



The U.S.-India Friendship: Where We Were and Where We're Going

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be with you this afternoon in New Delhi. I know that you've hosted our American ambassadors and many other distinguished guests frequently, and I appreciate you hosting me as well. This is my first solo visit to India as Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, and as you know, this is a new job in the State Department. In addition to policy responsibility for South Asia, this bureau is also responsible for the five nations of Central Asia. While I look forward to delving into this expanded portfolio and the great opportunities that we have before us in building closer ties between South and Central Asia, there's absolutely no question that much of my focus in the coming months and years will remain on nurturing the bilateral relationship between our two great countries, India and the United States. This is an epic journey with historic implications and that's why my speech has the same form as an epic poem: starting in the past, joining with the present and then moving into the future. Do not be alarmed, however. My speech is somewhat shorter than the Ramayana.



How We Arrived Here

America has important and unique relationships with each country in the region, but perhaps none have attracted more attention than the U.S.-India relationship. Since India's independence, our interaction has been marked by cooperation, estrangement, and occasionally indifference. The potential of the relationship never seemed to become reality. Although that history certainly informs where we are today, I submit to you that our relationship has come very far from the Cold War differences that once defined us.

Indeed, I believe the U.S.-India relationship has entered an entirely different phase. Years from now, when people gather to discuss our relationship, they will remark upon the across the board transformation of U.S.-India relations that took place in the first decade of the 21st century.

Why do we see such a changed dynamic today? I believe it is the result of a changing world, changes taking place both in India and the United States, our increasingly shared values, and the efforts of Indians and Americans, particularly those in business, who decided not to wait for their respective governments to begin forging new links. This is not to say that our governments did not play an important role in bringing the relationship to its current high level. As a diplomat, would you expect me to say otherwise? Indeed, I believe it would be fair for any observer to recognize that we owe today's vibrant ties to the sustained efforts of governments in both countries, including those that preceded the Administrations of President Bush and Prime Minister Singh.

Profound changes certainly helped to bring about our new relationship. India is emerging as a major power, thanks to fundamentally sound decisions you have made about the kind of country India should be. This is a good thing not only for India but for us all – economically, politically and in other vital areas.

This audience knows well that India's economic growth is booming, promoting domestic efficiency and entering markets globally. It is hard to open a magazine in the United States without finding a story about the opportunities for business in India, and the role that Indian businessmen and Indian Americans are playing internationally. Indeed, it's reasonable to think that your economy will have the most significant impact on the rest of the world for the foreseeable future. Much of this has been made possible by wise economic reforms undertaken since 1991. Continued economic reforms, changes in the bureaucratic functions of the state and increased efficiencies and growth are vital for the Indian economy to continue its high-paced growth. We believe the way ahead lies in an increasingly open Indian economy, one which opens up important business sectors like retail, insurance and banking to foreign investment. The international business community has been coming to India thanks, in part, to reforms in licensing and regulations that have made it easier to do business here. Still, I think you will agree with me that more needs to be done. Every excess regulation, form and process is a drag on economic achievement. And every excess step increases business uncertainty and becomes an opportunity for corruption. "Minimum credible deterrent" is a term with which you are all familiar in the security context. I think we should also try to bring about "minimum credible regulation" so that entrepreneurs from both our countries can create the industries and jobs of tomorrow to their fullest potential without devoting excessive effort to negotiating officialdom.

Due in no small part to businesses like those that are members of the Confederation of Indian Industries, India has rightfully received much attention for its dynamic economy. But our vision is broader than that. We look toward stronger economic ties, but also a deeper partnership and wider engagement on global issues that can benefit from India's capabilities and expertise. For example, India's ability to respond regionally to natural disasters, as demonstrated after the December 2004 tsunami and aid sent our way after Hurricane Katrina, was praised by the world community, including the United States. We also have welcomed your ability to deploy top-notch military personnel for peacekeeping duties around the globe.

