that, you know, a lot of countries around the world have a lot of experience with India in a nuclear realm. And of course, a lot of countries have taken a close look at India's record on nonproliferation. And the consensus that I hear, talking to most of the members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, is that we all agree on one thing.

India, while it's been outside the NPT has conformed to a lot of the practices of the countries inside the NPT, which is another anomaly of India's current state. And all of us agree that India does have a good record in not proliferating its nuclear technology and nuclear materials. So people are free to make charges, whatever charges they want. That is the consensus opinion internationally. We have not seen anything that would indicate to us that there's any serious problem that would allow us to question the basic agreement we've made, which is that India is a country that when it makes commitments, follows up on those commitments and adheres to its international agreements. We believe that's the case with the Indian Government, that it's a trustworthy partner.

On the first question, again, we want to be respectful of the congressional process. So I don't want to answer -- respond to what individual members may have said outside of the discussions we've had. This is a complex agreement. To reopen it, we're probably at risk of never being able to achieve it again and to reassemble it. So what we've said to members of Congress who have raised this with us is that we welcome all ideas. There may be ideas that do not require renegotiation, that may help to reinforce or strengthen this agreement. We're open to all of them. But we wish not to renegotiate.

Yes.

QUESTION: One of the problems that's always been an issue with India is export controls. Are you satisfied that their export control law allows them -- enables them to control exports of items controlled by the NSG and are they adhering to the guidelines of NSG unilaterally as they said they would? And also have they committed to join the Proliferation Security Initiative and, if not, why not?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. We believe that the passage in June by the Indian parliament of the weapons of mass destruction export control law was a significant step forward by the Indians. I think had they not done that, it probably would have made the July 18th agreement and the subsequent agreement of two weeks ago impossible to attain. Because it gave the Indians a foundation of compliance with international practice on export controls, so we were pleased by that. India is trying to align itself with all the practices of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

And on your third question on the Proliferation Security Initiative, we're very hopeful that India will decide to join the Proliferation Security Initiative. There are a number of things that India has under discussion -- as I said before, alignment with some of the other international regimes, Wassenaar and Australia Group. PSI is important. It's now a worldwide system that has been very helpful in the fight against proliferation and we think India should be part of it and it's India's decision whether or not to join, but we think it should and we're hopeful that it will.

QUESTION: A follow-on on Joel's question (inaudible). Based on the conversations you and other Administration officials have had up on the Hill so far, in the broadest possible sense, would you say you're hearing more objections or just more technical questions, requests for information, desire for more detail?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: To be very specific, we're hearing a lot of support and we're hearing a lot of questions. There are very few members of Congress who have told us, "We are opposed to this and we will vote against it." I think there's one member of Congress I've talked to who has said that, in the House of Representatives, and that's it. I think most members are -- this is a very serious proposition. They want to look into it carefully.

What we did last week was to offer the House staff and the Senate staff, staff briefings. So, briefings by our negotiating team with the staff. That has now taken place. There have been two of them. There will be more of those to come. I think it's reasonable to expect that Under Secretary Joseph and I will go up and do further formal briefings. And then there will be testimony in the House and Senate and we're going to offer the highest-level Administration witnesses that we can.

QUESTION: Could you comment a bit, please, on the deal between Russia and India, for Russia to supply uranium? I understand there's been some concerns by the State Department about this deal?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, you know, I would answer your question this way: India needs energy. For an economy growing at eight to nine percent a year, a billion people in the country, a rapidly expanding infrastructure, they need energy. So everyone understands that and in fact, the basis of our own agreement on civil nuclear technology is based on the need for energy.

We think the proper sequencing would be that if India needs nuclear fuel for its reactors at Tarapur, which I think -- I believe is the question here. That the proper way to do this would be to have the U.S. Congress act and hopefully change our laws, have the NSG, more particularly, act and change NSG practices, and then countries -- the United States, France, Russia -- would be free to engage, at that point, in civil nuclear trade with India. And we think that that's the proper sequencing and we -- I know that Adam Ereli and others have spoken this week and that reflects the views of our government.

QUESTION: So if it goes ahead before they fulfill the agreement, you're opposed to it?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I gave you the answer I wanted to give and that is that the proper sequencing would be the one that I laid out. And it's important that the international community have confidence that it's had a chance to voice its own opinion. Of course, before you go too far ahead, we've made that clear to both governments.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, I assume that you just said it falls through Congress, doesn't go through -- where would it leave the U.S.-India relations?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I make it a practice -- I used to stand up at another podium across the hall ten years ago -- never to answer hypothetical questions. We are hopeful that the Congress -- we are hopeful that the Congress will agree with the Administration and I don't want to engage in any kind of hypothetical answer that would take us off that.

MR. CASEY: I think we have time for just one or two more.

QUESTION: I have a question on India. You've gone ahead with this deal. I mean, it kind of flaunts --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Carol, I guess you would have to ask both governments for their public rationale. I gave you an answer that I thought reflected the views in our own government and we've made those views known to both of the governments privately.

QUESTION: Did either of them let you know in advance that they were doing it?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes, they did. Both of them did.

QUESTION: And did you say --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I said essentially -- we said essentially, in private, what I just said publicly.

MR. CASEY: This is the last question, Nick.

QUESTION: In view of referring Iran to the Security Council and in view of the President Bush speech expected about reaffirming the preemptive war doctrine, do you expect that the problem with Iran is eventually going to be solved diplomatically or through use of force?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We are clearly attempting to send a very strong signal to the Iranian Government that it is isolated on this question of nuclear weapons and that the whole world is speaking with one voice and therefore, they ought to listen to that voice. And there's a process underway in the United Nations Security Council designed to shine a bright spotlight on Iran and have Iran pull back from its nuclear ambitions. We hope Iran will respond to that diplomatic course.

Thank you very much.

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