



Remarks With Ambassador David C. Mulford

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs
David C. Mulford, U.S. Ambassador to India
 New Delhi, India
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AMBASSADOR MULFORD: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, I'm very pleased that we have the opportunity to meet with you briefly this afternoon.

The purpose of this session is to give Mr. Nicholas Burns a chance to address you briefly and take a few questions. We're very tight on time, so I hope you can restrict the length of your questions.

I would simply like to say, in introducing Mr. Burns, that he has led the effort these last 18 months on negotiations. He has done a superb job in Washington in advancing the interests of the civil nuclear legislation. Secretary Rice has made a major effort, as I know you all know, over the past two weeks to work with the conference members in the Congress to further refine and improve the legislation which was passed by such large majorities in both the House and the Senate.



This was a very delicate exercise, it was a bipartisan exercise very importantly, and finally it was a successful exercise. I think we can stand today with a great deal of pride, a great deal of enthusiasm, because this is truly a landmark event. We are on the brink of a change in law to the Atomic Energy Act of the United States and this will usher in, truly, a new phase in India's history.

I'll turn over now to Under Secretary Burns to make a few remarks and take your questions. Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

We are very pleased today in our Government, the United States Government, because we've now seen the text of the conference bill that the House and Senate of the United States Congress have put forward to be voted upon this afternoon, and we're very pleased by it. We think, in all respects, this text fits well within the parameters of the negotiations that we conducted with the Indian Government over the last 18 months, both the July 18, 2005 Joint Statement of Prime Minister Singh and President Bush; and the March 2, 2006 Joint Statement.

This is a major historic step forward for both of our countries. The Civil Nuclear Agreement in our eyes is the symbolic center of this new strategic partnership between India and the United States. It's taken on, in many ways, a life of its own because we've broken with the conventional wisdom of the last 30 years which held internationally that India should be isolated and walled off from the international non-proliferation regime. The United States disagreed, and we decided in 2005 to undertake an effort in our own country to change American law and then internationally to change international regulations and practices so that India would be welcomed in to the international non-proliferation regime for the first time in decades.

With the vote today in Congress, which we expect and hope is going to be a resounding vote in favor of this conference bill, we are now that much closer to this objective of both India and the United States.

What the Congress has done, and we're very grateful to the Congress -- to the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Congress. What the Congress has done is to reinforce the agreement that the United States has made with India, and in all respects now we believe we will have the necessary authorizations to move forward towards the civil nuclear agreement that needs to be signed by India and the United States to allow India to go forward with its IAEA safeguards agreement which is so important, and then to see this final change by the Nuclear Suppliers Group as well. So a historic day.

We thank the Congress of the United States for the action it has taken. And for those of you in India who are watching our country, I think it's very important that you have seen a bipartisan effort in the United States. The Republican and Democratic leadership; the Republican rank and file and the Democratic rank and file, have joined together to say that we had to make this change to gain the trust of the Indian Government and the Indian people, and to effect this change so that we would participate in the effort to build India's nuclear power sector.

It's been 18 months. There have been a lot of ups and downs. There have been, sometimes, some very tough negotiations between our two governments over the last 18 months, but today is the culmination of it. It's certainly the most important step on this entire continuum; today's vote in the U.S. Congress.

The Ambassador and I have been meeting with Indian Government officials. We've met with many members of Parliament, the Indian Parliament today. We're just off to see Foreign Minister Mukherjee in just a couple of minutes, and then on to see Foreign Secretary Menon and Ambassador Saran who was my negotiating partner for the last 18 months. I think we've been able to reassure the Indian government that with the passage of this law this evening, the United States Government and the administration of President Bush will meet all the commitments that we made to Prime Minister Singh and with the Indian Government over these past 18 months in these two agreements that includes the fuel assurances of March 2, 2006. So it's a great day and it's a day, I think, to celebrate this new relationship between our two countries.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, how soon do you think the nuclear commerce will actually begin with India? You have said there are two more steps that have to take place. And then what about a 123 Agreement, how soon do you think you can conclude that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much.

The 123 Agreement, this is the civil nuclear core between India and the United States, is well on its way. We've had three negotiating rounds. We now want to accelerate those negotiations in the month of January. The United States will go anywhere and meet the Indian team anywhere to further these negotiations, and I'm very optimistic.

The 123 Agreement, I've always seen the negotiations there as essentially a codification of what we've already decided. The big, tough decisions were made in July 2005 and March 2006 between the two governments. So, I don't worry about the 123 Agreement. It's going to get done.

Then the United States sees itself very much as the advocate of India internationally. In addition to changing American law, which will allow the United States and our companies to invest in nuclear technology and nuclear power plants and the provision of nuclear fuel to India, for the first time in 3.5 decades we want the rest of the world to change too. So, we're asking China and Russia and France and Britain and Germany and Japan and Australia to support this agreement. And consistently at the Nuclear Suppliers Group the United States has been launching diplomatic offensives for India and we'll continue to do that. Because delivering India from its isolation and putting it squarely in the center of the international non-proliferation regime is going to strengthen it.