I could list any number of areas in which India brings something important to the table. These combine to one conclusion: India's role in helping foster and maintain international stability is vital. We hear frequently that America must surely be promoting ties with India as a counterbalance to China. I reject this kind of zero-sum thinking as too simplistic. Good relations with India do not come at the expense of good relations with China. Both can be responsible stakeholders in the international system. Think of this another way. Are American businessmen pouring into Bangalore, Hyderabad and other Indian cities to "counter China?" Absolutely not. They are building a business relationship with India because India's attractiveness stands on its own merits. And that is the same approach that the United States Government takes. Both India and China are welcome and important partners of the United States, and of one another. So, rather than seeing India as counteracting a communist China, we see India as the essential engine of economic progress and democracy that enhances stable development from the Middle East to the Far East.

Where We Go From Here

Prime Minister Singh's visit to Washington in July 2005 established the promise of our relationship, and President Bush's visit to India in March 2006 began to transform promise into reality. These visits provided a big green light to our cooperation. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, beginning my job as Assistant Secretary just a week before President Bush's historic trip to India. I say without shame that I enjoyed the spoils of an immense amount of hard work by officials and like-minded partners on both sides, including by our fine ambassador, David Mulford.

With the hard work of preparing for the visit safely behind us, I believe that the work ahead of us is even more important. Realizing the promise of this partnership -- and making it benefit Americans and Indians, the region, and the rest of the world -- is the toughest work. The list of initiatives and agreements is expansive and covers nearly every conceivable area of cooperation. If we can come to an agreement on civil-nuclear cooperation -- and we did after struggling with the issue for 30 years -- we can do anything.

I am happy to report that since the announcement, both sides have worked hard towards fulfilling their commitments. Just this week, Dr. Anil Kakodkar, the chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission, traveled to Vienna to begin discussions with the IAEA on a safeguards agreement, and Secretary Rice testified before both Houses of the U.S. Congress in support of this initiative, declaring it to be the key element of "a partnership that will become one of the most important we have with any country in the 21st century."

As Secretary Rice said, this initiative "is a strategic achievement: It will strengthen international security. It will enhance energy security and environmental protection. It will foster economic and technological development. And it will help further transform the partnership between the world's oldest and the world's largest democracy." Delivering on our many commitments will take work by both sides -- diplomatically, domestically and bureaucratically. As we transform our relationship, we must transform our attitudes and structures. America's growing stake in India's future means that we will continue to talk frankly with you as friends do with one another about economic reform. And we expect that you'll continue to offer us pointers on things we could do better, as all of our best friends in the world do.

As we move forward together, we have put special emphasis on the growth of business, science and technology cooperation. This week, Science and Technology Minister Sibal is in Washington to meet with Dr. Jack Marburger, President Bush's chief science advisor, and here in India our Assistant Secretary for Energy, Jeffrey Jarret, signed an agreement with Ministry of Power Secretary M.K. Shahi to join an international public-private research project that will develop the next generation of clean coal power plants and other energy technologies. These concrete steps should tell you how much value we place on the 19 initiatives we agreed to during the President's visit that put technology to work for our people. We look forward to energetic work on agriculture, clean energy and new technologies. We are hard at work forming commissions, and moving funding so that our money, both Indian and American, can do the most good. And we are taking seriously the recommendations the CEO Forum presented to the President and Prime Minister in New Delhi, including everything from looking at ways to increase high-tech trade, to facilitating business visas.

India is playing and will continue to play an invaluable role in helping to solve regional conflicts. During my visit today I had excellent discussions with your Foreign Ministry Officials about how we can work together to address shared areas of concern in the region. For example, we continue to coordinate on efforts to restore democracy in Nepal. As a friend, we are also encouraging the Indian Government to continue the progress we've seen recently in relations with Pakistan. As we have said many times, we would like to see a peaceful solution on Kashmir that is acceptable to both India and Pakistan, and can foster lasting peace and prosperity not only in Kashmir, but throughout South Asia and right into Central Asia. Recent statements by Prime Minister Singh and President Musharraf have attracted considerable favorable international interest, and there is no dearth of ideas circulating for ways the two countries can establish greater trade, transport linkages, and people-to-people contacts. I think everyone believes now is the time for India and Pakistan to press for further progress and achieve the unlimited potential that occurs when two neighbors trade openly and freely with each other.

