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Press Conference With the Western Press

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

U.S. Embassy Moscow

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UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Good afternoon, sorry to keep you all waiting. I was just down the hall talking to the Russian press, and that was consecutive translation. So lots of fun.

I thought I'd start off with just a few comments on what we've been doing here in the last two days, and then I'd be happy to take your questions.

I was here for three reasons. The first and most prominent was to meet, first with the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister bilaterally, and then with the P-5 and Germany last evening on Iran, and then today we had a very long discussion among the G-8 countries on Iran. So lots of different Iran discussions in three different, for myself at least, three different meetings. I want to talk to you about that for a moment. Secondly, we had a full day today of the G-8 Political Directors to plan the Summit meeting in St. Petersburg, and also the Foreign Ministers' G-8 here in Moscow on June 29th. We're responsible for the foreign policy issues; there are other people, the sherpas and sous-sherpas who do the economic issues. We're responsible for foreign policy. I'd like to tell you a little bit about that. Third, I took advantage of my presence here to meet with a group of Russian civil society leaders, people who run Russian NGOs, as well as – I met with one political party leader. And I had a very good chance to talk about the state of democracy in Russia and some of the issues with which you are all very familiar, as you live here. So those are the three reasons I was here, let me say a word about each.

On the Iran issue, I think it was a very constructive, and, frankly, very fruitful set of meetings – all the meetings that we had over the last two days. We didn't come here with the anticipation that we would somehow resolve all the different tactical differences among these countries in the G-8 about what to do in the Security Council on the Iranian question, but we did come here with the conviction that, given what the Iranians did especially last week in announcing a full-bore attempt to be engaged in the enrichment process, and given the fact that that put them again in violation of their commitments to the IAEA, and also in violation of what the UN Security Council has said they should be doing, I actually found a fair degree of common ground here on a number of points. And then I think we found the need for us to

work out some of our differences over the best tactics.

Let me tell you what I think – what I know – we all agree on. All of us agreed and said in the meeting, that we all wish to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. Every country spoke to that – including Russia and China – and every country said that it is not in our interest collectively or individually to see Iran acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Second, all of us said that we are severely disappointed, not only by the actions of Iran over the past year in marching towards an enrichment capability, but especially the flagrant violations of Iran's international responsibility of last week. Every country mentioned that they had made public statements against the Iranian actions, and that, given the fact that the February 4th IAEA Board of Governor's statement specifically said that Iran should not have this kind of enrichment capability, and that Iran should suspend its nuclear activities and return to negotiations, what Iran did last week was in clear violation of the IAEA Board of Governors in addition of the UN Security Council. Every country spoke in support of the notion that there has to be a response to that by the international community, meaning, both the IAEA and the UN Security Council. Most countries said specifically that now there has to be additional pressure put on Iran – diplomatic pressure – that would be designed to isolate the Iranians even further than they have isolated themselves, and designed to convince them of the cost/benefit ratio of what they have done, should lead them to conclude in a rational basis that they've got to turn back from their present road towards enrichment. And I think all of us believe that Iran, especially the statements Ahmadinejad made last week and again yesterday – the statements that Israel is headed for destruction, he said, the statement that Iran will not turn back from enrichment – that these statements are having an effect that possibly the Iranian government doesn't want them to have, which is to dig that hole that Iran is in even deeper down. All of us said, repeated what we have said for many months now – and we all agree on this – that Iran should have the opportunity to have civil nuclear power in the country for electricity production, but all of us agree that that cannot and should not happen in a way that allows them to pursue a secret nuclear weapons research program. Or, importantly for what's going on now, it should not allow Iran to have access to the sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle on Iranian territory.

I said in the meeting several times – both yesterday and again in the G-8 today – that the U.S. believes and has believed for six months now that the best solution that's been offered to this problem is the Russian proposal that President Putin put forward last October. And that would, as you all remember it, would keep all the sensitive aspects of the fuel cycle outside of Iran. It would allow all that to be done offshore, but nuclear fuel would be brought in to service the Iranian nuclear power industry. And we still believe that that is the best way forward and it's a shame that Iran has walked away from that proposal and continues to walk away from it.

