



Town Hall Meeting With Indian Students

Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs

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MODERATOR: Welcome everybody. I want to thank you again so much for your patience and for coming here today. We're very pleased to have our Assistant Secretary for South Asia and Central Asian Affairs, Ambassador Richard Boucher. He was appointed to this position in February 2006 and prior to that he had served as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs with the Department of State. He was actually the longest-serving Spokesman for the Department of State. He's been in this position since February. It's his third visit to India in this position and he's come here for interaction with you to really hear some of your concerns and your questions about US-India relations or other things on your mind.

Without further ado, I'd like to introduce the Ambassador, then after that we'll go around the room for some questions. Please, welcome.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you.

A lot of people, a lot of smiling faces, a lot of potential in people that are going to do great things in the room tonight.

I've had a lot of meetings in India, in Calcutta and then here. I've met with senior government leaders, I've met with members of parliament, I've met with business leaders, I've met with the press, and all we ever talk about is the future of the U.S.-India relationship. We're talking about commissions and scholarships and knowledge initiatives and technology exchanges and business ventures and all these new things that are coming along, but as part of this I think it's probably a good idea to talk to the people who are going to use these things. Because as we go forward with what we hope is a vastly changed and improved and new relationship between the United States and India, as we go forward with new research on science or efforts to make agriculture more effective in India, as we go forward with the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal, you're going to be the people who benefit, who use it, who maintain it, and who make it even grow more. So since I spend so much of my time giving speeches about the potential of India and the young people of India, I thought I should actually talk to some of the young people of India and see what's on your mind.



So my goal here tonight is to hear from you, listen to you, hear your ideas and answer your questions, and hopefully as we go forward with all these new relationships with India, some of you will become involved in it, whether on the side of business, on the side of academic exchanges or developing new technologies together with U.S. companies, or even as diplomats talking to Americans. But I think together we're going to change the 21st Century. If the U.S. and India work together, stay together, and develop together it's going to make a profound difference not just for my lifetime but for yours as well. That's what we hope to happen, that's what we work for every day.

With that, it's all yours. Who wants to talk about things? Who wants to ask about things? Who's first?

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. I'm in third year of graduation. Since this was --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: What are you studying?

QUESTION: Journalism from Lady Shriam College, Delhi University. This was a free-wheeling discussion so I wanted to ask about the long history of human rights violations which are still continuing in China and how come the rest of the UNSC members have adopted this silence toward it, and especially with respect to Tibet. Why so?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Human rights around the world is something that, as you see, America has been very active on. I think we've seen...I've certainly worked on China most of my career on and off. We've seen in some ways a lot of changes in China that have improved the lives of Chinese people.

When I first went to China in 1980 you'd ask a student what do you want to do when you graduate, and the answer would be, "I'll go wherever I can serve the state," meaning they're going to assign me somewhere, I have no choice. About the mid 1980s, '85, '86, you asked that question and they'd say, "well, they're going to try to assign me somewhere but I've got a cousin in the economic zones and he thinks he can get me a job and I can get out of my assignment." By the mid '90s you'd ask a Chinese student the question, "what are you going to do when you graduate," and they'd tell you just like any of you: "I want to go abroad, I want to go to graduate school, I want to go get myself a job, I want to be a biologist, I want to be a doctor." You've seen that kind of personal life improvements in China.