As in the past, we continue to look to India for leadership in stabilizing nuclear and defense relations with its neighbors. We, and previous American Administrations, have pushed for India to further define its "minimum credible deterrent," and we continue that today. We understand the complexity of this task having spent 40 years in discussions with the former Soviet Union over our nuclear weapons programs. We also understand that such discussions are complicated by China's intentions and by Iran's energetic pursuit of technologies that underlie nuclear weapons. But, nevertheless, we see this as an absolutely necessary step toward decreasing tensions in Asia. We look not only to India, but to Pakistan, to work out mutual understandings to build confidence in both conventional and nuclear areas.

In addition to working bilaterally with India, we see great promise in working together in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We recently approached SAARC's Secretary General requesting observer status. South Asian Free Trade is an opportunity for all the countries of South Asia to help make free trade in the region a reality, and to establish links to Central Asian economic organizations.

From my particular perch as Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, I see numerous opportunities for links that can bring power, roads, communications and trade all the way from Kazakhstan to Pakistan and India. The South Asian region will benefit from the positive development of the countries of Central Asia. As Central Asia develops, India and others stand to gain a great deal in opening up new markets and trade routes with Central Asia.

Last weekend I attended a conference in Kabul on "Partnership, Trade and Development in Greater Central Asia." One of the resounding themes was that providing Central Asia with options and opportunities from all directions will help those countries in the region to move ahead on a positive and prosperous path. They cannot link up with Russia alone, or China alone, or the United States, Pakistan or India alone. They need all of these opportunities to create strong economies and modern societies.

Bringing your experience in development, democracy, education and other fields is another important way for India to show regional leadership to the benefit of all. Imagine the day when one can travel and bring goods and services from India, through Pakistan and Afghanistan, to Central Asia. We would welcome India's participation in endeavors that reinforce Afghanistan's newfound status as an open corridor, rather than a barrier that separates South Asia from Central Asia.

India does and will continue to make a difference in the world. Its leadership will be crucial in a myriad of areas, from working to eradicate HIV/AIDS and avian flu, to promoting economic efficiency, to supporting a strong United Nations and leading in the World Trade Organization to open trade and services.

Perhaps most importantly, we believe that one of India's greatest contributions in the coming decades can be in its stand for democracy. Many countries around the world are deciding to act on their democratic aspirations, while some others are wary. We know that India will stand beside us and the world community in assisting those who choose freedom. We hope that India will work with others on education, judicial training, free media, technology, independent elections commissions, rule of law and other foundations of democratic societies.

As you can see, the possibilities for what we can do together are limitless. There's a big agenda in the U.S.-India relationship and a lot to do. When she offered me this job, Secretary Rice told me that it was the most exciting place to be working. It's not only an exciting place, but an exciting time that can change the lives of our children and grandchildren. I am happy to be here with you at this important moment.

Thank you for having me, and I'll be happy to take your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Prakaj, Secretary General, Telecom User Group and [inaudible] Foundation. I think your speech is astonishing and I think every word [inaudible]. But you have touched upon some of the problem areas. Basically the economy, Indo-US economy is growing and there is a friendship has built up quite a lot. There are a lot of new entrepreneurs bubbling up and coming to join hands with the US entrepreneurs.

But the problem comes to visa. I think the early days were much better. You could stand in a queue and at the end of the day you get a visa or you don't get a visa. But now you put a number in the internet and you don't know what happened. So the situation is dynamic now. If I want to fly to Europe, I can just get a visa and go there. I don't have to wait, I don't have to plan for three months in advance. Okay, I'll make a trip to Europe.

