Working Towards the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I’m going to say a few things in the beginning. It’s good to be back in India. It’s good to be back in Mumbai. It has been a little while since I’ve come here and I try to make myself, every time I come to India, go somewhere besides Delhi. I think there’s a tendency, if you only stay in meeting rooms in the capitals, to understand less about what’s really going on than if you get out at least to one other city. I’ve tried to do that. I am glad to be here in Mumbai. We all know this is a place of education and place of business and so I’ve taken some time today to meet the people in the business community, to meet people to talk about agriculture, talk about retail, talk about investment, infrastructure and these kind of issues that face India and try to understand those better. And also, I will get out to see a school and meet some students.

I will be heading up to Delhi on Monday and I guess I’d say my visit this time is part of the continuing effort of the United States and India to work towards the fulfillment of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement. As you all know, many of our colleagues, our diplomatic colleagues, both Indian and American, are now in Vienna working that part of it. I will be able to work with some people in Delhi to make sure we continue with the other pieces, to try to bring all the pieces together in September for our Congress to look at. We’ve got a lot of things to do, a lot of pieces to the package. The commitments are all there and now we’re trying to fulfill them all. That’s where we need to move forward and run all the pieces together. We’re looking to do that, and we’ll continue weekly and daily consultations and work with Indian government to try to bring all this to fruition.

Beyond the nuclear deal though, part of the reason I’m coming to India is to see all the topics in the relationship that we’ve got. This is an enormous and rapidly expanding relationship between the United States and India. More and more Indian students are going to the United States, 88,000 Indian students now. There are also all the investors and the Indian-American community. In addition, the business opportunities that people are finding in India are increasing; this includes our defense relationship. I am very positive and optimistic on the U.S.-India relationship in general and I am positive and optimistic on getting the nuclear deal finished. So, with that, I would be glad to take your questions.

MODERATOR: Please introduce yourself and your paper or your affiliation when you ask a question. Our newly arrived Consul General is here, as well. I think most of you must have met him earlier.

QUESTION: The nuclear deal appears to have met some roadblocks at the [Nuclear Suppliers Group] meeting. Do you visualize it will go through or it will be stalled?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think most of the countries that I have talked to and most of the countries we are hearing from in Vienna are basically positive on the deal. They understand the, sort of, big importance of having cooperation with India. They understand the benefits of having cooperation with India on nonproliferation matters. They understand the benefits of helping the Indian economy achieve its potential with clean energy. I have talked to skeptics. I have talked to countries that are raising questions and issues, but I think they are all basically positive. So I think the question is how we answer those issues that they have raised and how we answer their legitimate questions.

This is different, you have to understand, for the Nuclear Suppliers Group, for people in the Nonproliferation Treaty. This is different than the way we have done things before. It does raise a lot of questions. A lot of people, before they do something different, will be very careful on asking proper questions and doing a very thorough analysis. We shouldn’t look at that as opposition. We should look at that as a chance to explain this deal, to explain the implications, and to explain the benefits of the arrangement. I think India has done that in its meetings with the Nuclear Suppliers. We need to listen to them, to discuss how to go forward and to answer their concerns, but also to listen to them about how we can make happen.

QUESTION: How confident are you of seeing the guidelines of the NSG coming back in its same form, and do you envisage any changes being introduced at the NSG?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don’t know. There are countries that would like different kinds of changes to the text. Some of those may be acceptable, some may not. I think that’s where I said that we have to listen carefully. We have to answer their questions to the extent that we -- we meaning us and India together -- can sit down with what we hear in Vienna and discuss the way forward and maybe there are some things we can consider. But I think it’s got to be something that we do jointly, and not about considering things that would block the cooperation or impede the process going forward.