What we care about is the sort of systemic problems, the people that get arrested, that are sentenced to jail without trial, the people that are not given any choice over their political future, over their political life, the people who are not allowed access to information. We raise those issues all the time with the Chinese. Some other governments do. The Europeans have a human rights dialogue with China where they raise these issues and they press on these issues. Other governments don't. Some governments say it's a question of reality politics, we have to deal with whoever's in charge and it's not for us to tell them what to do. But we believe in the end the world is not stable without democracy and that democratic stability means developing healthy, democratic societies and that creates stability. That doesn't mean refusing to talk to people, refusing to work with governments. We can work with governments that are not democratic. But we're going to try to support any tendencies towards democracy because we think, as our example shows, as India's example shows, as Japan shows, as countless countries around the world have shown, the world is more stable, it's a better place, there's more opportunity if people are democratic.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. My name is [inaudible] and I am a research scholar at the American Studies Program at the School of International Studies, Jawala [inaudible]. Sir, India has declared a war into the moratorium on testing of nuclear weapons yet why is there specific legislation on no further testing in the Senate version of the bill?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Boy, you've been reading the Senate version of the bill at night? Look, you're an American Studies student, well beyond student. The legislative process in the United States that we all learned when we were in high school has a few extra steps. There's a House version of the bill that's been passed; there's a Senate version of the bill that will be taken up in September; then if those two are different there's a conference afterwards where they get together and they negotiate. So it's really too early to start making decisions about good, bad or otherwise.

As this proceeds through there will be things that we agree with, don't agree with, in different versions of the bill. We have some problems still with the Senate version of the bill and we've raised those issues, but it's not until after the conference and the final legislation that we find out in the end whether we have legislation that's good or

not. And I'm confident, because I've heard from Members of the Senate, I've heard from Members of the House, I've heard from staff members working on this, they want a bill that allows the President to go forward the way he said, to do what he told Prime Minister Singh he would do, that lets him implement the agreement the way it was agreed.

So we're going to keep working for that, we're going to work on all these provisions. I think we'll get there. It's a little too early to start picking it apart and saying what about this, what about that.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. I'm [inaudible], and I'm studying economics at Delhi University.

In context of the nuclear deal there are two concerns that specifically come to my mind. One is very obviously, do you not think that it would put a further strain on the Indo-Pak relationship instead of bringing more security to the subcontinent? And the second being that since the U.S. would be a big source of providing nuclear energy and things like that to India, maybe there comes a time when India becomes too dependent on the U.S. and is there something that we could fear, or has that been taken care of?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think natural processes will take care of the second part of that. India is growing so fast you need all kinds of energy. You need new nuclear energy, you need new coal energy, cleaner coal energy. We're trying to work on India with that. You need various kinds of electrical power from wind and solar and all those things. You need to import power from dams, you need to build your own dams. You need energy to continue economic growth. The issue is how can all of us get together and help provide that power in addition to what you do yourselves, and how can we do it in a manner that's clean, so what's beset for the environment; and second of all, how can we do it in a manner that we hope will lessen the pressure on the fossil fuel, on the oil and gas markets so that the pressure that's driven up the prices will maybe not go down, but at least it will be less in the future.

The fact that the United States would...once this is all done there will be a market for these goods. There are many suppliers around the world of nuclear technology, nuclear fuel. U.S. firms will be competing for some of these projects, the ones that are done from outside. Some of this will be done inside India. U.S. firms will get into relationships with Indian firms so that they can become manufacturers and they'll compete elsewhere. You'll have a market. And frankly, the best protection for the future is the market, is the fact that there are plenty of suppliers and plenty of opportunities.

What does this mean for Pakistan? Does it make India-Pakistan relations more difficult? I don't think so. This is a civilian nuclear agreement. We're very careful, the Indian government is very careful to make sure that's all it is. It's a civilian nuclear agreement and it doesn't have any military implications and it doesn't have any military or strategic implications for any other country in the neighborhood.

We do plenty of things with Pakistan to help them with their energy needs. Our Energy Secretary has been there. We've had lots of discussions, we've looked at different kinds of technologies. This is just something we're doing with India. We think the Indian case is unique, but this is a civil nuclear arrangement and not something that makes relations with Pakistan more difficult.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. My name is Vinit [inaudible], student of journalism in [inaudible] School.