So Ambassador Mulford is here, this is his department, I don't know how efficiently his department is but at the end of the day we have a lot of pain. I have come to notice about conferences taking place in [inaudible], starting [inaudible]. There are about a dozen very fine entrepreneurs, there are managing directors, there are CEOs of a company and they have to stand in a queue and download on the internet and they are now just waiting for a call, and their exhibition and conference is taking place in the next 10-12 days.

I'm really sorry about this bottleneck. I think if you can sort it out that will be good on behalf of industry, I think it is my general concern. Thank you, sir.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'll try to answer this question, and if I miss anything I'll ask the Ambassador to supplement what I say.

You're right. It's a problem. It's a bottleneck. It takes too long. We made decisions after September 11th that changed the whole nature of our visa process. Prior to that when I did it 20-30 years ago and I've seen it done throughout my career, it was really getting people through the process and getting them to America, trying to keep out the few that might want to stay longer than we would like, but there wasn't perceived to be any enormous threat involved in this process.

After 2001 the element of security became paramount and it was more important to keep out those who were going to do us harm than it was to let in those who were our friends, and who have always been our friends. I have many friends around the world that used to get visas in two days, it started taking three months, six months. I heard from them. We started hearing from Foreign Ministers, we started hearing from university presidents, from hospitals, from high tech companies, companies around the United States.

What we've done is, we can't change that essential difference and we're sorry for it, but given what we've experienced five years ago, almost five years ago, keeping out the bad people is more important than getting the good people in.

So what we've tried to do now is make that process more efficient. Make sure that all the careful checks that we do are done more quickly. This embassy, frankly, is one of the most efficient at processing visas in the world. They've done a lot with technology, they have a lot of other plans. They're still constrained somewhat by physical space, and they do have backlogs. But they've implemented a lot of things and I think will continue implementing things to try to make it more smooth.

But all these problems that you raised that we're talking about were raised in the CEO Forum recommendations and that's one reason why I mentioned them because I want people to know that these things are hard for us and they're difficult for us, but they've been recommended to us by what we think is a very credible body that has our common interests at heart and we're going to try to do everything we can, whether it's resources and space, or more efficient process or more technology. We'll try to do everything we can to bring it down more.

Right now the best advice I can give you is plan ahead. I realize it's not always possible. The embassy tries to accommodate that. But anybody who can plan ahead will find the process a whole lot easier. And eventually, stand in a line, you'll come in and see us, and we'll have the joy of giving you your visa.

QUESTION: Professor Rasha Bramanin, [inaudible] University. If I may, Ambassador, come to the knotty problem of the Indo-US civilian nuclear cooperation.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: How do spell that word, knotty? [Laughter].

QUESTION: Well, I leave it to you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Is it naughty or knotty? Either one.

QUESTION: I am a nuclear physicist trained in the United States most premier universities – Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley. So I know a little bit about nuclear physics, not too much about politics. But your Congress is facing election, our Congress may face election, I don't know. But the specific issue is here, from what it appears now it's gone beyond the administration to your legislative branch and there are compulsions which seem to suggest, looking at it, I mean I rely on the press, I have no access to government or its information. There is a definite problem.

It's all very well to say our non-proliferation record is impeccable, but the enshrinement and edification called the Non-Proliferation Treaty is basically what is related to your own congressional act of 1978, amendment to the Atomic Energy Act.

Now where does this act leave us right now? We have considered 60 percent of the facilities. The administration has been very forthcoming. I personally tend to agree with you, there's a lot more issues that are going on in the economic front, defense relationship and so on. The nuclear is always been a knotty problem. It seems to have surfaced again. The Democrats, given their capacity for non-proliferation and so on.

Can you please tell me what is the state, or what is the likelihood? Because the NSG is looking. It's all very well for the Chairman of the Atomic Energy to seek India specific safeguards, but everyone is waiting for this deal to go through. Can you please tell me, will this deal go through or not? Yes or no? Thank you, sir.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes. [Laughter]. Next question. [Laughter].

