



## Interview With CNN Correspondent Satinder Bindra

**R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

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**CNN:** Ambassador what does this deal mean in the larger context of the relationship?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think the civil nuclear deal between India and United States has become, if you will, the symbol of this new strategic partnership between the two countries. It's become, I think for the Indian population and also for many people on Capitol Hill, the big breakthrough that we have been waiting for. If you think about it, for decades of this relationship, this was the ultimate unfulfilled relationship from 1947 until recent years, and I think both of us have acknowledged in the last decade or so that our national interests are converging as to what kind of world we want to build. And this civil nuclear deal was so surprising for people because it overturns 35 years of orthodox thought about how one should deal with India and it gives us tremendous possibilities and energy and the environment of the future.

**CNN:** You described it as a "liberating" experience for India?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Yes. You know India, here is the country that's going to be, in 10 years or so time, the largest country in the world by population. And yet for 35 years was forcibly kept on the outside of the major international efforts that govern civil nuclear production and proliferation. So India was the country whose nose was pressed against the glass and the great powers of the world wouldn't let it in to this big operation. It took a lot of courage for President Bush, and I think a lot of foresight for President Bush, to decide that it was time to change that policy; it was time to change conventional thinking, both in the United States of America but also around the world, about the proper way to deal with India. So it liberates India from its isolation of the last three decades and that's a profound strategic shift for India.

**CNN:** Literally for India but there would be concerns in the neighborhood; how is Pakistan going to react, and there has been talk in many circles that China would see this as directed against its rising power.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think that this is going to be seen as an act that gives India its due. India is a global power. India has been a responsible steward of nuclear technology and it has never been a country that has proliferated. India deserves this. And has earned this distinction to be treated by the rest of the world as a responsible player. This should not present a threat to any one in the region. We, you know very well, we have a very, very good relationship with Pakistan. But it is different than our relationship with India. The two countries are different. The economic and political basis of our relations with India differs from our relationship with Pakistan, so I think its time in South Asia that we all not see relations between Delhi and Islamabad as zero sum game, and when President Bush was here several months ago he visited Delhi and then he visited Islamabad and had quite different conversations because our interests were different in both places.

**CNN:** Still the critics will be out in force both from the United States and in India. In the United States they will be saying, "why make this exception for India; it's still not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty." So you are blowing holes in the non-proliferation, sort of, regime, so to speak. That will be their argument still.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** You know, we strongly believe that this agreement is going to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime. Consider the incongruity of the following: you've had, for a number of years, North Korea and Iran inside the treaty, inside the system, cheating, and India forcefully kept out of the treaty, obeying the treaty and playing by the rules. So we thought it made sense to correct that. It made sense to bring this enormously gifted country, India, into the non-proliferation regime to strengthen it. And it certainly makes sense for us to demand that North Korea gave up its nuclear weapons and that Iran not become a nuclear weapons power, which are two great concerns of ours. So I think we've corrected some of the mistakes and imbalances in that treaty.

**CNN:** You want India to work closely with you and, as you put it in your own words, to try to stop Iran from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Now, many in India would view this as directly impacting on the sovereignty of India. There are going to be concerns here in India. How would you like to respond to those concerns?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I would say very directly that India is a very sovereign country. It's a great country and a great power. There is nothing in this legislation in the United States that is going to subvert India's right to make its own decisions about the future of its country. But here's what the legislation does, I think, speak to: the very promising fact that India and the United States, while we have different relations with the Iranian government, have come together, with China and Russia and the European powers and Japan and Brazil, to all say to the Iranians, "we don't want you to develop nuclear weapons systems because, frankly, we don't trust you with nuclear weapons." And, so, on that very important question, India and the United States are together. I think that has been reassuring to the United States Congress, and I think it should reassure the Indian population. This is not an attempt, this bill by the United States Congress, to subvert sovereignty. I think it unifies the two countries.

**CNN:** Other concerns, and simply put, this concern in India that it will not be able to transfer used fuel back to the United States or wouldn't be able to reprocess it as well. What would you like to say, as far as that is concerned, and also, there is some concern about the transfers of sensitive technologies relating to reprocessing and enrichment of Uranium as well?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think this agreement by the United States Congress, this bill, is going to revolutionize the ability of India to now build a civil nuclear sector, to provide more power to the Indian population, especially the poorer parts of the Indian population who live on farms and need electricity for their homes and businesses, because for the very first time the most modern civil nuclear technology, as well as nuclear fuel, is going to be made available by American companies and others to the Indian sector. Now there are some restrictions on our ability to work with India, and every other country in the world, in terms of enrichment reprocessing technology. The United States does not sell to any country in the world certain aspects of those technologies, so we are not treating India any differently then we would treat France or Britain in that respect.

**CNN:** But will you make exceptions for India, as far as the reprocessing technologies are concerned?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We will treat all of our leading partners in the same way and, obviously, we are operating under congressional restrictions and we are going to follow the letter of the law. But I would like to say that the United States Government will meet every commitment that we have made to India, in the two agreements that we have signed over the last 18 months, and specifically on fuel assurances.

**CNN:** What about spent fuel? What happens to that?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, you know, we are going to have to see the development of India's nuclear industry, and there will be some restrictions applied to that as there are to other countries.