I wanted to know when India showed its nuclear power to the world at the time of Vajpayee when he was the Prime Minister of India, the U.S. imposed a ban on India in many fields. But now the U.S. [inaudible] announce its nuclear power. Why is it so? Don't you think it's [inaudible] part of [inaudible] of USA?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. We're against...we don't like the idea that there are new nuclear weapon states coming into the world. We don't think that's helpful. We were against it then. We would prefer in the end that India and Pakistan and others would give up their weapons and become non-nuclear states. At some point you have to admit that's not going to happen. So this agreement that we've concluded, it's a realistic agreement. It's not the ideal achievement under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It's a realistic agreement that says this situation exists. What's the best way for us to move forward? And given India's record on non-proliferation, given India's industry, its energy needs, its whole circumstances, we felt that it was appropriate for us to say we're not going to help you with the military side of this program, we're not going to get involved in that. We have an obligation not to do that, we don't want to do that. But we can help develop the nuclear power sector. We can help develop the nuclear power sector because India has had a very good non-proliferation record. India has been very careful with its technologies. We feel like it's better for us to cooperate with India. It's better for us and India to cooperate with the international non-proliferation effort, even if we don't do it formally in one of the categories of the treaty. So it's an agreement that says on balance this is good for non-proliferation, and certainly overall this is good for the U.S. and India, it's good for your economic growth, it's good for your economic future.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. My name is Sean. I'm a student of journalism from [inaudible].

My question is on the thing that when [inaudible] Afghanistan and Iraq they do not have solid proofs that Saddam Hussein is there or Laden is there. But they got [inaudible] Saddam is now on trial [inaudible] carried on and Osama bin Laden is not being arrested. But now when [inaudible] took place in Mumbai then USA [inaudible] implementing that Pakistan has put this on, this blast is because of Pakistan and the USA wasn't interfering that Pakistan has done this but [inaudible] bring solid proofs. But the USA doesn't have solid proofs for some time. So [inaudible] --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Slow down a little bit.

There's about three things going on here that I want to try to comment on. One, there's no question that Saddam Hussein was a bad ruler. There is no question I think that he wanted the weapons of mass destruction. There are obviously questions raised and probably answered already I would say for most of us that he did not have these active programs, weapons of mass destruction, but there was certainly a lot of reason to believe.

There is no question that Osama bin Laden and the Taliban carried out the September 11th attacks.

But I'm not questioning who carried out the Mumbai bombings. Some people have made a big deal out of some small quotes that I said two weeks ago that frankly didn't mean what they said it meant when they first said it, and then what they said instead of what I said. So let me try to give you a clear perspective on this.

There are terrorists in this region that operate in many countries. It's a top issue when I go to Bangladesh, it's a top issue when I go to India, a top issue in Pakistan, a top issue in Afghanistan, almost any other country in this region. We talk about what we can do to fight terrorism. The fact that there are bombs going off in India, that's a threat to all of you. When people can't get on the train and go to work, come home in safety, there's a threat to all of you. The people in India who were killed in the Mumbai bombing and the other bombing that happened before. We feel very deeply for that and feel very sad about that and we feel like India obviously is first and foremost going to try to do something about it but we also have to do everything we can.

But every country in this region has to fight terrorism. Whoever actually did the Mumbai blast, I think we agree that until we stop all the terrorism in the region we're not going to be able to stop all these bombings.

So we work with Pakistan, we work with Pakistan against some of these groups that they themselves have banned. We try to support their efforts, we work with them in a variety of ways. I think they understand the need to go after terrorism, but we all have to keep going until we finish the job. We haven't finished the job in any of these countries. I think we all know we need to keep going, but the only way we're going to get at this whole thing is if we work on it here, there, there, there, everywhere, otherwise it will start creeping across again. That's our goal and that's why we work so much with so many countries so that you don't have to face this kind of danger in the future.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. I have done my doctorate from American Studies, I have done on U.S.-Israeli strategic relations in the post Cold War.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: So you know more about it than I do.