Some of our critics in the United States have said "you're going to weaken the non-proliferation regime". We said no. There's an incongruity about the international non-proliferation regime right now. You have Iran and North Korea that have been inside the regime for the most part violating their international commitments. You have India on the outside observing its international commitments and being a responsible steward of its nuclear technologies. We want to bring the democratic state that wants to follow the rules in, India; and we're trying right now to convince the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons, and we hope very much that we'll be able to resume the Six Party Talks soon. And we're trying very hard to have the UN Security Council pass a sanctions resolution, I hope, in the next ten days or so to put sanctions on Iran because it's violating its IAEA commitments.

So what we're doing today is signaling that countries like India and the United States, democratic states that play by the rules and observe international regulations, we ought to be working together and we ought to be, obviously, trying to oppose those states that would seek nuclear weapons in an illegal way, and both North Korea and Iran are in that latter category.

QUESTION: Have you discussed the issue of Chinese support with the Chinese Government? It started with a statement from the Chinese official news agency that the U.S. Government is adopting a double standard as far as nuclear cooperation with India is concerned.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I was in China three weeks ago and I raised directly with the Chinese leadership the issue of India's application to the Nuclear Suppliers Group to have a change in practice. China will have to speak for itself. I can't speak for the Chinese Government, but I'd be very surprised indeed if there were any attempt by China to block this because, I think, China sees the constellation of countries lining up in support of change at the NSG. We've seen strong support from Asian allies, from all the European allies to speak of, and I think there's building support for this.

I do think that a lot of countries in the Nuclear Suppliers Group are watching the United States and watching the U.S. Congress. Now you've had the landmark and very large majorities in the House of Representatives in July, in the Senate just three weeks ago vote by a wide margins to support our policy towards India. I think you're now going to see a positive reaction from the Nuclear Supplier Group states.

China can speak for itself, but it's in the interest of China, in our judgment, to have India squarely in the mainstream, in the center, of our struggle internationally to contain the proliferation of nuclear technologies and fissile material. India has been a responsible steward and has an excellent track record. So, in our judgment, China ought to favor that constellation of forces.

QUESTION: The final text of the bill continues to have an amendment by Senator Barack Obama on fuel supplies. Would that affect fuel supply assurances when you drop the 123 Agreement?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I don't see any inconsistency in the specific provisions that you mentioned in the conference bill that is being presented for a vote today and the fuel supply assurances given by President Bush on March 2, 2006. Those fuel supply assurances were worked out at the very highest levels of both of our governments in Hyderabad House on the morning of March 2nd. It was the last issue that was decided in the year-long effort to put together this civil nuclear arrangement and so, I mean what I said, there's nothing in the bill as we read it, and we've read it very closely, that would contradict in any way, shape, or form the commitments that our President and our Government have made to the Government of India. That's what's so positive about this occasion today.

You have the Congress of the United States and you have the Executive Branch of the United States speaking with the same voice for this new relationship with India, so we thank the Congress for what it's doing.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, we have some unfinished agenda from yesterday. You said if you don't answer we could meet --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You're very persistent. [Laughter]. I thought I'd bump into you in the streets. I was walking around looking for you today and I didn't find you, but I thought I might find you here.

QUESTION: We could step out, sir. [Laughter].

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: No, no, no. That's not necessary. We can be friends here.

QUESTION: It's a friendly question, sir. The same question repeated, sir.

Now that you've seen the text, what is the Administration's view on two things: one, whether India would be able to use spent fuel, or will it languish the way it has in Talapur?

Second question: what is the Administration's view on fall-back safeguards?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: It's going to be up to the Indian Government, obviously, to decide what it's going to do with spent fuel. That is obviously a sovereign decision of the Indian Government, and we wouldn't presume to give public advice to the Indian Government. But I think that the text of the bill, and you've now read it, it's up on the web, is very clear about the issue of enrichment reprocessing technology. It's silent, I think, on the issue of spent fuel except in one respect pertaining to one statement of the United States, and that issue of spent fuel of course is an issue that's ahead of us in future negotiations between the two countries.

There are a number of steps ahead of us and ahead of the Indian Government along this continuum. In addition to the 123 talks for the United States, India needs now to accelerate its discussions of a safeguards agreement with the IAEA. We're very supportive of that and we think the IAEA is ready to meet India and to continue, and so, we look forward to progress and observing progress that the two of them will undertake.

QUESTION: You talk about proliferation concerns. One of the proliferation concerns that India has, and a lot of other states have, is the role of Pakistan and A.Q. Kahn in running his Wal-Mart as far as the nuclear proliferation was concerned. Are you addressing that at all?

Secondly, is the nuclear agreement predicated to some kind of arms sale agreement like the helicopter deal that is imminent, as well as, various other deals in the Navy, as well as, the Air Force?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Of course the Civil Nuclear Agreement between India and the United States does not refer in any way, shape, or form to Pakistan. It's an agreement between our two countries, India and the United States, so it doesn't refer to that situation whatsoever.

