

U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement

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MODERATOR: Good morning and welcome to this morning's briefing on the Indian Civil Nuclear Agreement. This morning we have with us Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns. He'll give you a brief opening comment -- I believe you've seen some materials on the agreement that we've put out front -- and then be happy to take your questions.

Under Secretary Burns.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Good morning. It's a pleasure for me to be at the Foreign Press Center where I have not been in 10 years. It's changed a little bit and I'm happy to be back, happy to see all of you. I wanted just to say a few words about President Bush's initiative to seek congressional support for our civil nuclear agreement with the Indian government. We have been briefing members of Congress for the last several weeks. Those briefings have gone very well. We've briefed members and staff. Next week, there'll be formal briefings of the relevant committees that have jurisdiction over the legislation and then the following week, Secretary Rice is going to be testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well as the House International Relations Committee.



We're convinced this deal is positive for United States national security interest because it will help us first cement our strategic partnership with India, which is very important for our global interests. Second, it will provide a net gain for our hope to strengthen the proliferation regime because it will bring into the proliferation system for the first time in 30 years, one of the largest countries in the world and a country that hopes to have one of the largest civil, peaceful nuclear power industries in the future and that's India. And the calculation that we made, as we thought about this agreement over the last year is that we are far better off working with the Indians and having the IAEA place safeguards on India's nuclear -- civil nuclear program than we are if India is isolated and fully sanctioned. And so we're seeking relief from U.S. law that currently prohibits American private investment and trade with India's civil nuclear sector. We're asking Congress to provide an India-only -- and India-specific waiver to the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 and we're looking forward to the briefings next week of members, the formal briefings and of the hearings that will follow thereafter.

I'll be very happy to take any questions that you have on this particular arrangement. I think all of you are familiar with it, but I think it's best just to go right to questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, this is Sridhar Krishnaswami from The Press Trust of India. Has anybody had a chance to see yesterday there was a report in *The Washington Post* of respected senator -- former Senator Sam Nunn, expressing serious reservations of this civil nuclear arrangement. I would want to know how you'd react to it, number one, and number two whether his comments would complicate Administration efforts on Capitol Hill?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. Senator -- former Senator Nunn is a very respected individual and all of us, of course, appreciate the tremendous work that he has done for many, many years on the issue of proliferation. So we take his views very seriously and we have had a chance to talk to him, members of the Administration, and I know we'll continue to seek a dialogue with him.

I would say this, that the civil nuclear agreement with India is positive for our national interests because what we do believe, it will strengthen, not weaken the nonproliferation regime. The curious aspect of a current nonproliferation regime globally, is that some countries that are inside the regime, I'm thinking here of Iran and North Korea. They have not met their commitments to the NPT regime and, in fact, are cheating and have cheated on those commitments. And the anomaly is that some countries that are on the outside -- and India is the most prominent of those -- are adhering to the regulations of the nonproliferation regime, but they're not allowed in.

And so we had to answer, in our government, a fundamental question. In the real world in which we live, the world of relations among states, is it better for the United States and the rest of the world to keep India at arm's distance, to keep India out of the proliferation regime, to have no international safeguards to speak of on India's civil nuclear industry or is it better for us to bring them in, so that at least we capture three quarters of the Indian civil nuclear power system under international safeguards?

And we arrived at the conclusion, about a year ago, that far better off working with the Indians, because India is a country that is governed by the rule of law. India is a country that has not proliferated its nuclear material, unlike many other countries that are signatories to a nonproliferation regime. And therefore, India is a country that can be trusted and that the rest of the world wants to work with. We are assisted in this by Mohamed ElBaradei who is the defender and protector of the international nonproliferation regime. He made a public statement three weeks ago that he is fully in favor of the civil nuclear agreement between India and the United States because he thinks it's going to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. And Britain and France and Russia and Australia and many other countries have now come out to strongly support this agreement. So we think that, on balance, this is a net gain for proliferation and therefore we ought to go forward with it and we're seeking congressional legislation that would allow us to do that. And we have also sent Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher and Assistant Secretary Steve Rademacher to Vienna to address the Nuclear Suppliers Group tomorrow and they'll make a presentation to the Nuclear Suppliers Group that we think that that 35-nation body should agree by consensus to change its practice and to allow every country in the world to trade and invest in India's nuclear power sector.