QUESTION: Thanks for giving me an opportunity. It's everyone's knowledge that India has been claiming permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, India being the most vibrant and the populous democracy. What is the U.S., like the oldest and the most, let's say the largest democracy in the world has to offer to India on this issue?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: On the Security Council issue?

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We think India is great. We think India is wonderful. We think India is a solid candidate. We think India...we think the new Security Council should reflect the 21st Century and not the world of 1945. At the same time the whole Security Council issue is going to be taken together with UN reform. We're actually trying to make sure that a lot of UN reform happens and that people don't get bogged down in the big politics of the Security Council too soon.

Be that as it may, there's a lot of political maneuvering going on between different countries. The United States endorsed Japan a long time ago, but beyond that we haven't endorsed any particular country. But we have said India certainly is well qualified, has a legitimate claim on membership and is a serious candidate. So that's about as far as I can go right now. How it will end up will depend on a lot of different factors, not just the voice of the United States and we're going to try to work all that with other countries when the time comes.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir, I'm Rachad Abra. I'm doing my post-graduation degree in management. It's my first year.

I have a question. The U.S. has lots of armament itself. Why does it talk about partial disarmament for the whole world?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Twenty years ago the United States had somewhere more than 20,000 nuclear weapons. I never knew the exact number. I don't know what it was, but it was a lot. Probably 20,000 plus. Then we signed agreements with the Soviet Union to bring it down. We went down to about 6,000. Now we've signed agreements that by 2012 we'll go down to 3,000. So we've destroyed more nuclear weapons than everybody else in the world is making.

There's a certain instability that comes from new acquisitions of nuclear weapons. So one person gets a nuclear bomb, their neighbor wants it, their neighbor's neighbor wants it, their neighbor's neighbor's neighbors want it. Or else you leave yourself open to pressures, blackmail or whatever. It destabilizes things. It also diverts attention from the modern world.

The Cold War for us, at least, was a struggle for existence. There was a very large set of countries that wanted to destroy us or at least our friends and we felt that was our very existence at stake. I don't think most people feel they're in that situation right now. They feel like their struggle for existence is the struggle against poverty, the struggle against diseases, the struggle against AIDS, it's a struggle for economic opportunity, for economic development, and yes, it's a struggle for choice and freedom in your own personal life.

So where should the emphasis be right now? Should it be on building nuclear weapons or trying to give people that sense of opportunity for fighting poverty and things like that? From a lot of points of view, a) it's destabilizing from a geopolitical point of view, but in the world we live in today these weapons don't have much of a purpose, they don't have much of a reason, they don't do very much. We're probably not going to get rid of ours completely, at least in my foreseeable future we have certainly pledged -- But we've done more to get rid of them over the last few years than I think anybody realizes. Both we and the Russians have reduced and reduced and reduced and we don't think at a time that we're reducing that other people should start making new ones.

QUESTION: Hi. I'm [inaudible] from [inaudible] School. Actually, Fidel Castro just resigned his post recently.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: He did? Oh, temporarily, for the operation.

QUESTION: Temporarily. And --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I thought I was getting breaking news here. You journalism students better write this down.

QUESTION: I know a lot of talks that U.S. might launch an attack on Cuba. So should we expect this kind of, for the U.S. to be a moderator in like places where there's unrest?

And my second question is when Iraq was invaded by U.S., I keep on hearing Bush saying that terrorism is a global issue, so why didn't Bush launch, try to resolve the issue through the UN since it's a global issue? Isn't that a contradictory statement?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. On Castro, I don't know who was saying we were going to invade. We never said we were going to invade. Our desire is to see a transition in Cuba that gives the Cuban people the choice over who their leaders are. Whatever happens to Mr. Castro, whatever his illness, how he recovers, the Cuban people deserve a choice. That's our interest. We're not interested in invading Cuba. We're interested in seeing change in Cuba. We'll continue to say that whenever we're asked.