I still think the answer is yes. The Secretary of State was out in public yesterday two times for two hours each at least, up in front of Congress, going through the process of democracy. It's noisy and it's messy and there are lots of things said about you and there's lots of things said about me that we don't like and don't agree with, but that's democracy and you guys know it as well as we do.

I think it's going to go through for some fundamental reasons. This is part and parcel of a new relationship with India and I think people want to support that relationship. It's part and parcel of meeting the energy needs, the growing energy needs of a growing economy without putting more pressure on fossil fuels and oil prices which is in all our interests, all of us who drive cars. And it's part and parcel of in a way stabilizing this region of the world. The net improvement in non-proliferation around the world we think is clear.

There are serious questions involved here, though. I don't deny the critics their day. I think they have raised a lot of things that need to be discussed for us and for you. Non-proliferation has always been done through the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The rules, the procedures, the mindset is all based on the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It took us a while to figure out that it was worth it to do the deal with India that was you might say is alongside the practices that we had based on the treaty. And I think it takes critics and people who are concerned about non-proliferation a little while to think these things through, to look at all the aspects, to look at all the implications. Does it undercut the treaty? Does it lead to greater production on the military side? Does it change the rules for future candidates? Does it somehow change the rules for India in a way that is a disincentive to restraint and confidence building in

these areas?

Those are serious questions. I think we've answered them as well as we can. I think we've answered them fully and forthrightly for our Congress and for the many groups that we've seen. We've gone out to talk to business groups and universities and academics and experts and scholars and a lot of people who are involved in this discussion. But I think in the end people want to support the new relationship with India. They will agree this is a net positive for the non-proliferation effort that we're all making around the world. And that it will pass.

So yesterday you saw a number of Senators and Congressmen declare their support. Some of them sort of declared their support. Others kind of sort of declared their support. But that's a gradual process for some. There are some serious questions that everybody needs to think about and I think the momentum is positive.

QUESTION: Sir, can you talk about [inaudible]? Is this not a potential deal-breaker? And if not, why so?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think it's a demand. I think it's something we've always encouraged that we would continue to encourage. As any nation embarks upon a military policy, tries to design its structure of forces and its quantity of forces, it has to have a doctrine, it has to have a way of tying the doctrine to the needs in terms of actual equipment. I think that applies in the area of nuclear weapons as well. So it's hard to define what the future of nuclear weapons in this part of the world is and how countries in this region could reach stability I think without some more thinking and discussion of some of these concepts. But that's something we would encourage. That's what I said in there. I didn't say it was a new requirement or anything. We're proceeding with the deal and we're proceeding with many other things in our relationship including a discussion of these areas where we think they deserve to be spelled out a little more.

QUESTION: Professor Satish Komar, formerly of the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

You said, Mr. Boucher, that India and the United States are cooperating to restore democracy in Nepal. The impression we get from the media is that there are differences between the Indian and the US approach. The US seems to be supporting the King, whereas India hopefully is supporting the political parties and particularly the [inaudible] in the plan to have a joint struggle against monarchy.

What exactly is logic for the United States to support the King? And how are you trying to coordinate the move with India if the two countries are --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There's no logic to supporting the King, there is no reason to support the King. He's done a travesty to democracy and the only thing to support in Nepal is the restoration of democracy. Unfortunately the key part of your question is in the press, and no offense to our friends in the back, I'm sure they didn't write it, but there have been some somewhat misleading reports written in the press recently about our stance.

I think we and India are very much on the same wave length on this one. We had a very good discussion today, very serious and detailed discussion about Nepal. As you know the President and the Prime Minister had a good discussion on Nepal, again, very much on the same wave length.

