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## Interview With Kambiz Tavana of Radio Farda

### R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Washington, DC

August 20, 2007

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much for being with us. Just to start to my questions right away, I know you have a tight schedule to go through, Mr. Burns, the first question of mine is, what is the essence of timing in recent talks on ambassador levels between Iran and United States on Iraq issue, having in mind that recently, they had the announcement that there might be a possibility for the United States putting the IRGC, Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps, on their terrorist list? Could you please tell me, what is the essence of timing now after 27 years?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I'm not quite sure I understand the question. Are you -- does the timing refer to our discussions in Iraq?

**QUESTION:** The talking with the Iranian side and ambassador level and Iraq issues, it's the first official talking between two sides after around 27 years. With this current government and Iran -- specific relationship that they have at international level, according to the nuclear plans, everything that relates to -- what is this essence of timing of talking with them right now? Why not sooner? I mean, why now?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, we made the decision that we would have discussions with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, with our ambassador, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, for the simple reason that we think that Iran has been deficient in doing what they should be doing to limit and prevent terrorism and to play a more positive role in trying to help the Iraqi Government to deal with the many problems that they have.

For instance, as you know, we do believe that Iran has been supplying sophisticated explosive technology to Shia militant groups and those Shia militant groups have, in turn, used that technology against American soldiers. President Bush has talked about this and we're very concerned about it. And so we want the Iranians to know directly from us that they have to stop such measures. We also want the Iranian Government to act to prevent the type of violence and terrorism that has happened in Iraq, some of which comes right across the border, terrorist groups from Iran.

And so there's a big agenda. It is focused on security. It is focused on trying to make Iraq a more peaceful country and that's why we've had the limited number of meetings that we've had. Our problems with Iran extend well beyond Iraq. Of course, most of the world believes that Iran is trying to create a nuclear weapons capability through its nuclear research and its plant at Natanz. The world is united against that. There have been two Security Council resolutions, Chapter 7s that passed in New York over the last year that have put sanctions on Iran.

Iran is now one of the few countries in the world that has Chapter 7 sanctions placed upon it. And that is a very serious problem, indeed, and we are looking for the Iranian Government to stop its nuclear research and to engage instead in negotiations with the United States and Russia and China and the European countries as we've offered to do, but Iran has turned down those negotiations. So the nuclear issue is also an abiding concern of ours.

And finally, we're concerned by the fact that Iran seems to be arming and funding most of the terrorist groups in the Middle East that are the reason why there is no peace in the Middle East, including Hezbollah and Hamas and the Shia militants. And so there are a number of problems between the United States and Iran and I thought I should give you that more comprehensive answer.

**QUESTION:** Why do you think that Iran will cooperate now?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, we don't know if Iran will cooperate. We're testing that proposition. What we have told the Iranian Government in Baghdad is that we're looking not just for nice words; we're looking for actions by the Iranian Government to do what it must do to play a peaceful role, a role for peace in Iraq itself and we will judge the Iranians accordingly.

On the nuclear issue, we're looking for action to suspend the research underway at Natanz on centrifuges. You know, we see that the Iranians now are willing to talk to the IAEA and to finally, after two or three years, answer the questions they should have answered all along about the Arak heavy water reactor, about P2 centrifuge research, about getting the IAEA inspectors fully back into Iran. But that's not going to be sufficient. Even if Iran announces some kind of willingness to work with the IAEA, that's just announcing a willingness to answer questions that they've refused to answer for several years.

The real indicator will be, is Iran willing to suspend its nuclear operations at Natanz, and if it's not willing, then we're going to need to go forward with a third sanctions resolution at the Security Council and rather soon. And no matter what they do with the IAEA, that still is not going to prevent them from -- prevent us from pursuing a third Security Council resolution because Iran has not suspended its enrichment activities at Natanz and that's the crucial factor here.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Burns, if there is any point of agreement between Iran and United States on Iraq issues, is United States ready to give something to Iran in return? And if so, what kind of deal might work in between?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** No, we're not talking about any kind of deal. We're not talking about a quid pro quo. Iran is a country that needs to make more of an effort to support peace in Iraq, to help the Iraqi politicians in the cabinet to come together, to help unite the Shia and the Sunni and the Kurd. Iran is not doing that. Iran needs to make a greater effort to help subdue the terrorist groups in the Shia communities. It's not doing that. And so we're not going to reward a country for doing something that it should have done all along.