On Saddam Hussein, we went to the UN again and again and again. After the first Gulf War we had resolution after resolution after resolution. I think there were 16 UN Security Council resolutions. There were 12 statements. Or maybe it was 12 resolutions and 16 statements. But the UN was again and again asking him to open up and show whether he had or didn't have weapons of mass destruction. And he never did. Whatever the situation was, and now that I know that he really didn't have that much of a program at that point I'm as baffled as anybody in saying why didn't he just one day invite all the inspectors in and say look, ha, ha, ha, I've got nothing. But he didn't. The war happened and that's the way history turns out. But in the end we did go to the UN again and again and again.

QUESTION: If the U.S. doesn't get what it wants in the UN will it just do it on its own without the consent of other countries?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: First of all, we weren't the only country that went in. Second of all, there are some situations where we feel our national security is threatened to the point that it requires military force. Military force for us, for everybody else, it's not something you do easily. No President can make that decision easily. The President of the United States sends our military forces into combat knowing some of them will get killed. It makes it a very very difficult decision. It's not an easy one and you shouldn't joke about it and you shouldn't pretend that some people find it easier than others. For every President it's the most difficult decision they'll ever make. And it's not just: "well, the UN fails, let's go invade." We don't want to invade most countries, many countries, any countries. We want to solve things diplomatically. The reason we go to the UN for 12 or 13 years in that case is because we're trying to solve it diplomatically. But if in the end the UN can't be effective in those situations and it's a situation that we feel threatens our existence and our lifeline, and there are other countries that are interested in taking action as well, there were 30-some countries I think on the original invasion, yes, we will take the very difficult decision to act. But those circumstances hardly ever apply and I really wouldn't expect them just -- We don't do this easily. It's a very difficult thing.

QUESTION: I am [inaudible]. I'm doing [inaudible] in American studies from the School of International Studies at [inaudible] University.

My question is regarding [inaudible] on the civil nuclear deal. The Indian Parliament feels there is a shifting in the goalposts from the original July 18 deal. So what are your comments on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: They don't have to worry. [Laughter]. I hope you'll tell them that for me.

We, let me give you a little bit of context. This is new. We talked about how this was different than the Non-Proliferation Treaty requirements, so this is new for us to do something like this. It's new for you, too. You've had a nuclear program that was very closed, it was very independent, it was very Indian, had very little cooperation because most of us wouldn't cooperate with you. So for you this is new as well, this kind of cooperation, this kind of entering into agreements, this kind of joining with the rest of the world in stopping proliferation in that way. So I'm not very surprised that there's a lot of discussion in our House and Senate and in your Parliament about these issues. Everybody is sort of saying, I mean they said this in the House and the Senate as well, "okay, this deal's okay, but I don't want to see anything else." I think to some extent I hear people in your Parliament saying that too. "This deal's okay, but I don't want to see anything else."

So what we have to deliver through our Congress and through all the negotiations that we have with you and that you have with the International Atomic Energy Agency, is the deal that was agreed, and that's our intention. The President said, the Prime Minister is saying, "here's the deal, we're going to do this, and that's what we're going to do." So we've gone to the Congress and said we have to do the deal the way it was agreed; we've gone through our House, came through with legislation; our Senate understands that but we still think they have a couple of problems, but in the end we recognize for both of us because it's new, because everybody has now gotten comfortable with this particular deal, we need to go forward with this deal the way it was agreed, and I think we will be able to. So they don't have to worry.

QUESTION: Good evening, sir. [Inaudible] from Indian Institute of Foreign Trade.

The question is the world trade talks have collapsed and in this context do you think that WTO is slowly losing its relevance? More so because of increased focus on the ideas? If you think otherwise, what could be the future [inaudible] for WTO talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. I don't think the World Trade Organization's lost its relevance, nor do I really think -- The talks aren't over. They've collapsed, they've hit a setback, whatever, but they're not over. You saw one of the first things that our trade negotiator did after the unsuccessful efforts was she went down to Brazil to start talking to the Brazilians about how are we going to make this happen. We've got to fix this.