The action the King took a year ago February just destroyed democracy in Nepal. It needs to be restored. The political parties need to be able to run the country, and the path the King's chosen for the country leads nowhere. Unfortunately at the same time as all this you have the Maoist insurgency doing horrible things -- shooting up people, bombing people, taking over villages, forcing people into being soldiers, killing people. These are nasty people, the Maoists are. And I think we need to work as much as we can to pressure the King to restore democracy, to encourage the parties to stay together and to come up with a workable, functioning democracy. And to be able to expunge the Maoists from Nepali society. I think it's very much the attitude of governments in the region including India, and we've had some very good discussions today about how to advance those goals.

QUESTION: What kind of steps are you taking?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We've taken a number of steps. We have very much restricted our support for the King and for institutions that are close to him. We have supported the political parties. We have encouraged training and other activities that they could undertake and really tried to look for ways that we can be involved in a positive sense in that situation.

Our diplomats are in touch with everybody in Katmandu, all the players, the political parties and the King, delivering very strong messages I think every day and coordinating with other countries who are represented there.

So it's a diplomatic effort, to some extent. It's a question of not supporting the King and the government and funneling some of our support to the political parties so they can have the training they need or other things.

QUESTION: Ambassador, thank you for that wonderful presentation. You referred to China, and quite rightly I think, used the wonderful phrase that it cannot and should not be a zero sum game between China, the United States and India. However, we have had a serious history of problems with China and we have done a great deal, the Indian system has done a great deal to improve relationships, the border talks, the trade relations, et cetera. And many analysts believe that Indian foreign policy challenge today or in the coming decade will really be to manage the growing relationship with the United States and the improving relationship with China. And that is where some finessing would have to be done.

In the light of it, in relation to the Indo-US nuclear relationship, what is the consultative process you have with the Chinese who are definitely going to take a strong position on it? And how do you see this unfolding? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let me say, I've worked on China all my life and realize not everything is smooth sailing with the Chinese. What was the phrase you used, we have had some difficult periods in our relationships with China too. And we remember your history and ours as well in terms of relations with China for the last few decades. At the same time I think there are real opportunities opening up. Our goal is to get China to become a responsible stakeholder in the international system, that is a responsible power that abides by the various rules, whether they're export rules or import rules, WTO rules, control of technology rules, human rights rules, the responsibilities of Security Council membership and other things like that. So we're looking for China to become a responsible stakeholder in these international institutions, and sometimes it's rocky and sometimes it's smooth.

I think the course with India will be somewhat smoother as we go forward because we share a lot more in common, including democracy and people and families and education systems and other things with India.

How does China play in this civil nuclear deal? China is a major member of the IAEA and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. So as one of the countries there we are talking to them, working with them. When I went out to Vienna with one of my colleagues we met with a lot of countries, some of them small groups, big groups, but we certainly spent some time talking to the Chinese. I expect I'll continue talking to the Chinese as time goes forward as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group who we expect to take a responsible position on these issues.

I think in the end, I've watched India-China relationships a little bit in the last few years, and it seems to me both sides recognize the economic potential

of the other, the potential for interaction as well as competition. That's fine. Opportunities. I'm struck by the number of Indian companies that have invested in China. So I don't see any reason why China should think that using this method to provide the energy that India needs to grow, that there's anything wrong with that. So we're hopeful.

QUESTION: [Inaudible].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Are you a member of the press?

QUESTION: [Inaudible].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'm sorry, but I really came to talk to these folks. I'm glad you're here, but I think we're going to let them ask the questions, okay?

QUESTION: Secretary Boucher, thank you very much for your quick presentation on the most salient points that are really exercising many of us in this region. There are two quick questions that I have, and one is perhaps something that I probably missed. You did say something about non-proliferation and the division between the specialists and the regionalists. In a kind of way you referred to that both within the Congress and within the administration. I guess that's what you mean when you said transforming structure and the mindsets, probably. But I'm also interested in your views on cooperation on counterproliferation because it seems to me that the question of non-proliferation and cooperating with India involves a lot more than just this deal. It would mean India coming on board, for example, on the PSI on which I think there has been a history of differences and we need to be a little more –

Then the question of dovetailing the Iran question. Why has that become such an important and elevated issue all the time? We have an independent policy. We continue to express our policies and our reservations on issues. Why has it become such an important thing in this whole thing? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's a lot there. Let me try to take it in order.