Some of the criticisms of this agreement have been that -- one is that this will somehow weaken our ability to work effectively internationally to place pressure on the Iranian Government to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions. Well, I am a person who's been working very intensely on that issue. I was in New York on Monday night for a meeting with the P-5 political directors and I can tell you, not a single country with which we deal has said, "We can't be tough on Iran because you Americans have this nuclear deal with India." It doesn't work that way. International politics doesn't work that way.

I think everybody recognizes a peaceful, democratic, law-abiding country that wants to come into the IAEA regime, India, versus a country that is autocratic, that has not

told the truth about its nuclear ambitions, and that is actively trying to kick the IAEA out of its country, and that country is Iran. So it's a very clear and, frankly, stark juxtaposition of these two countries. And when I meet with the Russians and the Chinese and the Europeans and the Japanese and the Australians, none of these countries are saying, "Gee, because you've got this deal with India, we simply can't agree with you on Iran." That's not how the world works.

And I sense a great deal of commitment on the part of all the governments that I mentioned, particularly the governments of Russia and China, that we ought to deny Iran a nuclear weapons capability and all of us should work towards that end. All of us agree that Iran is in violation of its IAEA commitments and all of us believe that there should be a concerted action at the Security Council, hopefully in a matter of a couple of days of a presidential statement, to say that to the Iranians.

So the argument that somehow, by working with India on civil nuclear issues, we weaken the international effort against Iran, that argument, I think, carries no water, it has no weight, and it's not accurate. And so I think that, as we explain this deal to the Congress, we're going to be able to make a convincing case that this is in the interest of the United States of America.

MODERATOR: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Chidanand Rajghatta from Times of India. Ambassador Burns -- Secretary Burns, sorry -- your colleague -- you mentioned your colleague, Richard Boucher, has gone to Vienna. Can you give us a sense of how the NSG countries stack up, for and against the deal? In particular, have you spoken to the Chinese and the Canadians and where do they stand on this deal?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think it wouldn't be appropriate for me to characterize the views of other governments. One doesn't normally do that in diplomacy, so I won't do that this morning. But suffice it to say that when you have leading members of the NSG, the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Australia all speaking out in favor of this agreement, I think that's a fairly compelling group of countries. Now, we do have to reach a consensus in the Nuclear Suppliers Group. And my very strong sense is that what we're going to hear tomorrow is a lot of countries are going to wait and see if the United States Government is able to convince the U.S. Congress to pass the necessary legislation to allow this deal to go forward.

And once that happens, then I think sequentially, the Nuclear Suppliers Group will then want to take action on its own. And I'm confident that if the U.S. Government can convince the Congress to do what we're asking, I think that there'll be a very strong tide of support in the NSG in favor of this, but that's probably a few months away. This is a very complicated arrangement. Countries obviously have a right to look at it and be given the details and we'll be getting the necessary details tomorrow when Ambassador Boucher and Assistant Secretary Rademacher brief the NSG countries.

MODERATOR: We're going to go do a question from our colleagues in New York, please.

QUESTION: Under Secretary Burns, I'm with the CNBC TV 18. My name is Anirudh Bhattacharyya. I have a question about the statement recently from the Pakistan Foreign Ministry in which the office criticizes the India nuclear deal and it said that it altered the balance of power in South Asia and that will only encourage India to continue its weapons program without any constraint or inhibition. How do you react to those fears expressed by the Pakistan Foreign Ministry?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, let me say that we have a very good and strong relationship with the Pakistani Government as well as with Foreign Minister Kasuri personally. I met with him in Islamabad in January and, of course, Secretary Rice and I met with him on the margins of President Bush's visit to Islamabad just three weeks ago, two and a half weeks ago.

And I think that, you know, what we have said to the Pakistani Government is that this arrangement between the United States and India is good for all of the countries of South Asia, including Pakistan, because India's nuclear program, civil nuclear program, which has been outside of international supervision, outside of international safeguards for 30 years, is now going to come into international safeguards and the IAEA is going to place safeguards on fully three-quarters of India's program. That ought to be, you would think, an attractive proposition to all the neighbors of India, including Pakistan.