I will say this, the agreement that we are offering India, that the Congress is offering through this change in American law, is specific to India only. India is a unique country. India is a country with enormous potential in the nuclear power field, civil nuclear power, but it's also a country, as I said before and I think it bears repeating, that has been responsible in protecting its nuclear technology.

So, we have made it clear now for the better part of a year and a half that we will not be offering such an arrangement to any other country. In fact, when Secretary Rice and I both testified before Congress in support of this arrangement, we said that we would not be coming to the Congress to seek similar legislation for any other country in the world, only for India. I think it's important. I just wanted to state that to you today.

Your second question, I'm sorry?

Oh, yes. There are no links between today's legislation and any other issue pertaining to our bilateral relationship. Of course not. You're seeing the Congress now act, of the United States, act to change American law so that American firms will be able to invest in nuclear power plant design and construction in India and supply of nuclear fuel.

We do have a separate ambition in this relationship. Beyond the Civil Nuclear Agreement we want to see India and the United States become closer partners in the fight against terrorism. Both of us are victimized by terrorism. Both of us are democracies that wish to deal constructively and effectively in the fight against terrorism, and I think this is an area where our two countries can do a lot more together.

Secondly, we want to build a much closer military relationship with India. The Ambassador and I have just been over at the Defense Ministry. We've had excellent conversations today about all aspects of our future defense relations. There's soon going to be the transfer of a U.S. naval vessel to the Indian Navy. We are very hopeful that the United States can participate and our firms will be able to participate in the transformation of the Indian armed forces. We think we do produce some of the best helicopters and fighter airplanes in the world and we've been a reliable and good partner of many countries around the world in supplying that kind of technology, and the technology transfer allows for the two militaries to have a long-term relationship.

So, we see India as a partner both in counter-terrorism and militarily. And looking ahead to 2007, I think those are two areas where we're going to make a major effort to see if we can have an equal transformation of the relationship in those spheres as we're seeing in the politics of our relations and certainly in the civil nuclear sector.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, I thought I understood the Ambassador to say that you had already met with some Parliamentarians today.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes.

QUESTION: Whom did you meet with, and did you explain the bill or had they already read or seen it.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Maybe the Ambassador and I can both say a few words about your question. We had a meeting this morning at the Ambassador's residence with members of Parliament from several political parties. We've seen other Indian politicians, both yesterday and today. We'll see more tonight in our activities here in New Delhi.

What we've tried to do is take the members of Parliament through the legislation from the Congress, explain it, and I'm very pleased to see that what has emerged from the Congress is a bill that's, I think, very fair. It's very fair, and it's very respectful of India. It's respectful of India's sovereignty. There are no certification requirements that ask India to certify anything. If anything, it is appropriate in a democracy like our own, the Congress is asking the administration to report back to it, which is of course our 230 year tradition in our democracy, about the implementation of this agreement in a number of areas and that's appropriate, and that reflects the way that we normally do business with the Congress with lots of different countries around the world.

I think the Congress is also receptive to some of the concerns that India had expressed and that the administration had expressed about some of the initial amendments, and you've seen some modifications that we think are very well taken and that support the intent the administration had in putting the bill forward.

AMBASSADOR MULFORD: Could I just address your question in one regard? The people we met with, the Parliamentarians, were mainly from the U.S. and the Parliamentary Forum. Not all of them, but most of them. Secondly, they had questions. They had read the legislation in some cases, in other cases they had read media reports, but they were not at that time of morning as fully up to date as I think probably they are now as the information comes out.

But I did make one point to them that I would like to make to you, all of you in the media, because I think it's a very important point. When you think about how this legislation has been altered and transformed over the period of the conference process and the administration's dialogue with conferees, staff, and so on in the Congress, it's very important to understand how this worked.

There are provisions that all of you have focused on, and I just want to distinguish for your purposes a method of thinking about provisions. Some provisions were in the law as provisions in the law. Some of those were moved to determinations to be made by, say, the President. A further movement would be to move them from a determination or a certification to a report. In our system this is a method that is used between the Congress and the Administration which is very common. Mr. Burns signs hundreds of these things a year going from the State Department to the Congress, where there's been an agreement. Remember the separate branches of Government, the legislature and the administration, Executive Branch. For them to remain informed they ask to have reports. It's in a way, sort of like an ongoing annual question time in the parliamentary system to keep people, all members, informed.

I think it's important for you to follow the way in which the legislation has been dealt with, to take issues that could have been regarded as too sensitive in their current form and have not eliminated them, but have moved them into these different categories. There are no certifications or determination items left. For the most part these items are in the report category. Others, of course, have remained provisions in the law.

But it's very important to look in that way at this because it will help you understand what the process has produced. And as we say, the process has produced a most remarkable result in terms of accomplishing 90-95 percent of what everybody was hoping would come out.

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