We agreed on all of that, which I think is fairly substantial, and I say that because there are a number of steps we disagree on. And I know the tendency when writing a story is to say, well, "this is what they didn't agree on." I think, if you look at what we are trying to do to isolate the Iranians, it's impressive that Russia, China, European countries, the United States agree on this platform. And I was very pleased by my meeting with Assistant Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai of China. It was the first time that he had come to the meeting – he has recently been given his portfolio – and he had been in Tehran over the weekend and had met with Dr. Larijani. And I won't describe how those meetings went, because that's for him to describe, but I was pleased by the very constructive attitude that China took in these talks last night. And, obviously very pleased by what we heard from a number of others.

Now what's next? Dr. ElBaradai has to report to the Security Council and the IAEA on April 28th, and Mr. Lavrov said this today to you, he has to report on whether or not Iran is complying with the Security Council and the IAEA. Given what happened last week, there is only one conclusion that Dr. ElBaradai can come to: and that is they're not in

compliance. They just flew by all the red lines last week – they crossed them all last week, as they've been doing consistently for many months. Following that report, we would expect to continue to work in the IAEA to try to gain more transparency into the Iranian program to ascertain the technical details of this drive towards full enrichment. Second, there's no question that within days of the April 28th report you will see permanent members of the Security Council suggest the Security Council needs now to take up some new initiatives.

Now what those initiatives will be – we discussed several possibilities. We didn't agree on any of them last night, but we did agree to continue talking, and we agreed that the Political Directors will come together again in the first days of May to try to define a way forward in the Security Council. A Chapter VII resolution is a possibility that some countries talked about. Nearly every country is considering some form of sanctions; and this is a new development. We have been having these meetings with the P-5 now for six months, and meeting with Russia and the West European countries for a solid year. Until the last several weeks, no country with the exception of the United States had come forward to say that now a sanctions regime had to be considered. But you saw the statement of Javier Solana a week ago Monday in Brussels that the EU is now formally looking at a set of sanctions, and we heard last night and again today from individual countries that all of those who spoke – and that was the great majority – are looking at sanctions. Every country in these meeting said that some type of action had to be taken. Some type of action had to be taken to, in effect, erect a barrier to Iran's progress. And so the challenge for us will be, what is it that we can all agree on, knowing that some countries will take individual actions, but all of us want to take one, collective, multi-lateral action in New York at the Security Council. And I think we discussed in great detail the pros and cons of a number of these initiatives; I'd be happy to get into them.

In addition to the multilateral action, it's certainly the view of my government – I'll just speak for the United States – that individual countries in the G-8 and in the P-5 can take their own actions, because some countries have great leverage. A number of countries are continuing to permit the export of dual-use materials that could be used – and we think in some in cases, are being used – to help the growth of Iran's nuclear industry. And obviously it's the view of my government that it would be appropriate now for those individual governments to stop that practice and no longer to permit it, given the fact that Iran has violated both the UN and IAEA provisions. Some countries continue to sell arms to Iran. It's been the view of my government for a long time that no country should sell arms to a regime like that. And you know that when the Russian government on December 1st here in Moscow the potential sale of Tor-1 missiles and other military equipment to Russia, my government spoke out against that, and I said in the meeting at several points yesterday and today that we felt it would be appropriate for that arms sale not to go forward. It would be logical for that arms sale not to go forward. And we also think it's important, perhaps, for countries to stop any kind of cooperation with Iran on nuclear issues – even on civil nuclear issues like the Bushehr facility. These are not new positions of my government, but I did reiterate them again because they're important. It's time for countries to use their leverage – their diplomatic, and economic, and political leverage – to demonstrate to the Iranians that there is a cost for the type of strident behavior that we see from the Iranian government.