I should also say that we've had a very full discussion with the Pakistani authorities. We've kept them informed in general on these negotiations for the better part of the year, so this didn't come as a surprise to the Pakistani Government. And our sense is that along with this deal should come a continued effort by the governments of Pakistan and India to obviously continue the good relations that they enjoy in a composite dialogue, that they should work on narrowing the differences they have on the range of issues between India and Pakistan, that they should continue to work to resolve the problem of Kashmir as they have been trying to do, and that the more positive developments in relations between those two countries should continue.

Restraining any sense of arms competition between India and Pakistan should be a very high priority for both governments. We've said that to both governments privately. We're very happy to say that publicly. And we're convinced that stability will be maintained in South Asia; we will not see the kind of arms race that some of the critics are now forecasting. We think that we'll continue to see an improvement in relations between India and Pakistan, and we're a friend to both and I think we're in a position to assess that as a reasonable prospect for the future.

MODERATOR: We'll go to Barry.

QUESTION: This has been my question. I was going to suggest for decades the U.S. has maintained this exquisite balance between India and Pakistan. If there was any tipping, it was in Pakistan's direction rather than democratic India's. And I wondered how you -- if this isn't an aberration and will it hurt relations with Pakistan. But I think basically you may have answered it by saying you're talking to the Pakistanis and explaining that it promotes stability.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes, Barry, thank you. And I think you're right to ask the question and, of course, you're drawing upon your experience of the last 30 years, as you remember from the 1970s, when this question was paramount in U.S. foreign policy. I think President Bush answered this question better than I could at his press conference in Islamabad just a couple of weeks ago when he said these two countries have different histories and they're different countries, and the United States wants to be, can be and shall be good friends and partners with both countries.

But as he and Secretary Rice have said very frequently, there's no need for us to have a hyphenated policy towards India-Pakistan. We ought to have a strong global partnership with India. We think, frankly, that one of the most important strategic initiatives of the United States in the last few years has been the opening to India, to see this incredible expansion of private sector ties between our two countries, the tremendous American private investment in India, particularly in the advanced technology sector, the tremendous expansion of trade which has benefited both of our countries.

We've also seen a real flourishing of ties between American citizens and Indian citizens. There are 85,000 Indians studying in the United States. It's the largest group of foreign students. We've seen a multiplicity of private sector ties: the Asian Society, our premier American nongovernmental organization that looks at Asia -- just opened a new center in Mumbai just last week. And so that private sector expansion has been coupled with the emergence of a key, now global partnership, between the Indian and American government, which we think is going to be critical for stability in Asia, in the Asian region, in South Asia as well as in the broader, the greater Middle East as we look to the future. So this relationship between India and the United States is singularly important for our society and for the future of American policy.

Now, I should also say that we have indicated now very clearly, and the President did so when he was in Pakistan, the centrality of the U.S.-Pakistani relationship. It's a different type of relationship than the U.S.-India relationship. Our relationship with Pakistan is grounded in our commitment to that country's security, to the fact that we are partners in our war against al-Qaida, of course there's an al-Qaida presence in part of Pakistan, and against the Taliban. It's our mutual commitment -- Pakistan and the United States -- to the safety and security of Afghanistan and of a more peaceful and stable border. And so we wish to see a growth in U.S.-Pakistani ties.

We are close to, I hope, resolving negotiations, finishing negotiations for a bilateral investment treaty. We brought to Islamabad some ideas about further American

investment in Pakistan that we hope will lead to job creation, even in places like Balochistan and Waziristan where there's been high unemployment. So we have high hopes for the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. And there's no reason that we ought to somehow tie these two together so strictly that you limit the growth in either relationship. That's the way President Bush put it and that's how we see relations, Barry, between the United States and those two very important friends of ours in South Asia.

QUESTION: How are you going to sell the deal to the Nuclear Suppliers Group? On the one hand, you'll tell them to loosen it in the case of India and then tighten it in the case of others? So there's a contradiction there.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: There's no contradiction at all. There's no contradiction at all. I mean, it's not a contradiction to say to the Nuclear Suppliers Group or the U.S. Congress, "here's our friend India, a democratic country that plays by the rules. That has not diverted its nuclear technology, that wants to invite the IAEA to come in and inspect its nuclear facilities on a permanent basis so that the whole world will know what's going on inside the Indian nuclear -- civil nuclear establishment.