**CNN:** Let's be specific, Mr. Ambassador. Can that spent fuel be sent back to the U.S. or does it have to be kept here, let's be specific on that if we can?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, there are certain restrictions on enrichment and reprocessing of spent fuel that apply, not just to India but to other countries around the world, and we will have to look at any future cooperation with that in mind. There are American laws that govern this part of our civil nuclear cooperation with all countries in the world, so I think it is important to acknowledge that this bill is India specific and that it gives India, for the very first time, opportunities and rights that it did not have before. But India will be treated in an equal basis, in the same way we would treat any nuclear power.

**CNN:** What does it do for the United States because still, in the United States, many people are concerned about India; they see it as outsourcing central, stealing U.S. jobs. What was this deal do to advance the United States' own commercial interests?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I think it is increasingly recognized in the United States that India can become one of our most important strategic partners. So, for instance, in terms of trade and investment, there is a lot of business that American companies can do it here. Look how well Boeing has done selling 68 civil airliners to the Indian fleet; an \$11 billion deal. Look how well Wall Mart is doing with this new deal, just announced in the last few weeks, and so there are tremendous opportunities. In any competitive trade relationship obviously there are advantages for Americans and advantages for Indian companies, and you hope that it works out well for both. I think in this case it does; we've doubled our trade with India in just the last 4 years.

**CNN:** Bottom line, it's still going to be a hard sell for the Indian Prime Minister. This deal, as it stands even now, is still going to get the critics out and still the Prime Minister is going to find it hard to sell?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Oh, I think this deal is indisputably in the best interest of India, as well the United States, and I hope that it is going to be recognized by the Indian Parliament and the public here that there is tremendous advantage for India. It's being relieved of its three decades of isolation. It could not participate fully in the major international activities concerning civil nuclear power, which is so critical to our future. Especially given the problems with climate changes; it is clean energy. And so, I think, as the Indians look at this bill in its totality they are going to see a fair bill passed by the United States Congress. What the Congress has done is to reflect, very much, the commitments that we made in our negotiations. This is a tremendous step forward for India and the United States. It is a very, very great day for our relationship.

**CNN:** Mr. Ambassador, what happens next now?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** What happens next is that we implement this whole agreement, and I think that unfolds over the next year. What happens next is that now that the United States Congress has said, "we agree, the United States should work with India in civil nuclear production", we need to convince the rest of the world, and so India and the United States will take our agreement to the nuclear suppliers group; the 40 odd countries that make up the nuclear powers in the world, and we will try to convince every single one of them that they should drop all the international barriers to further investment in India by international firms.

**CNN:** If India should test a nuclear device 6 months from now, what happens then?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** You know, I don't want to deal with hypothetical questions. India has been a responsible player in the nuclear field, and India and the United States have an agreement that we are going to look forward. A nuclear test would obviously be an abrupt departure from the agreement that we have, so we don't expect that will happen. But, I think we ought to be positive and look ahead and understand the significance of what has happened today.

**CNN:** You know, India and the United States have had some times of turbulent relationship; in the Cold War it was up and down, both countries could not trust each other, and now?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** And now we have a significant strategic partnership world-wide. This civil nuclear deal between India and the United States is historic. It is a dramatic and positive turning point in the relationship. In that sense this is big day for all of us who have known that since 1947 India and the United States have had a roller coaster ride in our relations; and series of ups and downs. This was the ultimate unfulfilled relationship between the aligned power, the United States, and the great non-aligned power, India. And I see our national interests converging. And we certainly share a lot of values and we look upon each other with a great deal of trust that together, whether its on nuclear power, whether it is on HIV/AIDS prevention, whether its trying to promote democracy in the world and trying to fight terrorism. We have these common interests that are bringing our countries together, in a way, for the very first time since India's birth in the late 1940's, and that is a significant accomplishment for both countries.

**CNN:** Ambassador, you have been working, I know, for 18 months, and I have to say "congratulations." We all feel that this is a pretty big day.

**CNN:** Ambassador, can I just jump in where Mr. Bindra left off? Ambassador, specifically on the access to reprocessing technologies and enrichment, heavy water production, etc, you did make the point that none of these were available to other countries. My question is in the bill. You do talk about certain conditions under which these might be made available. Could you elaborate on those conditions?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Yes, if India were to join this revolutionary new group called GNEP, where we are experimenting with the most modern designs of nuclear facilities, then it might be possible for us to engage in commerce on this. So that is an incentive, frankly, for both of us. We would like India to be a part of this very small group that includes Russia, China, France, Japan, and Britain. We would like India to be among the cutting edge of research, and if it does join this group, then it is possible we might be able to go further in that area.

**CNN:** Great. In which case, if we do put a breeder reactor under safeguards, say 6 years from now, it's possible that we could get access to these technologies?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** And we hope that India will elect to put one of its breeder reactors under safeguards. When we negotiated this deal, India was reluctant to do that, but we anticipated that the great majority of new reactors to be build in India will be breeders, and it is in this breeder technology that you can look for this revolutionary new breakthrough in how we process fuel and how we go forward with nuclear power. And India, given its math, science, and engineering talent, its technological prowess as a country, ought to want to be in that group. And, if it does then, of course, some of these technology transfers might be possible.

**CNN:** Final question, Sir. Spent fuel reprocessing, you did say that no other country really does that, but, Japan and Switzerland do have consent rights on reprocessing.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** The great majority of countries do not. It requires a very intricately negotiated and lengthy agreement with the United States, and India does not have one yet. And, so, it is theoretically possible for the future, but currently India will be treated as all other countries are treated. So, we do not make a distinction, there is no discriminate here. Now, I actually think that one of the hallmarks of this bill by the Congress is that it doesn't discriminate against India; it gives India a fair chance to be treated on an equal basis.

**CNN:** Thank you.

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