

Interactive Session with
Nicholas Burns
Professor, Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics,
Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and
Former Undersecretary of Political Affairs, US Department of State

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Aspen Institute India, taking forward the US India Strategic Dialog under the Indian Strategy Group, organized an Interactive Session with Nicholas Burns, Professor, Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and Former Under Secretary of Political Affairs, US Department of State on 21 August 2009 in New Delhi.

Nick Burns made insightful observations about the future of India-US relations, demonstrating that India is one of the top 2 or 3 important relationships for the USA. The visit of Prime Minister Singh in November 2009 at the invitation of President Obama will be the first official State visit and is a symbolic gesture in all its might.

This is a dynamic time for both countries, who cannot afford to be isolationist or unilateralist in nature. Complex challenges confronting the world are climate change, terrorism, global economic recession, trafficking of women and children, and pandemics among others. India and the US share a common strategic interest, more than any other 2 countries in the world, be it pertaining to the South Asian region or the world. Both countries must work towards overcoming their historical and ideological differences to build a stronger partnership.

Some of the major challenges facing us today include climate change, counter terrorism, trafficking of women and children and pandemics. Last 10 years has been a period of dramatic growth. From 1947 to the 1990's, the bilateral relationship was largely neutral. It started softening during the engagement initiated by President Clinton's with India's BJP government and then evolved to a new level under President Bush and India's Congress-led government. The strategic partnership with India has seen consistent strengthening and both sides are committed to work together in overcoming bilateral and global challenges.

It was not the governments that led the way to this strategic partnership; the exchange between the business community, Indian students studying in USA, the cultural exchange had created deep linkages, to which the governments had to play 'catch up'.

The Nuclear Deal between the two governments is a big sign of our engagement at that level. While there were complex and frustrating differences during the signing of the nuclear deal, the major point of contention eventually became a "unifying factor" and marked a growing sense of trust.

In terms of the strategic balance of power, US-India interests are largely aligned. Both want to engage productively with China. Rise of the US-India relationship has been the most important positive change and the US, which was until now, most focused on understanding and engaging with Europe, has turned its attention to South Asia, East

Asia and the Middle East. Issues in the region are plenty: Iraq is going through the throes of its own revolution, there is a possibility of an impending catastrophe in Pakistan, the resurgence of terror outfits in Afghanistan, and China's political instability causes it to balance on the brink of economic instability. It seems that the only stable democracy playing a constructive role globally is India.

India and the US have differing points of view on:

- **Climate Change-** India has made it clear that it will not accept legally binding carbon emissions reduction targets, though India is fully committed to finding solutions in fighting climate change. India is proactively taking steps to develop green technologies and has also announced a National Action Plan on Climate Change addressing significant aspects. An agreement out of Copenhagen does not seem realistic.
- **Trade:** The Doha Development round was stalled earlier, essentially because the US and India could not work effectively with each other. Both countries need to communicate more with each other.
- **Nuclear issues:** Differences will arise if a new regime of non proliferation is introduced or issues over the CTBT.

In any relationship, the challenge is how to manage expectations and disagreements.

However, there are many areas, which can be positive forces as strong pillars of our relationship:

- **Counter Terrorism:** Both US and India have been victims of terror and both have strong learning to draw from each other. Both can collaborate and work on building a stronger security shield for the world.
- **Military:** The India US defense relationship has grown stronger over the last few years. Routine visits are done by defense counterparts as they engage in joint military exercises. Both countries can build on deepening the relationship.
- **Agriculture:** Universities and research institutions can collaborate in ushering a second green revolution in India. The joint Indo-US Agriculture Knowledge Initiative (AKI), though a great concept, was not utilized very effectively. Perhaps the two countries can recompose the structure of the joint dialog and explore one more time.
- **Green Technologies:** It cannot be assumed any more that India will be a perpetual receiver of technology. Both countries can jointly engage in research and development to create green technologies for reducing global carbon footprint.

Prime Minister Singh, as a universally respected and trusted leader, has enhanced India's image positively in the world. President Obama has showed deep respect and presented US-India relationship as a "respect of equals". Under their leadership, the partnership can evolve to a higher level.