QUESTION: Most of the opposition seems to be coming from smaller countries like Norway and Ireland and so on. We heard yesterday that the U.S. is individually talking to some of these countries at Vienna. Is there any update on the specifics, whether there is any progress?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I don’t have individual updates from our team that is out there. I think, to say “smaller countries,” you know, is a fact. Frankly, this is not done on the basis of population. It’s not done on the basis of [Gross Domestic Product]. It is done on the basis of consensus. The Nuclear Suppliers has been a group that, whatever the size of the countries, it brings together a lot of countries that are very committed to nonproliferation in the world. They are very committed to the safety of all of us from nuclear proliferation. It is based on consensus and cooperation. It doesn’t matter how big or how small a country is. Their concerns are legitimate. Their commitment to nonproliferation is unquestionable. We need to work with them.

QUESTION: Any possibility that the deal will go?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Any possibility that it does go? Yes, if we get our work done. That’s the goal. The goal is to get it done.

QUESTION: What about roadblocks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don’t know if they are roadblocks but there are a lot of things to do. Let’s face it: we have to finish the work with the NSG, India has to finish the work that it has committed to in terms of adherence to the national export regimes and moving forward on the additional protocol. Go back to the communiqués and see all the commitments that have been made. India’s got to fulfill those things. Not more, but not less, as well. And so, there are those pieces to bring together. There’s the NSG piece to bring together. In the administration we have to do various studies, reports, and papers for our Congress, as we’re required under the Hyde Act. The more solid the package and the more solid the commitments, the easier it will be for us to go to Congress to say: "Now that we have got it to you, can’t you find a way to move forward?" Even there we’re asking for expedient handling. We’ve got expedient handling from the Atomic Energy [Agency]. We’re hoping to get expedient handling from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. If we get the package together, we look for expedients handling from our Congress, as well.

QUESTION: You’re looking at a date from the 8th of September?

http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/2008/108865.htm

8/26/2008
ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That’s the date the Congress comes back into session. We’d like to have it for them on the first day of their session. We’ll see with timing, and again, it is a matter of bringing all these pieces together. We have to have the full package, solid, and all wrapped up in a bow.

QUESTION: What’s your Plan B?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Plan B is to do Plan A. Our goal is to move this whole thing forward. It is intellectually a product of different administrations in the U.S. and in India. Certainly we would like to fulfill it. We would like to finish this under President Bush and Prime Minister Singh because both of them had so much to do getting it this far. If we don’t, we will just keep doing it. It is good for India, it is good for the United States, good for the nonproliferation regime and we figured its good next year, as well as this year. But let’s try to get it done this year.

QUESTION: What will be the nature of the next parliament in India: single-party rule or multi-party rule?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I have no idea (laughter).

QUESTION: Is the new government bound by this agreement?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Governments are bound by what they do. If the country signs an agreement then the future governments are bound by it.

QUESTION: Why I am asking this question is...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You mean if a new government comes in before we finish signing this agreement then, in theory on either side, one can try to reopen it. That’s happened before in other circumstances. I think it’s not something we would like to see on either side. That’s why it is better to get it done this year.

QUESTION: No, why I am asking this… it is such an important deal like this, it has to be debated in the Indian parliament and it is going to the American Congress.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let’s be honest about this. We’ve got a whole lot of discussions in the Indian Parliament and in between the parties. We’ve said India showed a great respect for our democratic procedures as we moved through to get the Hyde Act to pass. It is understood that we have to go back to our Congress under our democratic procedures. We have had the same respect for India’s democratic procedures as India has worked its way through its parliamentary issues. It is better for us not to speculate on that or interfere. The Indian government will handle its democratic procedures and we will handle ours.

QUESTION: Ambassador, there was a stage where, you were probably aware, that there was a feeling in the U.S. that the deal was jeopardy partly because of our own political compulsions here in India. Was there an apprehension at that time among all of you in the United States? And how were you viewing those developments?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We were watching with great fascination. We learned a lot of Indian democracy, we learned a lot about Indian politics. We are not Indian politicians and we have to respect India’s democratic process. We saw it play itself out, luckily, with a good result.

QUESTION: And also the bags of currency notes shown in the Parliament?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I said we watched with great fascination (laughter).