I don't think the debate in the United States divides up too easily. I made a sweeping generalization about we need to change attitudes and structures across the relationship. That applies to all of us. It does apply somewhat to the nuclear issue. But I've seen Democrats come out for this agreement, I've seen Republicans come out for this agreement, I've seen Democrats oppose it. I'm not sure I've seen Republicans oppose it at this point, but anyway. I've seen people who have worked long and hard on strategic issues academically, on non-proliferation issues support the agreement and oppose the agreement. Some of the people I've talked to who know far more than me about these things have studied it carefully and come out one way or the other.

It is a kind of on-balance judgment that we all make. Is it on-balance good, is it on-balance bad? It's not the perfect deal. But we don't hide the fact that we would have loved to have India abandon its nuclear weapons and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That would have been fine by us. We were realistic enough to know that wasn't going to happen. I'm sure India would have been happy to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a nuclear weapon state. I'm sure India was realistic enough to know that wasn't going to happen. So we both got to a deal that was on-balance good for us and that's where we ended up so I think that's the important part.

That's where I'm going to have to stop.

QUESTION: Thank you for recognizing me. What I want to ask you, Ambassador is, is there a timeframe to this agreement, this deal? When do you expect it to be passed? And are you asking India to revise a bit of its earlier position on certain issues which are of particular concern to the United States? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We'll always ask India to revise its position on particular issues that are of concern to the United States. It's up to India whether it does it or not. But we're not asking for other revisions or changes in the context of this deal. We've made very clear to a lot of people that we've negotiated what we think is the best deal that's available at this point, that does the right thing for us, for India, for non-proliferation, for energy needs. We're not going to renegotiate it, we're not going to accept conditions that require renegotiation. That doesn't mean we've abandoned all our other positions and things we'd like to talk to the Indian government about, nor does it mean frankly the Indian government has abandoned its positions and things it wants to talk to us about.

I think the simple answer is we're full speed ahead at this point. We're looking for a vote in Congress if we can, as soon as they can arrange it. I hesitate to predict Congress because they do set their own schedule and they don't listen to us, and they're very hard to judge sometimes, but they're dealing with it. They're having hearings. They had the Secretary up. They're having other hearings. They are actually working this thing fairly smoothly in the halls of Congress, and I hope we'll get a vote a few months from now.

But let's all remember, there's a lot of pieces to this puzzle that have to be fit together. One is the congressional vote from the US side. Another is the approval by the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Another is the Safeguards Agreement that India negotiates with the International Atomic Energy Agency. And another is the bilateral agreement that the US and India have to negotiate for nuclear supply. There are actually other pieces of law and legislation that companies think are important to them in an economic sense that we'll have to see how those affect the ultimate trade. But at least those four big pieces have to go through before it's come together in a puzzle that says it's okay for the world and India to cooperate on civilian nuclear matters.

So we're proceeding on all those things. We've exchanged texts on a bilateral agreement. India sent somebody to the IAEA to start talking about the safeguards agreement. We've briefed the Nuclear Suppliers Group and we'll keep working with them. So we have all these pieces moving forward. When they can all come together, I don't know. It may take at least months, maybe a year at the best. But we'll get it done. It's a matter of making all those pieces come together properly.

QUESTION: Before we take the last question, Ambassador, may I request if you would like to add something on the visa issue?

AMBASSADOR MULFORD: If I could just intervene here for a moment, because I would like to make sure there's not a misunderstanding on the visa question that you raised at the beginning of the meeting. I'd just like to make several points on that to clarify the situation so this important group of business people are not under a misunderstanding.

The current level of visa production in India is running around or in excess of 500,000 a year, so our biggest problem is the very large number of people who want to come to America, which we welcome, but it is a very very large and growing number.