In addition to the nuclear issue, a number of countries including the United States spoke up about the leading support that Iran continues to give to the major terrorist groups in the Middle East. Iran is the central banker of Middle East terrorism, and Iran is the leading supporter and director of the activities of Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. And a number of countries said that our agenda with Iran can't just be solely focused on the nuclear issue; it has to include our opposition to this leading support for terrorism. And a number of countries spoke about the relatively new Iranian – very aggressive Iranian flexing of its muscles in the Middle East region in general. And we take that to the election inauguration of President Ahmadinejad.

So considerable discussion, very detailed about the nuclear issue. I leave here satisfied that we agree on the need to unite to dissuade Iran from its present course, that we now need to focus on the specific actions to take in the Security Council. But everybody believes the Security Council needs to take action, which is a step forward.

Very quickly. We spent the day today, in addition to talking about Iran at the G-8, I've been talking about the G-8 agenda. Now it's obvious that Iran is going to be the leading issue. The leading issue for the foreign ministers and most likely for the heads of governments. It's months away, but there's no more serious issue for us to discuss than Iran. We discussed our continuing support for the formation of an Iraqi government and for support to that new government. Obviously we talked a lot about Afghanistan and the need to support President Karzai, and all of our countries are doing that in one way or another. There was a lot of conversation about problems in Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia-Eritrea, some of the humanitarian issues pertaining to Africa. And today a number of countries raised the fact that it's going to be important for us to discuss Belarus in the G-8 context. And of course my country, my government, and most other governments around the table believe that what Lukashenko did was to conduct an anti-democratic election, and that his actions since then have been anti-democratic in his treatment of innocent, peaceful protestors. And a number of us, the EU and the U.S. specifically, are beginning now to put in place a sanctions regime against Belarus. And you've seen the statements from Brussels and from Washington to that effect. We also talked about the opportunity that the G-8 would have to try to work with Armenia and Azerbaijan towards a successful conclusion of the – I'm trying to remember how many years it is now – I guess 13 or 14 years of the international effort to negotiate a solution in Nagorno-Karabakh. And actually our lead negotiator, Steven Mann, is in Moscow today talking to the Russian government. We are co-chairs with Russia and France of that process. We also raised the issue for the G-8 agenda of the problems in Georgia and Moldova. And we said that there should be an opportunity for the G-8 to help the Georgian government in its peace plan for South Ossetia as well as its efforts to reach out to the Abkhazia as well as our efforts in the 5+2 process in Moldova to try to help the Moldovans, Ukrainians and others to resolve that problem. And so on the agenda we suggested today, for the first time, should be these four issues pertaining to conflicts very close to Russia's borders.

Finally and I won't belabor this, when I come to Moscow, in fact when every senior American comes to Moscow, we always want to meet with the human rights community, the NGO community, democratic forces; I did that over the last two days and I was very pleased to have the opportunity to exchange views and to demonstrate our support for continued democracy in Russia and for democratic standards.

Those are the three issues I discussed. I'm happy to take any questions you got.

Yes, Dana.

DANA LEWIS, FOX NEWS TV: Can you just tell us what was the nature of your discussions on sanctions. Did you actually come out and call on countries including Russia to go forward with the sanctions process and what kind of response did you get?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: The United States has had sanctions in place on Iran for 26 years – and they're full sanctions. There's not a lot more that we can do, but there're some steps that we can take. And I did say on behalf of my government that we felt that, if you look at these negotiations over the last year in particular, Iran's practices do the following: the international community sets out a line and says, "Don't cross that line." Iran then finds a way to cross it. And then what Iran usually does is to say, "Oh, now we'll temporarily suspend our actions and we'll be happy to return

to talks." I see that they're back today, talking not with me of course, but with the Russians and the Europeans. And then, when those talks break down inevitably, the Iranians move forward again. So, one of the core points that I made, supported by a great number of people in the room is, we're not going to agree to any pause by Iran – and it's inevitable that they're going to do this, sometime in the next two or three weeks the Iranians will come forward and say, "We'll temporarily pause our nuclear activities at Natanz, and we'll be glad to talk." But they want a pause in place, and they want to capture all of the growth in the enrichment process that they have, illegally under international law, achieved. Our view, which we put forward, is Iran needs to roll back to the status quo ante of December 19th, 2005. Meaning – no enrichment activities at either Esfahan or Natanz. And that is a position that we are united on in the United States with the European countries, with the EU3, and all of us made that point: that we're not going to fall for the ruse of a temporary pause knowing that the Iranians – President Ahmadinejad said! – they will not be stopped on their road to enrichment. They're going to go forward. And so that was a very important....