QUESTION: The Indian government took a huge risk for this agreement.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It’s a good agreement. It’s a good deal for India. It’s a good deal for India in terms of not just the economic growth and the energy opportunities, but in terms of India’s relationship with the rest of the world. This brings forward a sort of a new opportunity for India across the board and a new position for India in the international community, as a cooperating partner in some of the most sensitive, but also some of the most important issues. Establishing India in this position in the world is very important. So, it is a big deal. It’s a big deal for us, and it’s a big deal for India, so it’s worth it on both sides. Both sides have shown a certain amount of political work.

QUESTION: [Inaudible].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: What?

QUESTION: Now the ball is in the U.S. court?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: For the moment the ball is in everybody’s court. It’s in our court to go to the Congress. It’s in India’s court to fulfill its commitments from the communiqués. It is in the hands of all the governments in the Nuclear Suppliers Group to review it expeditiously. We hope to get their consent.

QUESTION: Once the nuclear deal is cleared, do you think the next step will be towards forging a strategic alliance between America and India?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it’s a question I can’t answer completely at this point, probably for the reasons you were hinting at before. We are likely to have a new administration as we have an election in the United States. There are going to be elections in India. It is now going to go to the next government in both countries to decide where to go from there.

On the other hand, just as we went logically from Bill Clinton’s time to George Bush’s, and from Prime Minister Vajpayee’s time to Prime Minister Singh, and continued the progress. The next steps with the U.S. and India? There are many opportunities. The fact that India is taking more of a global role, that India is becoming a major aid donor, for example, in Afghanistan and Africa, and that India is becoming a bigger economic player both for investments and for imports, these open new opportunities, and opportunities to work with India on global scale. Opportunities to look at our involvement with each other are increasing in depth and scope for each of our economies. This includes, for example, investment back and forth, people back and forth, and technology back and forth. So, I think there is a whole new dimension of relationship that will result in the coming years between the United States and India. This is an opportunity, both to deepen our own ties but also to expand our global cooperation.

QUESTION: Let’s come back to the NSG, and you were saying that India would have to accept that there may be a need for changes in the draft. Again, from what everyone is learning from the negotiations, India seems somewhat rooted in these changes by some of these countries. Do you anticipate a problem in any ways because you’re sort of seen as shepherding India through the NSG?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That’s because we are. That’s because we are members of [the Nuclear Suppliers Group]. As I said before, none of us want to see anything that impedes cooperation or blocks cooperation. I do think that countries are going to express themselves in the meeting and maybe the terms of what they would like to see in the document. To a great extent we are just going to have to work this through. We in India and the United States have to sit down and decide what we can accommodate, and what we can’t. We have to talk to the other governments involved. Part of that process is going on right now in Vienna. I think, therefore, it’s important that the Indian government sat down with members of the group and talked about how they see it from their perspective so people get a clear understanding of the Indian point of view.
We are pushing for what we call “a clean exception.” We are pushing for the text that we submitted. We are trying to push for, trying to get people to understand, that their questions have answers and that they don’t need to try to write everything into the text they might have ever thought about this. We will see if we can come out with that clean text we would like to.

QUESTION: And there are concerns by countries that would raise the NPT question again and again and making the exception for India.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This is an exception. There has to be a certain logic to it. If you are making an exception, you can’t say that they have to meet the rules if they are making the exceptions. Some of these things people understand we can’t do in this. We can’t change everything about India’s history by having a resolution in the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There are some things that probably everybody knows will not fly. We will listen to the questions and hopefully answer the questions, and will be able to move forward.

QUESTION: One of your citizens, Kenneth Haywood, has caused enormous embarrassment to the Indian police by fleeing even as he was in the investigations regarding the Ahmadabad serial blasts are concerned. Would you care to comment on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. I don’t know the details of it, so I am not going to comment on it. It’s an individual personal case and a judicial matter for India. This is the way I read it in the papers but I didn’t quite read it in the way you just explained.

QUESTION: Just to come back, are there any specifics in terms of changes that you see already coming up, out of whatever has happened so far?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I don’t. I think it’s too early to say that. As I said, we are going to push for a clean exception. Things come up that might be accommodated and then we might have to sit down with India and work through some of that stuff and see what’s possible and what’s not. But as I said, we are not going to allow anything that will impede or harm the cooperation; we are not going to put anything in it that’s going to make it impossible to carry out the deal on either side.

