



ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

India & US: Building a Virtual Highway

R. Nicholas Burns, Former Under Secretary, US Department of State, currently Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics, Kennedy School of Government and **Shashi Tharoor**, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, join Aspen Institute President **Tarun Das** for an exploration of the future of US-India relationship. The following are excerpts from their remarks and some of the audience questions that followed.



Tarun Das: India and US, the future: One of the men who built the present- Nick Burns. He has been with Aspen India before. This is his second time. We miss him at the official level during the India-US talks. But, he is leading our Track-2 as part of the Aspen Strategy Group, with us. This is US week for India. There are people like Richard Holbrooke & Mike Mullen etc are visiting. Nick has played a huge part in the bilateral relationship. He has also consulted extensively. Nick, let's start with your remarks on Indo-US relationship and then we will have Shashi's comments.

Nicholas Burns: The development of our strategic partnership over the last 10 to 15 years is one of the most significant geo-political events of the beginning of the 21st century. India and USA will be two countries among the 3-4 countries that will be global powers, globally oriented, globally capable, globally interested- politically, economically, militarily. China will, too. We shall be strategic partners. We shall be together for global peace, global security, and global development. There are not many countries that have the capacity to act globally and have a combined interest, an intersection of those interests and a combined will, to act together. And that's why I think the development of this relationship is profoundly important for the future. President Obama is very interested and it is a misguided view that the President is slow on India. His foreign policy has been the most difficult since Franklin Roosevelt's third term as the President. He has had difficult times- recession, two wars and a rebellious, recalcitrant Korean government and equally incendiary Tehran govt. If India was not always on top of the agenda it's understandable. If America has appointed a special envoy to Pakistan it is because India is not in crisis. India is the greatest democracy. At this time of transition US needs the same level of ambition from India.

It is important to define strategic partnership as US needs to understand India, since India is unique by its size, by its great ideals on which it has been built. India needs to shoulder its responsibility about Global peace. USA and India should be partners in counter-terrorism. I think US and India should be military partners and not just allies. We should train together. The best way to show peace for democratic countries is to show they are strong. We should have a degree of inter-dependence and have a degree of confluence. India and US should work together for issues related to women, co-operate in Green technology and there should be a concentrated effort in making the 21st century a lot less like the 20th century. G-8 is of the world of 1970S. G-20 is the power structure of 2010. G-20 is the world of this millennium. Without India and China, without Indonesia and Turkey and Brazil & Saudi Arabia in the room we can't manage Global Recession. The UN Security Council is the power structure of September 1945 and so I hope that US will say quite clearly that India should become permanent member of the UNSC. Japan and Brazil and an African country should be represented at the Security Council. How can an entire continent be unrepresented in the Security Council?

I am optimistic, we have come so far since 1991 and we have much farther to go.

Shashi Tharoor: It's extremely difficult to comment on somebody you can't really disagree with. Nick's remarks were comprehensive, insightful, and as far as I am concerned absolutely on the button. This is broadly speaking the vision that I and dare say others in Delhi share about the future of our relationship.

People to people relation with USA have always been good- even in the bad phase. In fact I have written before and argued that the Indian Diaspora is India's biggest strategic asset in US because there is no doubt that they have become economically and politically influential but, it's also true that they are willing to exercise their clout in defense of Indian interests in the world. Many Indian-Americans have used their access at high-political levels in the US to advance the interests of India or at least forestall policies that might have been seen inimical to India. I dare say that influence of Indian Diaspora is going to add a domestic reason to why US foreign policy in the world will take account of India in a way that it will not do for other countries.

If I had to pick up any problem areas, I would say that one remains the continuing presence in influential American circles (bureaucratic/public opinion making circles/op-ed writing circles) of what in India disparagingly dubbed the non-proliferation Ayatollahs. Non-proliferation treaty is about the closest thing we have got to apartheid, in surviving the international-affairs, a notion that there is something that only small group of countries are entitled to have and nobody else can, irrespective of what other factors might qualify them to develop the same technology and capacities. This notion, sadly, has been internalized by certain constituent elite in Washington, thus projecting an irritant in the relationship and I dare say some of it is present in American officialdom, which needs to be paid attention to. Secondly, those who persist on seeing India through the prism of other relationships in which there are particularly two relationships. Number one is the consciousness of relationship with China. Although, the talk that India would act as a counter-weight to China, never advanced to a senior-political level but was widely talked about- is not well received in India as India takes itself very seriously as an autonomous actor in world-affairs and can't see serving as a counter-weight for a third party. And that notion that India should fit into a paradigm that has been devised in Washington to contain a rising China is not welcome here and is not the way Indians would like to see itself in relationship with US. The more dangerous hyphenation is with Pakistan. And there I think we have some genuine lingering problems. It is understandable that America's priority is Pakistan right now, owing to its troops deployed in Afghanistan but if that priority translates itself to even a relative degree of inattention to India's concerns about Pakistan most notably about counter-terrorism, then those would be legitimate grounds for questioning.

Question from the Audience:

Nick, what do you perceive as the major internal discrepancies in India- Left wing extremism, unemployable educated, secessionism, extreme economic inequality, which could block or at least reduce speed of your special relationship with India?

Nick Burns: I see nothing happening inside India that will impede strategic partnership with United States, but I am very sympathetic to the challenges of poverty elimination. And I would like to believe that my country will be helpful in another Green Revolution in India. India faces a major problem with the Naxalites and this problem has gone under-reported in Western Press and this is a tremendous challenge that no other democracy faces.

Question from the Audience:

A real impediment in the growth of our relationship is the United States' strategic partnership- not with Pakistan, but with Pakistan's army, which is a rogue army, war-mongering army and what Washington has done is pouring money and arms, which has again led to the separation of civil society in Pakistan. What do you plan to do about it?

Nick Burns: I don't see an alternative to a strong US Govt. relationship with Pakistan, because we live in a very imperfect world. Pakistan has a very weak civil leadership, a high degree of corruption, doesn't control most of its territory, exports terrorism and sometimes unfortunately, exports nuclear technology. So, one alternative is to walk away in objection and isolate them and sanction them. We have tried sanctioning Pakistan for many decades. The other alternative is there are good people in that Govt. who want Pakistan to be a better neighbor in this part of the world. I think that the decision President Bush and President Obama had made to give economic and military assistance is the right one. Having said that obviously Pakistan must do much more to shut down terrorist channels that emanate from its country and I am fully sympathetic to that. I see a contradiction but we live in a highly imperfect world and so we make this difficult choice and I think it's the right one.