(Interruption in tape)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: (continued)...on that. And we need to actually agree on the measures that will put that into operation.

PETER FINN, WASHINGTON POST: When you talk about the meeting and you get to what should happen next, you move from the formulation of everyone in the room to "most of the people in the room."

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Sure, just trying to be accurate.

PETER FINN, WASHINGTON POST: (continued)...but I'm struggling to understand what's new here, because, I mean, we've been hearing essentially the same message for months now: that we all agree they should stop. We all agree they should do this...but as soon as it gets to what we should do to stop them or progress forward – there's disagreement.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Peter, I'd say what is new.... There is a little bit of a continuum operating here. You know, we've all been – we all believe that it's better for the P-5, the Security Council, to be united on this and to send a clear, single message to Iran. We've believed that for many months. What's new is, I think, a greater sense of urgency, given what the Iranians did last week. Now, on January 4th when they took the seals off the plant at Esfahan, they threatened to go forward on enrichment but didn't do so. And then last week they said they'd actually done so, and they said they had strung together the 164 centrifuges in a cascade – which is very limited, but very significant scientifically. And then they said two things last week publicly that I think surprised everyone: they said that by the end of 2006 – and Mr. Vaidi said this, the Deputy National Security Council Director in Tehran – they hope to have an experiment with 3,000 centrifuges, which would be a considerable technological leap forward. And they also said – and this is President Ahmadinejad who spilled the beans – he said, "We're already engaged in P-2 centrifuge research," which is a qualitatively more serious type of research. Now that was interesting, because what Iran has been telling the IAEA for two years – three, I guess, since 2003 – is that they're not engaged in P-2 centrifuge research. There had been a suspicion that they were. Iran has said for three years, "We're not engaged." The President of Iran said last week for the very first time, "We are engaged." So this has created a lot of doubts in the minds of a lot of countries around the table about whether or not Iran is telling the truth. And we have an admission by the Iranian President last week that they have not been straight with the IAEA. If you put all that together, I think what's new is a much greater sense of urgency, that the Iranians have not been dissuaded until now from what the UN and the IAEA have said and done. And so,

the conversation last night was focused on what can we now do to raise the cost to Iran? Diplomatically – diplomatically speaking. All of these proposals were for diplomatic action. And I think that is a step forward. As I said, we were pleased by the discussions because everyone was kind of – each country agreed on this analysis, we just didn't agree on the specific steps forward, which is not surprising given the complexity and the difficulty of this issue – and given the fact that we come to the problem from different perspectives and different relationships with Iran.

STEVEN MYERS, NEW YORK TIMES: You made some very specific comments about what you'd like to see from Russia (inaudible), about missile sales, about the Bushehr plant. How did they respond?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: By the way, we believe a lot of countries can take action to limit access by Iran to technologies that can be used – dual-use technologies – in the nuclear industry. So this wasn't just a message for Russia, it was a message for lots of different countries. What I said yesterday was not new; we've never favored the arms sale, and we said so on December 2nd, I believe, after the press statement was put out here by the Russian Ministry of Defense that they had signed an agreement for Tor-1 missile sales and other sales. I think, you know, ask the Russians what they think. I don't think it's my job to characterize – it's not appropriate for me to characterize the Russian reaction to everything we say in private. But we've believed for a long time it's a mistake for countries to have a military relationship with a regime like Iran. You have to remember what this regime says it stands for: it says it stands for the destruction of Israel. It's denied the historical basis of the Holocaust. The other day – two or three days ago – President Ahmadinejad said that Israel was headed for destruction. We're a friend and ally of Israel. So obviously we don't think that any country should sell arms to Iran. And, frankly, it would make Iran pay a little bit more for what it's doing and raise the cost, if countries began to shut down the normal way of doing business with Iran. So yes, that was my message yesterday and we'll continue to repeat that message.