**QUESTION:** So what is the meaning of the -- designating the IRGC, the Iranian -- Islamic Republic -- Revolutionary Guards Corps to the terrorist group?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, I just have no comment on that. The State Department spokesman, when asked last week, said he wouldn't possibly comment on that, on an action that had not yet been taken by the United States Government. So I have no comment to make.

**QUESTION:** You said that United States, right, to tell Iran the issues that needs to be worked out inside Iraq and asked them for more cooperation -- at the same time, just told now that there was no deal, no quid pro quo. So what is it in Iranian -- does this negotiation mean they just have to cooperate with that or they have these alternatives to come up and ask for something in return?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** You know, one would think that Iran would have an interest in a stable and more peaceful Iraq. Iran is a neighbor of Iraq. Iran should not want to see Iraq further destabilized. And so we are asking the Iranian Government to do a better job of closing down the routes the terrorists take to cross from Iran into Iraq and to do a better job and make a greater effort to try to help those in the Iraqi Government who are trying to stabilize the country. And that's the agenda; it's security and that's what we've said all along as we've agreed to open -- to have these few discussions with the Iranian Government on the subject of Iraq.

But I think that I want to go back to two of the other issues that I mentioned and that -- those are that Iran needs to understand that the world is going to be increasingly unified against this attempt to create a nuclear weapons capability. Now we are not trying to deny the Iranian people the right of peaceful civil nuclear energy. Every people needs that, especially these days when the price of fossil fuels are so expensive and when there are so many concerns about global climate change.

We offered -- the United States, Europe and Russia and China -- to actually help build a civil nuclear power industry in Iran and we thought that would be a way to answer the concerns that the Iranian people have, which are quite legitimate, for further electricity production that will help their economy and help them in their daily lives. But we're not going to give up our effort to convince the Iranian authorities that they should stop their nuclear research designed to produce a nuclear weapons capability.

That would be fundamentally destabilizing in the Middle East, the whole world is against it, and Iranians listening to Radio Farda should know that countries such as India and Egypt and Indonesia and South Africa and Brazil have all voted for sanctions against Iran, because the whole world fears that Iran is going to try to create nuclear weapons capability. And that will be a very negative development for the balance of power in the Middle East and a very negative development for Iran itself and for the Iranian people. So we want the Iranian people to know that we wish -- we have no argument against the people of Iran.

We understand the need for a nuclear power in Iran and our proposal that the P-5 countries -- that's Russia, China, the United States and Europe -- the proposal that we continue to make to Dr. Larijani through Javier Solana is that we want to have a negotiation. We want to talk to the Iranians. We want to resolve this through peaceful diplomatic means and we're willing to see the creation of civil nuclear power, but not nuclear weapons and that's the crucial distinction.

The Iranian Government, of course, tells its own people that the United States and other countries are trying to deny civil nuclear power to Iran. That is not true. If you read our proposal at our website -- you can go to the State Department website or the Russian Government's website and read our proposal -- is to create civil nuclear power. And I wanted to emphasize that point for your listeners today.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Burns, Thank you very much for your time. I just have one last question to ask.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Does -- about the 75 million budget on the spreading of democracy in Iran, what does U.S. hope to get from this plan?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, the United States, of course, understands that Iran is a country where people have different views about the government. We know that people desire freedom, we know that people want not to have a government that subjugates them, that puts so many artists and intellectuals and journalists in prison, but wants to see a greater measure of freedom in the country and democratic rights like all people. And so we hope very much that the Iranian people will have that kind of future. In the meantime, we're using the monies appropriated by Congress for several things. First, we strengthen Radio Farda. It's on the air now more frequently than it was before and we believe that Radio Farda is a place of independent objective news that the Iranian people can turn to.

We have tried to strengthen our ability to have Voice of American and RFE television into Iran itself and that's important. We are trying very hard to bring Iranians to the United States, so that we can get -- our peoples can get to know each other. We'd like to see more Iranian students at our universities. We have helped to bring disaster relief experts from Iran to visit their counterparts in the United States, health professionals. We'd like to see more of -- we've brought artists to the United States. We'd like to see more of that kind of exchange.