And then here's another country, Iran, that lied to the IAEA for eighteen-and-a-half years about its secret nuclear research, that has just said to the IAEA, "We don't want the additional protocol," that has also said on January 4th that it's proceeding to enrichment research and development, which the Russian, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Sri Lankan, American, Japanese, Australian, and European governments have all said is a bridge too far, they crossed a line.

There is a dramatic difference between India and Iran, a dramatic difference, and all the world understands it. So when Ambassador Boucher and Ambassador Rademacher walk into the hall tomorrow and brief the Nuclear Suppliers Group, I think they're going to get a good reception. I don't think all the countries are ready to make a decision yet. They're going to want to see the details of this agreement and we'll give them the details. They're going to want to see what the U.S. Congress does and that's logical. And so this takes time, but we're confident that in the end, there's going to be -- there will be a positive result.

MODERATOR: We'll go to VOA right there.

QUESTION: You just said that you were talking to Pakistan before the deal happened, but the way Khurshid Kasuri has come out and President Musharraf later said, it shows that Pakistani leadership was not taken into that kind of confidence, that they could not prepare their people, given the bitter history between the two countries, to be prepared for this kind of a deal. Were the political implications of the deal taken into consideration?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I understand that Foreign Minister Kasuri has said he -- -- and I think he informed us that he believes that he was misquoted in the *Financial Times* article last week. And we've had very good discussions with Minister Kasuri and Foreign Secretary Riaz Khan over the last several days. Pakistan is a friend and I think we have a good dialogue on this. We did keep the Pakistani Government fully informed of what we were doing over the last year in negotiating this civil nuclear agreement with India. I was in Islamabad in late January, six weeks before President Bush's visit to the region, and I did brief the Pakistani Government, as did our ambassador, Ambassador Crocker.

So there's not a problem between Pakistan and the United States. We're friends, we're partners, and I've had good conversations myself over the last 24 hours with senior officials in Islamabad and I think they fully understand the rationale of the United States. They may not agree with everything that we do, but that's normal in international politics. Even the best of friends sometimes disagree, but there's no sense of crisis and I think we'll move forward on a very good basis for the Pakistani Government.

MODERATOR: Let's go over here.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for coming today.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Pleasure.

QUESTION: My name is Ota with Japanese Kyodo News. I have a question. You say that some people -- you characterize them as critics -- they are concerned about the arms race based on this deal. So my question is congressional side is also putting the pressure on your side, put some condition, like a capping of fissile material productions, but if this deal doesn't go, maybe it doesn't seem to go anywhere, just reflecting the strong reaction from India's side.

So my recommendation -- it's a cutoff treaty --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You're recommending to me --

QUESTION: Cutoff treaty --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: -- on behalf of the Japanese media?

QUESTION: Cutoff treaty, yes.

(Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay, (inaudible).

QUESTION: You have the administration's declared position: a cut-off treaty is unverifiable. So maybe because of this decision, (inaudible) discussion hasn't -- you know, it looks like -- don't go anywhere. So, I -- you know, this position unverifiable, it's cutoff treaty. This option -- is kind of feasible for your government to push away -- push -- you know, push to steer around, get some more weight out for final agreement with congressional side. Thank you very much, sir.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much for your question and thank you for the recommendation. We look forward to your written proposal to us.

(Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you for raising this issue. The United States has said for a very long time that we are interested in a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. In fact, if you go back to the July 18th joint statement between Prime Minister Singh and President Bush here at the White House in Washington, both governments said that we will work together to support a fissile material cutoff treaty. And I think you'll see us in the near future push this idea forward. As you know, the United States and many of the other nuclear powers do have a moratorium on fissile material production and we encourage other countries to adopt the same practice. A treaty would be helpful. We've said that many times. The President said it in July. And I think you'll see us support that in the future.

MODERATOR: Let's go to *Al-Hayat*.

QUESTION: Joyce Karam from *Al-Hayat* newspaper. My question is about the presidential statement that you're expecting from the United Nations. You announced a couple of weeks ago that it has been delayed. Why is this delay? And would it be a preliminary step before we see a potential resolution under Chapter 7 about Iran?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you for your question. You know, we are working hard up in New York at the United Nations to achieve a presidential statement of the Security Council. This is important because we believe that the Security Council should speak with one voice to say the following, and here is the elements of a presidential statement: that the Iranian Government is in violation of its IAEA commitments; that all of the Security Council members, including all the permanent members, want to see Iran suspend its nuclear program and return to negotiations; and that would be to suspend the enrichment R&D that is currently underway this week at the Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz.