PRESTON MENDENHALL, NBC NEWS: You've said that EIBaradai's report on the 28th was essentially a foregone conclusion...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: From our perspective.

PRESTON MENDENHALL, NBC NEWS: From your perspective.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes.

PRESTON MENDENHALL, NBC NEWS: Assuming so, and assuming that you would assume that as well, you say then we'll meet in the first days of May for the Political Director's event. Is there really any bite to that? Shouldn't the P-5, shouldn't the Security Council – shouldn't the U.S. be pushing for an immediate Security Council?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh we will. Yes...

PRESTON MENDENHALL, NBC NEWS: It seems like this is just such a gradual process. Is there really any bite to what...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: It's called "diplomacy." I don't mean to be – it's called "diplomacy." This is a very intricate – it's a very challenging set of issues that are presented by the Iranian government. And here you have this unique coalition. A year ago, there was no coalition. A year ago, the EU3 was negotiating with a different Iranian government –

the Khatami government. A year later, because of what Iran has done, you've had the creation of this very large coalition. This is very much in our interest, to have Russia, China – and to a larger extent if you think of the IAEA – India, Egypt, Brazil, Sri Lanka, all voting to rebuke Iran and to say to Iran, "Suspend your nuclear operations and come back to talks." We are focused on diplomacy. We're trying to make diplomacy work. We believe a diplomatic solution is possible; I'm not saying it's certain, but it's possible and we haven't given up on a diplomatic solution. So when you're engaged in this multilateral diplomacy of this nature, it takes time. Now what we hope is that the UN Security Council will speak with one voice and then agree to a set of actions that will be one action designed to convince the Iranians to back down and to suspend their nuclear operations – that is the challenge here. And I suppose it would be easy for us to give up and say, "These are difficult negotiations," but that's not a very logical choice, and it wouldn't serve the greater interest we have in a diplomatic solution.

PRESTON MENDENHALL, NBC NEWS: If I could just follow up, you've give a fairly pessimistic characterization of how Iran responds to negotiations over the last decades – that they've crossed the line, immediately crossed the line – why would this be different? Do you have any real optimism this time?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, what's different now is that the Iranians have never been confronted by a Security Council resolution – like a Chapter VII, if that materializes, it's one of the options. Iran has not had to face a consistent, global coalition against it. And we have erected a global coalition. I named some of the countries in it; they're from every continent in the world. If that global coalition can sustain itself, can speak with one voice, and take a series of diplomatic steps designed to pressure the Iranians and turn up the heat on them, then we believe that there is a chance that the Iranians are going to have to assess the costs of continuing on the path that they're on. That's the purpose of this diplomatic coalition. And so, we are willing to put the time then into lots of different meetings, and to patient diplomacy, if at the end we can maintain this global coalition. So, shortly after the 28th of April, one of the things we'll do is come back together in the P-5 with Germany to try to determine a way forward, but we're certainly going to go – within days – very quickly to the Security Council after that meeting. But we felt it was important to have that meeting first in order to try to give some momentum and direction, since the P-5 have a major responsibility for what the Security Council does.