Secondly, it isn't just a security issue because the process involves judgment about whether people are coming with the intent to make a brief visit for tourism or whether they're coming to stay indefinitely and become, if they can, a citizen. And as you know we have a major immigration debate going on in the United States and something in the neighborhood of 12 or 13 million illegal immigrants in the country that are causing a major dust-up politically. So it's a very sensitive issue.

Finally, the reference was made to the pressure on space and personnel. That is a very real issue, just by virtue of the numbers. Even without the security preoccupations, because to build the extra space, to hire the new people and train them all has to be passed by the Congress in the budget year and that's been going on since 2001, and it's a process that actually, looking back, has been fairly impressive but it does take time to do. It's important to know that the young people who are on the visa line, they're doing in the neighborhood of 100 to 150 interviews a day. Then putting their name on the bottom of that visa, responsible for anything that goes wrong if there's an investigation back to the source of granting of the visa.

So it's a very serious operation and you can sympathize I think with some of the pressures that these people are working under.

But the good points that I want to make sure you go away with are the adjustments that have been made here, and we're making every effort to make, are to introduce steps that improve the ability of people who need to get visas quickly to get them. There is a business express program which today I'm advised in India, throughout India, business people who are part of that program are able to get a visa now within about three weeks. That is a very different proposition than the very long waiting periods that are cited by people generally.

Secondly, students are brought to the front of the line, and we know of no students who are arriving late for classes in the United States. So that's another area of emphasis.

Of course tourists and family members are waiting longer because we're making an effort to bring other, more urgent people forward, but we fully understand and are sympathetic with the idea that people running businesses need to get their people over at short notice often. There needs to be flexibility. There's a high cost involved if you can't get newly hired people over to the US for training and get them back and into position and so on.

These things are adding up to a situation where we are seeing some considerable signs of improvement and we hope that if you're not aware of the business express program you will become so and register in it and take advantage of the opportunity that offers.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I stand with everything the Ambassador has said, and obviously there were things that I assumed that everybody knew that maybe are not as well known as I had hoped. But thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador, I'm a [inaudible] Advocate of the Supreme Court. I'm an advisor to the Tatas and I'm also a Global Counsel of an American company, Spartan Matrix. We're involved in satellite tracking and logistics.

Now we know that the United States and India are joint partners in the fight against global terrorism. You know as well as I do that there are terror camps and terrorists in Pakistan. Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar are probably in Pakistan. This is a growing threat not only to India and the United States but to the rest of the world.

In the context of our growing relationship, what role do you envisage for India and the United States, keeping in view number one, that Pakistan, apart from encouraging terrorism and terrorist organizations, is also involved with rogue states like Iran and North Korea.

And secondly India at the present moment lacks the courage and the capability to carry out preemptive strikes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think if that's what you're advocating you won't find any support from us.

We have an important relationship with Pakistan. We have a very important relationship as well with India. These both deal with fundamental aspects of our foreign policy. We don't trade one for the other. We don't compare them. We do as best we can with each country. We work with India in all the areas that are important to Indians; we work with Pakistanis on all the areas of importance to Pakistan. I've spent a lot of my time in the last few days in Pakistan working with them on the strategic cooperation that we have to fight terrorism, to fight extremism, building up the education and economic systems to build a more mainstream moderate society, working with them on energy goals in ways that we can work with them on energy goals. I have no apology for that. I think that was a good thing. I think it's a good thing for the United States, it's a good thing for Pakistan, it's a good thing for the region and for everybody who lives in the region.

There are obviously difficulties with extremists in Pakistan. We face a threat, you face a threat, neighbors face a threat. There are various extremist groups up there. We have worked with the Pakistani government because they face a threat as well. Their society is undermined, Taliban, other extremists groups have attacked them, they've banned some of the extremist Kashmiri groups. We're all in this together and the only way we're going to get out of it is together. So I don't think that building further divisiveness into the situation is going to help any of us. I think we have important relationships there and we're going to pursue them.

Thank you.

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