I was up in New York. I spent five and a half hours in discussions with the Russian and Chinese governments, the European governments, on Monday, and I think that there is sentiment that there should be a presidential statement. But you know, as you know, we're working multilaterally here and in any multilateral negotiation it's very complicated. I think we're united on the principles; we now need to find the right words to reflect that unity.

What I heard from the Chinese and Russian governments the other night in the meeting were the following: that they agree with the United States and Europe that Iran should not be allowed to achieve a nuclear weapons capability. That's what they said in the meeting. They said that they agreed that Iran should come into compliance with its IAEA safeguards; it's not currently in compliance. And they also agreed that we are alarmed, all of us, by the speed at which Iran is now moving forward at that facility at Natanz on enrichment research and development.

And so if that's what is unifying the members of the permanent five countries and Germany and others, Japan and all the other members of the Council, then I think it's only a matter of time before we find the right words to memorialize that in a presidential statement. Things take time. These things take time in diplomacy. We're patient. We know that a clear, compelling statement of the Security Council is going to have an impact. And the impact will be that it sends a message, as the IAEA Board of Governors did on February 4th, that the Iranians are very much isolated in the world. When you have a collection of countries like Egypt and Ecuador and India and Brazil, Russia and China and Europe and Japan and Australia, all voting -- and Canada -- the same way with the same message, you would think the Iranians would have to stop and listen to that message. That would be the impact that a presidential statement has once it's agreed to.

MODERATOR: We have a follow-up here.

QUESTION: Thanks a lot, sir. Dmitry Kirsanov of ITAR-TASS news agency of Russia. You said just a couple of minutes ago that you're hopeful that this presidential statement will be approved by the UN Security Council within several days. Foreign Minister Lavrov today indicated that Russia clearly would not support presidential statement in its current form because, as far as I understand, it gives Iran clear timeline, deadline within which it has to comply with the demands of the international community. Are you willing -- is the United States Administration willing to soften its stance on that and, you know?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You know, we're in a negotiation. Negotiations take time and these are not easy negotiations because we're dealing with a complex issue involving nuclear weapons and so the stakes are very high. But what we have to do is stay focused on these negotiations and understand that in any multilateral institution like the UN it's going to require some patience, time, good faith effort and an inclination that all sides need to be flexible. I think that those ingredients can be there. And I don't know how long it's going to take. I don't know if it's going to be a couple of days or longer. It may be longer. But eventually I think that these countries are going to agree to a presidential statement because we essentially agreed and voted on a February 4th IAEA Board of Governors resolution that is quite similar in its substantive content to what is current under negotiations in New York at the United Nations.

MODERATOR: To Turkey, here.

QUESTION: Umit Enginsoy with NTV Turkey. Mr. Secretary, in terms of non-UN Security Council nations, how would you like to see a major neighbor of Iran, Turkey, to behave on Iran's nuclear matter?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I don't need to give public advice to an allied country like Turkey, but I think that Iran's neighbors all know that Iran is a problem in its own neighborhood. I mean, on the one hand, it's developing nuclear weapons against the wishes of the entire international community. I think the only countries that have voted to protect Iran on this issue are Cuba, Venezuela and Syria. So just consider those three countries but think of the rest of the world. The rest of the world clearly doesn't want that. Think of the fact that Iran has been central banker for the international terrorist organizations in the Middle East for 25 years now, and that's disturbing to Iran's neighbors. Think of the fact that particularly since President Ahmadi-Nejad came into power in August, the Iranians have been flexing their muscles in their own neighbor and that's got a lot of their neighbors worried.

So I think the Iranians have, unfortunately for them, they've received so much attention later that they've become very isolated in the world and they're very much on the defensive, the Iranian Government. I think we'll have to keep them on the defensive so that we can move forward and make progress on all these issues internationally and maintain that unity that is clearly there. So I sense great unity in the international community as countries look at the problems that Iran causes in the international system.

QUESTION: Mounzer Sleiman, with Al-Mustaqbal Al Arabi. The issue of strengthening the nonproliferation regime and placing IAEA at safeguards, there is a question out there why this agreement with India has not been preceded with a kind of agreement with IAEA on those safeguards, the issue of entering into agreement with a diminished role and the authority of the IAEA if it was not previously known that those safeguards are going to be implemented and agreed upon, especially from a country that did not agree or sign the NPT?

