



Interview With Amitabh Pashupati Revi, NDTV Senior Special Correspondent

Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs
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AMITABH REVI: Assistant Secretary Boucher, we have seen Condoleezza Rice on the Congress, in fact, point by point rebutting all those questions that were being asked by... Nicholas Burns also in an interview to NDTV has said that, obviously, in such a circumstance, no time frame can be set for the nuclear deal to go through Congress, if it does. But, considering that Secretary Rice has given that testimony that she has -- two days in fact of that -- on the scale of one to ten, where do you think the Bush administration is in convincing the skeptics, all of those who had questions about the deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, I can't do a scale of one to ten. We had a lot of people, a few people at the beginning stood up against the agreement, we have now had a number that stood up for the agreement, there's a lot of questions, questions are being answered. Congress is working through this; they're having hearings with the administration, with outside experts. We'll see that process evolve, so I'm just happy at this point that the Congress is working on this, working hard on it, and we are working very hard with them. I think, in the end, the justification stands on its own feet, it's very important to the President and the Secretary of State. All of us in the State Department have seen that. It's a good agreement for non-proliferation, it's a good agreement for energy, it's a good agreement for U.S.-India. I think in the end that has to carry the depth.

AMITABH REVI: Secretary Rice also mentioned something that she called a regional moratorium on fissile material. That's a very sensitive subject in India, any kind of nuclear cap. She did mention that India had responded to that. Could you tell us a little bit more of where that stands?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think there's much more to say than what the Secretary said about it yesterday. We've always been interested in making sure that there was a reduction in tensions, that there was confidence built on both the nuclear and conventional side here in South Asia, that India and Pakistan dealt seriously with various serious issues of nuclear weaponry, and so we've always had conversations. We'll continue to have conversations to make clear our very strong interest that those things continue, and that this deal should in no way change the effort that the countries here and perhaps us with them can make to make sure things are stable, and calm, and safe.

AMITABH REVI: You yourself have said that the U.S. continues to be pushing India to redefine what a credible minimum deterrent is, but in your own experience, in the cold war, it's taken a long while to reach that stage, even for America itself, so that's an understandable topic that India is wary about?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, I expect India thinks they've done quite a bit in this regard already, and I'm sure they have. Any nation that is engaged in the pursuit of weaponry has to decide, as specifically as possible, why do I need this, what do I need it for, how many do I need? These kind of questions, that we learned during the cold war to find for ourselves, and many times those led to arms control agreements that reduced nuclear weaponry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and now between U.S. and Russia by half and half again and half again and half again. So, we're way down in terms of numbers now.

AMITABH REVI: But you would understand our concerns vis à vis not only Pakistan, but China on this front.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I know. I said today that it's a matter that needs to be addressed, that needs to be thought about. We would like to talk to India about it; India and Pakistan need to think about it. But it is complicated by China's intentions, by the fact that Iran is next door developing the technologies for nuclear weaponry.

AMITABH REVI: What about the Presidential waiver that comes into question if this deal goes through? That's not like in China's case in perpetuity; it's probably every year. Now, India is not a nuclear weapon state, and India is not a non-nuclear weapon state, either, so is there a grey area in between that you have to handle as to how you, what bracket you are putting India into?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, since India didn't want to join the NPT as a non-weapon state, and we didn't want India to join as a weapon state, we had to put India in a separate bracket. I think it's important just to recognize that this doesn't violate the principles of India's (inaudible). But it does align India more with the non-proliferation regime, the effort made internationally to keep the world safe from the proliferation of very, very dangerous weapons. India has actually had a solid record in that regard in the past. What this does, is lets us cooperate with India in a way that we think enhances that record, enhances our ability to cooperate, as well as helps the relationship and helps end the energy problem in India.

AMITABH REVI: What about a cap that would probably be required on sub-critical tests, isn't that what the U.K. and the U.S. have usually used the argument that for safety concerns that is necessary?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, at this point I have to repeat, we have a deal, we think the deal is good one, and we're going to put together all the pieces and try to get it through. We're not looking at other requirements or other demands that are not germane to the matter. We are not looking at introducing new deal breakers. We are having the Congress impose on us conditions that just can't be met.

AMITABH REVI: And Iran, how far does India have to, say, support the U.S. stand at the IAEA and the oil pipeline? Are those issues that are also still in limbo, because Iran is India's friend?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well I think India has to think about what its own interests are in this situation. But India has made clear its interests dictate that it does not want another nuclear power in the neighborhood. It should not want a state as dangerous as Iran, with Iran's behavior in the Middle East and elsewhere, possessing nuclear weapons right next door. So far, India has acted on those principles. When it came to votes in the International Atomic Energy Agency and

elsewhere, we would expect that India's own interests would continue to... it will head in that direction, and support what all of us are doing to try and get Iran to abandon this course. We're not telling countries you have to break relations with Iran, we're telling countries think about your relationship with Iran, think about what Iranian nuclear weapons would mean for you, and act accordingly. I think that's what India has done.

AMITABH REVI: Ambassador Boucher, on a different subject here on democracy in Pakistan, now what assurances have you got from President Musharraf. Do you believe he will in fact give up the uniform or give up one of those two posts?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's not the central issue; the central issue is whether democracy will establish in Pakistan next year through free and fair elections. The question of his two posts arises in that context, needs to be addressed in that context, and he has promised to do so. But the key to us is this overall movement towards a restoration of democracy, and we are happy that it has begun and are happy to support it. We have seen the appointment of a Central Election Commissioner with some credibility. That's a key part, it's not the whole thing, it doesn't ensure a perfectly fair election but it is one of the pieces that has to work, and we'll try to help it make it work, and support the process as it moves forward.

AMITABH REVI: Last question, a slight aside here, you have mentioned at your speech at CII how you are grateful for the work that Ambassador David Mulford has actually done, that you inherit, but there have been some sticky issues of letters that he has been writing to West Bengal or the opposition governments in opposition, criticizing them for, or saying that U.S. investments won't come in. Has that been an issue between New Delhi and Washington?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We have always supported our Ambassador when he carries out U.S. policy as he does. We are always behind him; we are always with him. Yes, sometimes U.S. policy is sticky for other governments; sometimes other governments' policies are sticky for us. But I think it's important to speak frankly with each other, speak honestly with each other, and the Ambassador speaks frankly and honestly. He tells the truth and we don't have any problem with that.

AMITABH REVI: Assistant Secretary Boucher, thanks so much for speaking with us.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much. It's good to see you.

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