But the WTO, the World Trade Organization, has a very important role already for all of us in maintaining a set of rules we can all abide by, in maintaining a set of procedures and understandings and mechanisms and all those sort of big words that we diplomats use that don't mean a lot until you have to go and solve the trade problem. Instead of making matters worse, you can make it better. You can fix it. Or you can make matters worse in a very organized fashion.

I see it frankly because I work on South and Central Asia. One of the things I would like to see in Central Asia is WTO membership for those countries. Some of them, Kyrgyzstan is in already; Kazakhstan is working hard on it. So what the World Trade Organization brings fundamentally is a new set of trading procedures, practices, and rules to the countries who join, and that's really important for all of us. But if we're going to achieve the benefits of more trade, we're going to have to achieve the benefits of more market access and decreased tariffs.

The United States came through in this round with some very significant offers: cuts in export subsidies that were much greater than the Europeans ever offered, and our subsidies are much less to begin with; cuts in tariff rates; cuts in sort of the whole area of agricultural trade -- much more significant than the Europeans were coming forward with. And frankly, we also made clear we're prepared to even do more and show more flexibility. We've worked hard on this round and we're not going to give it up. We're going to keep at it because the benefits of having more trade, lower tariffs, more market access, they go to exporters, they go to importers, they go to consumers in the United States and elsewhere.

Why has our President defended out-sourcing? Well, because it makes companies more efficient, it provides better products at lower prices. That always, even for companies that can be difficult. It provides more competition. But for consumers, better products at lower prices. Certainly that's what I want and I think that's what most people want. That's the effect of trade as well. Trade competition, imports. It's ultimately the consumers who benefit.

So we all need to look at this as an opportunity to provide better products at lower prices for all our consumers, and it's an opportunity to grow the whole economy, for all of us, and to create more employment opportunities as well. We're committed to that, we're going to keep working at it, we're not going to give up.

QUESTION: Sir, I'm Vidi from Journalism [inaudible].

I don't have a structured question as such, but I would like to know in your words the relevance of the cuts of subsidies, demands by the U.S. for cutting subsidies vis-à-vis the developing nations, not the developed ones.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's really big. What happens is when developed nations subsidize their agriculture then the world price for the grains or the products goes down. So a farmer in the Third World who wants to grow that product and sell it, he can't get as much money for his goods. If the world product is one dollar, his costs might be higher than that because it's subsidized down. If it weren't subsidized the price might be \$1.50 and he could grow it and make money.

The second thing is some of that grain is exported. Some of that grain is exported even to his home market. So it's not just a matter of him growing it and selling it in third countries. It's a matter of him growing it and selling it in his home market, sometimes even in his village. If subsidized grain is on the world market there the price there will be so low that he might not be able to even sell it in his village.

So by distorting the trade in agriculture subsidies can make it harder for Third World farmers. That's where we think a clean market, a fair market, is a lot better for all of us. But we have to do it together because we can't just take away some of our help for our farmers and have other people still keeping the costs low by subsidizing it extensively the way they do now.

We think ending subsidies, ending export subsidies is important for the Third World as much as it is for our guys and for other farmers around the world.

MR. KENNEDY: Sir, this has been a great discussion. I think we're going to have to come to a close. There have been questions ranging across the whole range, and I really wanted to thank all of you for being here today, for joining in this. I wanted to thank Ambassador Boucher, and perhaps you have a final word you'd like to say. We've had a really great evening and all you students have been really great participants. We're thankful for you to be here.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I want to say to the journalism students, you're already doing well. You're asking the same questions the journalists have been peppering with me all day. And I want to say to all of you, your questions are very thoughtful and I really appreciate the fact that you're thinking about these things, you're following them closely, you're looking at what we can do, and I take from the questions a lot of advice as well.

So thanks for coming, good luck in your studies, good luck after your studies, and I hope I see you around in one of these U.S.-India things that we do together. It's nice to meet you all.

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