Going back to your argument also about the difference between India and Iran, for instance, now if Iran then get out of NPT, then it will be rewarded or will be offered some kind of incentives to go back to sign into the IAEA and will be given civilian as they claim they want to be -- they want civilian. So the issue here -- the argument, if the people are not signing will reward them -- the people who they're signing and they may -- there is room to work with them and reinforce the safeguards and the supervision on the agreement -- it's not there.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, let me just say this. I think we've gone over this ground many times in this briefing. The Director General of IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, has come out strongly in favor of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement. He said that he believes it will strengthen the international nonproliferation regime. Now no one is saying that about Iran, right now. And, you know, this deal with India is exceptional and it's unique to India because India is a unique place. It's a country that wants to commit to a system and live by the world's rules. It was not, you know, for historical reasons, allowed to come into that system in the 1970s, when it developed its nuclear program. It now wants to come in.

Iran, on the other hand, is a country that's trying to push everybody away and escape from the international system, so a difference could not be more stark. There is not a chance in the world that Iran would ever be offered a similar deal, as the one that the United States has just negotiated with India.

Another criticism that some people have made on the op-ed pages of our newspapers is, you know, if the United States and the NSG changed their international practice for India, what's to prevent this deal being offered to North Korea and Iran. I'll tell you what will prevent it, the international community. Thirty-five nations of the Nuclear Suppliers Group all have to agree, come to a consensus, to change international rules. Now that's a logical proposition for India. If some country wanted to put Iran or North Korea and to nominate them for that treatment at the NSG, they wouldn't get any votes because no one would trust those countries -- North Korea and Iran. That they would live by the rules of the international regime.

MODERATOR: Let's go in the back.

QUESTION: Giampiero Gramaglia, ANSA. First of all, thanks for coming to brief us --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: A pleasure.

QUESTION: -- and brief again as soon as you can.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: As soon as I can, all right. It depends how you treat me. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I would like to go back to the Iran negotiation. You were referring to the need for patience and time. Is the American patience indefinite or there is a deadline for the American patience? And if you can, could you draw to us the similarities or the differences between the process going on now with Iran and the process we leave three years ago with Iraq?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh, I don't think there are any similarities at all between those two situations. I think that, you know, what you have now on the Iran question is a united international community. You have Russia and China and the United States working together. You have Brazil and India working with that group. You have Germany and France and Italy and Japan and Australia. It's a broad international group and we all say the same thing. We all agree on the message that should be given to Iran. And so I think this is a unique situation. And, frankly, you know, the United States now, for the last 12 months, has been supporting diplomatic efforts to resolve the problem. We supported the EU-3 negotiations between March 2005 and September 2005, until the time that Ahmadi-Nejad walked out unilaterally of those negotiations. President Bush then said that he would support the Russian proposal to provide an offshore fuel arrangement to the Iranian Government. Well, Iran rejected that. And so we have consistently supported efforts by Russia and by the European countries on a reasonable basis to offer solutions to the Iranians, and the Iranians walk away from each of these offers.

And so you have to wonder what is motivating the Iranians to walk away, and we think it's because behind that guise, the guise of a peaceful nuclear program, is a nuclear weapons research program. It doesn't stand to reason that they'd be engaged in enrichment activities at Natanz for peaceful purposes, not at the rate that they're going it and not in the way that they're doing it -- kicking out the IAEA inspectors so they can do their work in secret. What kind of message does that send to the rest of the world?

So what you've seen, you've seen a lot of countries band together, and that's been a very positive sign.

MODERATOR: We have time for one more quick one. Arshad.

QUESTION: I am Arshad Mahmud and I am from Bangladesh. This is your sixth or seventh sort of briefing trying to explain --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Are you complaining? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No, no, no. (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Have you been to all of them?

QUESTION: And you are scheduled to speak perhaps tomorrow again at the Council on Foreign Relations. Monday. Sorry. Anyway --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Are you coming to that?

QUESTION: I hope so.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Good.

QUESTION: My question is --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Have I convinced you yet? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No. (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You better come on Monday, then. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: In this process, do you have any time to think about other countries in South Asia? Bangladesh, for example. (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Amid all these briefings on India?