We’re not going to put in anything that changes the terms of the agreement as far as we’re concerned. We reached an agreement with India. It’s been public. It’s been known through the communiqués, through the statements. That’s the deal. That’s what you’ve got to say “yes” or “no” to.

QUESTION: Would you like to comment on the current developments in Kashmir. There is a lot of violence, and the former Pakistani President has raised it in an international forum. Do you want to comment on this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think I won’t comment on the internal matters in Kashmir. Those are questions that the Indian government and the people of the region are going to have to deal with. I think the one thing from the point of view of the United States is that over the last several years there has been significant progress in terms of understanding the situation, in terms of how understanding how it might be resolved — confidence building measures, lessening of tensions back and forth between India and Pakistan. Our hope, on both sides, is to see that this process continues. We have discussed with Prime Minister Gillani, when he was in Washington, our desire to see this process and intentions continue. We heard from the Pakistani government their desire to continue. I think we’ve heard the same from India. Without commenting on the specific events we might see — the overall process of reducing the overall tensions between India and Pakistan and moving towards a solution to the Kashmir issue — we’d like to see this process continue.

QUESTION: Would you like to comment on the current developments in Kashmir. There is a lot of violence, and the former Pakistani President has raised it in an international forum. Do you want to comment on this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Ambassador, you are here in Mumbai and shortly after the blasts here in Mumbai two years ago, India had specifically pointed towards Pakistan and said Pakistan was behind the blasts. You were quoted, or misquoted, that there wasn’t enough evidence of that. Is there a growing view now in the U.S. of a shift as far as Pakistan is concerned? It is as if Pakistan and the regime in Pakistan [inaudible] to give support to terrorism. Do you see a decrease in this or is it still very unclear?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There have been a lot of charges — sometimes its working, sometimes its not. What I think is clear, at least on the newly-elected government side, is that there is a determination to deal with the problem of terrorism. There is a determination to use every part of the government to fight the problem of terrorism — that means not just military and law enforcement matters but also development, education, economics, opening up the Tribal Areas to more integration economically in the area. There is a determination there to deal with the problem. They are still getting organized in terms of getting control of all the apparatus, of being able to line up the policy in a very clear and succinct way. What we’ve heard is a determination to deal with the problem of terrorism. Exactly who’s behind what probably varies from case to case. Whether certain people or organizations are involved with terrorist acts isn’t something that any of us can count on. At the same time, what I hear from the new Pakistani government is that they are determined to deal with terrorism and address it much more forthrightly.

QUESTION: What about General Musharraf? Is he headed your way?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: He’s no longer president. I have no idea where he’s headed. He’s a free man. He’s unencumbered by job and by constraints. He can go where he wants.

QUESTION: The problem is Pakistan’s total disregard for a democratically elected government. That [Inter-Services Intelligence] is calling the shots and no one has any authority to reign in the ISI, that is why it is a front organization the ISI.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I do think that every piece of national power has to be lined up in the same direction. If any organization is not pulling its full weight in fighting terrorism then authorities need to deal with that. I do think that a lot of the terrorist attacks have a variety of different groups and organizations. There were very different people involved. We’re not going to get anywhere dealing with the wrong one. We have to deal with all the parts and we have to use all the tools of government to get at it.

QUESTION: I can go on asking questions...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay, let’s do one or two more. I’m happy to do one or two more and we’ll call it quits.

QUESTION: I just…sort of to wrap on the energy, just to understand, what you are saying is that India will have to accept that that there may be changes to the text, but as long as it does not violate the spirit of the text, the changes may be inevitable. Is that what you...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don’t want to say “inevitable” at this point. I don’t want to lie to you. I can’t rule out that there might be some changes that we could accept. What I can tell you today is that we are pushing for a clean exception. We are trying to listen to the other countries and answer their questions, just as India is trying to answer their questions. We think these questions are good questions; we think they have good answers. We don’t see any reason for any changes. We do have to listen to countries and, if there is…if it comes down to it, if we think something might be done that’s acceptable and that we and India could agree to, then we’ll do it. Otherwise I think we’ll just have to keep answering questions and keep pushing for a clean exception.