The American national wrestling team traveled to Iran over the winter and it competed in a major wrestling tournament. And so we'd like to try to break down the barriers between the Iranian people and the American people -- see much more in the way of exchanges and some of the money that we've received from Congress goes towards that as well. And so we hope these can be successful programs and we hope the people of Iran listening to Radio Farda would understand just how interested Americans are in Iran and how we wish the Iranian people well and we just wish the Iranian Government would have a more sensible policy, when it comes to the nuclear issue, to the issue of Iranian Government support for terrorism. That's a big problem.

Iran is funding Hezbollah and sending weapons to Hezbollah. Iran is funding and sending weapons to the Shia militant groups -- the Shia terrorist groups in Iraq. And of course, Iran is giving major assistance to Hamas. In each case, Iran is funding groups that practice terrorism. And this is destabilizing to the Middle East region. It's being opposed by nearly every country in the region. I think that the result is that the Arab countries worry about Iran's policy in the region. And that's certainly true of Europe, it's certainly true of the United States. We would like to see a more peaceful policy of the Iranian Government. We'd like to see them stop funding terrorist groups and sending arms to terrorist groups.

I don't know if your listeners are aware, but in the second Security Council resolution, a Chapter 7 resolution passed by the Security Council by unanimous 15-0 vote on March 24th of 2007, the Security Council ruled that Iran cannot

transfer weapons to any country outside Iran and yet Iran continues to do this in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in Gaza. And it's a great problem and it is, I think, unifying Arab countries against Iran. And I just hope that the Iranian people know that their government is doing this because it's very destabilizing and very negative for the efforts of all those who want to bring peace to the Middle East. So it's very important, I think, that the Iranian people have objective news and I just wanted to pay a tribute to Radio Farda, to its editors and its journalists for the outstanding work that they are doing in the cause of peace and the cause of progress in this region.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Burns, thank you very much. I know you have a very tight schedule to go to, but I could add one more minute?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Burns, I'm just asking this question because the issue of talking between Iran and the United States on Iraq issues on ambassador level is so censored and tightened inside Iran. People really would like to know if there is something good coming out of these negotiations, if this means that the two countries are going to achieve a normal level of the -- of relation with each other, does this mean that the pressure, international pressure, would ease off? At the same, the government inside Iran just maneuvers all the time that Americans just ask us -- came to us desperately that we need some help in Iraq.

So the thing is for the Iranian people who really have no access to open discussions on these things, does this negotiation mean that we are offering you to the Iranians, the America -- the United States offers Iran a better path of having a relationship -- further relationship is more peaceful than the war or are you just telling them the exact thing they shouldn't do and they should do? And if there is really coming out of it? At the same time, they don't know if there is some discussion between two countries going on, why at the same time, United States remains very critic on Iranian attitudes and what they do?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, I would say this. We're going to have to judge the Iranian Government by what they do, not what they say. And I cannot envision a normal relationship between our governments until many things have changed. Iran must stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons, it must stop its funding of terrorist groups in the Middle East. And it certainly must play a more peaceful and constructive role in Iraq itself.

So the channel we've opened up that night that the Iranian people should know about is that our United States Ambassador in Iraq and the Iranian Ambassador in Iraq have met several times. We have asked the Iranian Government to play a more peaceful role to stop the funding of terrorist groups. We will judge the Iranian Government on whether they do that or not. So we still have a relationship that is extraordinarily difficult. We don't have a normal relationship. We don't have an embassy -- an American Embassy. As you know, we haven't had one there for 27 years. And there's very little contact between the two countries.

But I think the Iranian people listening to this should know just how isolated their government is in the world over the nuclear weapons issue and over the terrorism issue. And you now have most of the nonaligned countries that have been leading the nonaligned movement since the 1950s have now taken positions publicly contrary to Iran to sanction Iran. I think the Iranian people need to know this -- when India and Brazil and South Africa and Egypt and Indonesia all vote to sanction Iran, then you know that the Iranian Government has gone in the wrong direction. And the Iranian people should know just how much shame, frankly, the Iranian Government has brought upon the nation by these terribly

destructive policies that have been put into place. But I wanted to thank Radio Farda and I thank you for the opportunity to be with you. It's a great pleasure to be with you and I wish everyone of Radio Farda the best of success.

**QUESTION:** Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, thank you very much for being with us.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Thank you. It's a great pleasure.

**QUESTION:** Thank you so much for your time.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Thank you.

Released on August 23, 2007



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