I hope that answers your question.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: I think you mentioned that all of those who spoke, and then you said it was the great majority were looking at some kinds of sanctions at the dinner last night.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes, yes.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: ...which to me sort of implies that maybe China or Russia didn't speak or didn't endorse sanctions. But if you've got one of the UN Security Council members who's not even looking at sanctions, then coming back to what you said a second ago, that if this works the Iranians will have to assess the cost – I think that most of us here don't see anything on the horizon that would raise that cost to Iran enough to make us think that they're going to back down, given the way they've been talking and acting recently, especially when they're constantly pointing to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as allowing countries like Japan to have uranium enrichment and, you know, to have a full fuel cycle. So, how...I mean, is there anything on the horizon that makes you think the Security Council can come up with something strong enough that there is any reason to believe that Iran will back down. And, specifically with the problem of a country like China or Russia not even endorsing any kind of sanctions.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Let me remind you again, let me say again, that the Russian proposal does not give Iran access to the fuel cycle on Iranian territory. So Iran continues to say it has a theoretical right to nuclear research activities and enrichment activities under the NPT – but in practice? What the world community is saying to Iran is, "You gave up that right when you lied to the IAEA for 18 and a half years. That's point one. Point two is, I do think the qualitative difference in the diplomacy are the events of last week, and the message that Iran sent to the rest of us. And what we agreed upon last night is that we had to react to that – not just by words. Everybody talked about the need to consider actions – the majority said sanctions – and so it would be defining the way forward between those two words and two initiatives that will answer you question of whether or not we can erect a diplomatic coalition that is convincing enough to alter Iran's behavior. And again, there's no certainty of success here; but there is a possibility of it, and it's certainly worth our effort to pursue every last diplomatic avenue that we can. And we're certainly a lot stronger working with Russia and China than if we were working on our own – and we've known that for months. And that's why we've taken the time to establish this very large coalition of countries.

MATTHEW CHANCE, CNN: How important is that global coalition to the United States? Or would Washington perceive that it could achieve its objectives (inaudible) in Iran if that coalition were to fall away?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well I think that you know, President Bush, Secretary Rice, have been very consistent in what we've said about Iran. We are going to act to deny Iran nuclear weapons capability. President Bush spoke yesterday, probably, he said that all options are on the table, but we're focused on diplomacy. So he and Secretary Rice continue to be very consistent in what they're saying. We think that the best way forward is to work with other countries, and we've invested a lot of time in that. You remember the dinner that Secretary Rice had on January 30th in London, where the P-5 Foreign Ministers agreed to take this to the Security Council. I think it's important to keep this a little bit in perspective, the events of the year. I started working on this issue in late March of 2005 – there was nothing happening. The European negotiations weren't really going anywhere. They then broke down in August, and then the Russian proposal emerged – we all supported that. And then I think Iran was surprised that the IAEA in September and in February rebuked twice with an increasing number of countries from all over the world joining in that – India joined it, Brazil, Egypt – three countries I'm sure that Iran calculated would not join the majority in the IAEA. And then Iran said that it wouldn't be possible for this to get to the Security Council because we were divided, but we united to get to the Security Council. So, you know, diplomacy takes time, it's not perfect, and there are a lot of fits and starts along the way, but we have developed a coalition, we've had two successful votes in the IAEA, the issue is now in the Security Council, we've had a Presidential statement, we're heading towards another statement and I hope a series of actions by the Security Council to tighten the pressure on Iran. We can trace progress. If you take a momentary snapshot of last night, you say, "Well they didn't agree on a defined course of action," and yet I can construct a scenario where, over the last 12 months we've constructed, we've built a major international coalition. We agreed on a lot last night. And we're hoping that'll narrow those tactical differences. So that's what's important.

MATTHEW CHANCE, CNN: Is there any thinking though in Washington that regardless of whether that coalition stays together, you're going to go for that objective of denying Iran nuclear weapons? Will you go it alone and the coalition can come along if they want to?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I learned long ago not to answer hypothetical questions on important issues. But I think we've made our view clear in Washington – our administration. And that is it is absolutely not in our interest or anyone else's to have Iran with nuclear weapons. And so we're going to do what we have to do to prevent that

from occurring. And the President spoke yesterday about what our options are. He has very clearly indicated – as has Secretary Rice – we're in a diplomatic track. That's what we're focused on. We're going to try every avenue possible to make that work. And if that means meeting after meeting over the next couple of weeks – that's a good investment of our time, and we're willing to make that investment.