QUESTION: Could you tell us a little bit about your meetings in Delhi?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some of the key players are still traveling so I’m not going to see everybody. I’m going to see some of the people at the Ministry of External Affairs, some of the key people in the Prime Minister’s office, and the virtue of going to Delhi is that I can see a lot of people throughout and see commentators, smart guys, think tankers, people like that, and just get a better feel for the atmosphere as well as the specific issues. I look forward to probably seeing some parliamentarians, business people.
QUESTION: Largely linked to the nuclear deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Largely linked to the U.S.-India relationship. The nuclear deal is on everybody’s mind. I was meeting with some business people and that was the first thing they wanted to ask about – not the only thing but the first thing. I would expect whether it is business people, MEA people, or parliamentarians, that will be a big part of our discussion. Part of the reason to come to India is to have the official discussions with Indian representatives about the nuclear deal and the different pieces and what’s going on around the world, including Washington. I get a better feel for this and the range of opinions and different angles and aspects by coming to India. So the goal is to talk to a lot of different kinds of people.

QUESTION: Some persons who have been designated as terrorists by the American State Department, they are still roaming about freely in Pakistan. Why is no effort being done to tackle these guys?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: They haven’t been caught.

QUESTION: Not been caught? Like who?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some of the people we have on our terrorist list. We haven’t caught Osama Bin Laden yet. There’s continuing efforts to catch these guys. There are a lot of dangerous people in India. There are dangerous people on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Believe you me, we’re at it; the Pakistanis are at it; the Afghan are at it. The goal has to be to stop the phenomenon of terrorism, to get all these people. Also the goal has to be to develop these areas and to bring them into the rest of the country and to make them more settled and established in government.

QUESTION: The person who is classified as most dreaded is Daoud Khaskar and he’s still available on the list. I can call him right now.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I’d rather not, thank you. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Here’s this man, roaming the world freely.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don’t have anything specific on this man. I don’t know where he is. I don’t know why he’s not been caught. I think the real issue is that you have to get at the real phenomenon of terrorism. We’re working with the Pakistanis to stop terrorism; we’re working with the Afghans to stop terrorism; we’re working with the Indian government, the Bangladeshis and all governments in the region because it affects us all and we all have to understand this and we all have to go after it, not just with police and law enforcement and military means but with education. All the pieces together can establish a more settled state and a more healthy society.

QUESTION: India’s relationship with China appears to be slowly nose-diving. Would you like to comment on this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Not particularly. We are interested in seeing good relations between India and China, as anyone is. We have good relations with China; we have good relations with India; and we’d like to see them get along, too.

QUESTION: Are you in town for a couple days?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, and a couple of days in Delhi.

QUESTION: How is the U.S. going to help contain the expanding terrorism?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The first thing we do is talk about it. We go back and forth, we have consultations with India on terrorism. We and India are both very concerned about terrorism and are pained about the blasts, the attacks that occurred in India. Wherever there’s an opportunity to cooperate, we will. A lot of that means sitting down and talking about how it is manifesting itself, how it is expanding, and what these groups are up to, sharing information.

MODERATOR: Any other questions?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Do you agree to this expression “Islamist terrorist?”

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Terror is terror wherever it comes from, whatever its reasons are. There are some people who try to wrap themselves under the cover of Islam to commit terrorist acts. Basically, they are terrorists and most of the Muslims I know say that they are not very Islamic, and not following the principals that most of the Muslims that I know say they follow in their religion. So, no, I don’t think it is a subcategory, it’s not a definition.

QUESTION: Why aren’t you doing any TV interviews here in Bombay?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I guess I’m going to do some TV in New Delhi.

QUESTION: That’s unfair.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, I know. I’m going to be here a few days, seeing friends, seeing Bombay.

QUESTION: Who stands to win -- Obama or McCain?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, I predict it is going to be Obama or McCain, but I can’t narrow it down farther than that.

QUESTION: Can we attribute this all to you?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, you can. Or you can attribute it to him [Consul General Paul Folmsbee] if it sounds smart.

Thank you very much. Good to see you.