



Interview With NDTV of India

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Interview Via Telephone
Washington, DC
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QUESTION: Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, thank you very much for talking to NDTV.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

QUESTION: A question from the nuclear deal. You've been spending time on Capitol Hill since the dust settled on the negotiations. You've been trying to sell the deal to legislators there. How much work do you really think you have ahead? What are, honestly speaking, the difficulties ahead of you?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think our Congress is going to want to look at this agreement very carefully as it should, and to make sure that it conforms in every way to American law and to the Hyde Act. I'm confident that it does, as the person who negotiated this agreement for the United States. We have a lot of supporters on Capitol Hill. We also have some Members of the Congress who do not support this agreement. And some people in our society, influential people, who believe that this is not the way to go. So the challenge that we have will be to show that India will achieve in the next few months a Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA^[1], and the Nuclear Suppliers Group will work internationally to give India the same type of positive treatment the United States government has decided to give it, and then it comes back to our Congress for a final vote and we'll have to work hard for congressional passage. It's not a sure thing. But it is an important initiative for the United States and we know this agreement is in the interest of our country, it's in the interest of India as well, and we hope that this can proceed very smartly now at a rapid pace, that we might get it through all of this in this diplomatic marathon we have been engaged in for the last two years.

QUESTION: And the Henry Hyde Agreement was a relative pushover for you. It went through with a massive majority. There wasn't so much of a problem for you. Would you say this is a far more challenging job, selling the deal now?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think, and we worked hard for that Hyde Agreement, by the way, it didn't seem so easy at the time. But I think that Members of Congress will ask a number of questions. They'll want to know that the legal obligations of the American government have been protected and of course we'll say that they have. They'll want to know that on the reprocessing issue that India will be building a state of the art processing facility that will be fully safeguarded by the IAEA, and that there will be subsequent arrangements and procedures that will of course be negotiated on how this reprocessing will be done. But there are a number of very quite arcane but important technical issues that I think our Members of Congress will have some interest in, and it will be our job to convince them that we have protected the interests of the United States and of American law, and I believe we've done that, and I'm looking forward to, I hope, a positive decision by our Congress in several months' time.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, the U.S. Congress is just one problem in your problem filled life. The other right now is the NSG^{*}. There are potentially problem areas there as well, countries like China could well oppose the deal. Now how do you actually propose to get around them? How do you propose to get them on board?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, we intend to strongly support India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group. What we will do is present the U.S.-India Agreement to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, show them how it's in the interest of all of us around the world to have India on the inside of the system as a productive member of the system, putting 14 of its 22 nuclear power plants under international supervision, putting all future breeder reactors under supervision. I think that the international community will think this is a positive step and that our efforts to contain the spread of nuclear technology will be advanced if India is part of the international effort at long last. After all, it's been more than 30 years that India has not been permitted to participate. And I hope that the Indian citizens watching this understand what a great leap forward this is. It took a lot of courage by our President, President George Bush, to agree that we should have this kind of initiative together, and then to work for two years negotiating it and then to see it pass the United States Congress as it did last December.

So we think we've got a good deal. We'll work very closely in support of India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group. We hope other countries will as well. And I would predict that we'll have a positive result at the end of that process.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, China has in the past signaled that one country cannot be made an exception of and that if the United States does this for India, China has signaled it could have countries that it would like to do a similar favor to. Now how do you propose to deal with that? Do you see that as a problem?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think the great majority of countries understand that India is really an exceptional country and that we are right, given our global interests, to make an exception for India, but a unique exception for India. The United States will not support similar treatment being given to any other country in the world that currently does not have it. We think that it's best to put India forward on its own. I think India will have strong support from many countries and we would hope to convince all countries of the NSG that this is the right thing to do and that they should all be supportive.

QUESTION: And specifically the China question, how do you propose to deal with China? Do you actually foresee any potential problems there?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I know that the Indian government will want to work closely with China. We will as well. There are many other supporters of this agreement around the world. I think countries understand that it didn't make sense to continue the international proliferation regime with India as an outsider, not allowed to participate. Then you had this anomalous situation where Iran was inside and cheating. So the difference between Iran and India is quite stark. India is a responsible country. India has been a responsible steward of its nuclear technology. Iran is not a responsible country. In fact we believe Iran is seeking a nuclear weapons future against the will of the United Nations Security Council and the IAEA Board of Governors.

So there's a lot at stake here for a positive decision, and you can be assured the United States will be an ardent champion of India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

QUESTION: And Mr. Burns, I know you have to leave now. Let me slip in one last very short question. Are you somewhat disappointed at the domestic opposition within India, particularly the BJP^{*} with which you've negotiated in the past? Is there some disappointment there?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You know, I don't think it would be proper for me to comment. This has been an internal affair for the Indian political system and I'm sure the government can put its own case forward. But needless to say, the United States government believes this is an excellent deal. We believe it's in our interest. We're very pleased with the outcome, and we think it's a good deal for both countries. But I wouldn't want to interfere in Indian politics by commenting on what the opposition is saying. I think it's better for me to talk about what my own government is doing particularly around the world to gain the international support that we need to make this go forward in the future.

QUESTION: Mr. Burns, best of luck to you and thanks for talking to NDTV.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure to be with you. Thank you.

[\[1\]](#) International Atomic Energy Agency

[*](#) Nuclear Suppliers Group

[*](#) Bharatiya Janata Party

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