DANA LEWIS, FOX NEWS TV: What's your level of frustration with Russia? You're here in Moscow, you say to them, "Stop selling weapons," they continue selling weapons. You say, "Stop lending nuclear assistance," they continue on with that. Even though you have some sympathy from them in terms of their fear of Iran getting a nuclear weapon – or at least that's what they claim publicly – they don't change course. So what is your level of frustration and do you have any basis for some sort of new optimism that Russia's going to make a diplomatic move that will bring them more in parallel with the United States?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Maybe I'm just a glass-half-full, optimistic person, but on September 23rd, Russia abstained on the IAEA resolution. On February 4th, Russia voted for it. Russia then agreed to move the issue to the Security Council, and a lot of press thought Russia wouldn't agree to do that. Russia then agreed, after a very difficult negotiation, to a Presidential statement. So, we haven't given up. And this is hard work, but that's what diplomacy often is. And, if there's a better alternative out there, I'm sure you'll let us know what it is. What we said, a number of us last night, was we think that the best course of action now is through the Security Council. If any country around the table has a different proposal that could achieve the same purpose, we're willing to look at it. But it's got to achieve the purpose of denying Iran the capability to proceed on the enrichment plane/avenue because we don't want Iran to achieve the scientific and technological mastery of that process. And if you go from 164 centrifuges to 3,000 to 50,000, then they'll develop that expertise which will then give them the capacity to produce fissile material. We want to deny them that, and we're going to have to use a combination of carrots and sticks – now there's another important point. A lot of the countries around the table, with the exception of the United States, continue to meet with the Iranians and negotiate with them – there's a meeting going on right now. The Iranians sent a delegation here. We're not part of that meeting because we don't negotiate with the Iranians, but other countries do. Our advice to those countries that do negotiate with Iran is, you have to have a combination – a realistic policy – if you want to offer them carrots you also have to offer them – tell them – what the penalty's going to be if they don't respond. And the penalties can be any variety of things, including all the different sanctions ideas that have come out over the last couple of weeks publicly. Some countries are saying we should deny the ability of Iranian government officials to travel, or to maintain bank accounts and financial holdings overseas, or the export of dual-use technologies. And many others have proposed sanctions far more serious than that. And so it's developing that kind of sanctions package or actions that will be the test of whether or not this diplomacy can be effective.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: President Bush's comments yesterday... What President Bush himself said, he's said many times, but the question was different yesterday, it was about possible nuclear use. And so, is it a correct interpretation that by answering "all options are on the table" to the question that included the nuclear question, that he specifically failed to rule that out, meaning that it includes tactical nuclear use as among the options that exist there. Again, is it fair to interpret it that way as many did yesterday?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You know, I'm not in the habit of interpreting the President.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: But if it's not...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: ...he spoke for the United States government, and what he said was clear and very consistent with everything that he and we have said for many months.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: But it was in answer to a question that...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: You know I'm at a little bit of a disadvantage because I'm here and I actually didn't – I have not actually read the transcript – but he speaks for our government, and I'm not in a position, and I'm not going to be in a position, obviously, to deviate in any way, shape, or form from what the President said. He leads our government; he speaks for us.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: : Ok, so when he's asked....I don't myself know exactly what the question was...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I didn't see the question.

DAVID HOLLEY, LOS ANGELES TIMES: But anyway, the question involved the possibility of planning a nuclear strike, tactical nuclear weapons to deal with this problem...the State Department and the White House have not corrected or denied any of the interpretations that he really meant all options.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I think that if you look at what the President and Secretary Rice and a number of other officials have been saying for many months, it's this: that obviously the United States always keeps all options on the table – and no country is surprised by that, by the way – but we are focused on diplomacy. That's what the President said. I'm not in a position to interpret it or – he said what he said and we – of course he represents the United States government.

STEVEN MYERS, NEW YORK TIMES: (inaudible question about whether anyone in the meetings raised the issue or suggested that comments about possible military action against Iran were unhelpful?)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I'm trying to remember...from last night? The discussion? No one made such an objection. Some countries believe that there should be no use of force ever in this situation; other countries simply just didn't speak to it. But I think that all countries are aware of our policy and aware of our determination to convince the Iranians to turn back from their present course. So there's nothing new in American policy; we've been very consistent for the past 12 months.

Thank you.

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