QUESTION: Yes, and Pakistan.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes, we do.

QUESTION: And there are other countries that they have serious electricity problems, so and I'm just wondering, I have a question to you that Bangladesh is a signatory to NPT and do you have any time or have you given any thought to how to help on this civilian nuclear energy so that it can develop this power sector and develop the economy? Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you for your question. First let me say that countries that are signatories to the NPT, unlike India, then of course have, as they live by the rules of the NPT, they have the interest of all countries in the world to cooperate on electricity production through the growth of civil nuclear power. That's not a problem. India is an exceptional country because it's outside the system and so we try to bring it inside the system.

But let me just say in the case of Bangladesh, I was in Dhaka in June and I've worked very, very intensely on our relationship to try to build it into a strong relationship. We've given great support to the government and congratulate the government on the recent initiatives to crack down on the violent groups within Bangladesh who the government believes are responsible for the spate of bombings and intimidation in Bangladesh over the last six months. And we congratulate the government and the Prime Minister on the very good work that has been done.

We are very interested and involved in efforts to try to further trade and investment ties with Bangladesh. And I think in South Asia in general, I hope you will agree with me that the United States has been much more active in the past year or so than we ever had before in trying to work both bilaterally and regionally on all the issues that you mentioned. We've been a good friend to Bangladesh.

I was in Sri Lanka in January. We are a part of the group, along with Japan and the European Union, trying to support the negotiations to prevent a civil war in Sri Lanka between the government and the Tamil Tigers. We've been very actively involved in that and we'll continue to be.

We have been very actively involved in trying to give good advice to the Government of Nepal, and that would be to restore multiparty democracy as it continues to try to

prevent a destabilization of the country by the Maoist rebels.

I think you've seen in the attention we've given to Pakistan as well as to India, you have an American Government now more actively involved in the affairs of South Asia than at any time since the era of decolonization began 60 years ago. That's because we have made a conscious decision that South Asia is critical to our long-term interests and that we want to build up these relations. Secretary Rice has led that effort for the United States Government. It is a conscious, deliberate effort.

So I can assure you, in between the briefings that we give to the press and the Congress on the India nuclear program, we have lots of people, including myself and Ambassador Boucher, focusing and thinking about South Asia, including your country.

I can take one more question.

MODERATOR: Let's go to Al-Ahram.

QUESTION: Secretary Burns

MODERATOR: Here, please.

QUESTION: ---about the deadline of the American time limit. You forgot the first part of the question.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: The line?

QUESTION: Deadline.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay, deadline on --

QUESTION: The deadline on American --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize. I was just so interested in your second question I forgot about your first question. (Laughter.)

Obviously we want to see a quick resolution of the problem concerning Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions. We also believe it's important to work diplomatically and to work effectively with Russia and China and the European countries and India and Brazil, and we'll do that with Japan -- and we'll do that. So it's impossible to answer your question. I don't want to put a time limit on it. But I will say we're working with great urgency.

Yes.

QUESTION: Secretary Burns, Hoda Tawfik, Al-Ahram Egypt. Let me ask you, does this apply to countries in the Middle East with the United States seems -- use the same -- like the deal -- similar deal with India to help other countries like Egypt to have peaceful nuclear programs?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, you know, the difference here is that the great majority of countries in the Middle East and your region are signatories to the nonproliferation regime. So therefore, you already have the ability to work with private American companies to build nuclear power plants and to receive peaceful civil nuclear technology if you're a member of the NPT.

The case of India is India has not been allowed to be a member of the NPT. It's been kept outside the system. India is soon to be the largest country in the world by population. It is one of the great democracies of the world. It is a country that has always stood up for peaceful resolutions of disputes. It's a country that has not been aggressive towards its neighbors, but has been seeking to resolve problems with its neighbors. So it's an ironic situation and certainly, an anomalous situation when a great country like India is forced to stand outside of the system and we're just trying to bring India in.

Think what that means for a minute. India is accepting international oversight, accepting international inspections. Who can argue with that? Who wouldn't want to see the largest country in the world, the largest democracy in the world come into the international system and willingly submit itself to inspections? We think that's a net gain, a strong net gain for the international proliferation system and that's why we have proposed this agreement between our two countries.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you.

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