



Media Roundtable in Tokyo, Japan

William J. Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs

U.S. Embassy
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UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you all for coming. I am pleased to be in Tokyo. I am especially pleased that my first trip overseas as Under Secretary for Political Affairs, a job I just began about three weeks ago, takes me to Japan. I think that helps underscore the enormous significance of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which remains crucially important to both of our interests in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. I've had a very busy schedule over the last couple of days, which has included a series of bilateral meetings with my Japanese counterparts; a trilateral strategic dialogue with Australia and Japan, which gave us an opportunity to focus on practical cooperation in some important areas like disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, Afghanistan, and counterterrorism cooperation; and then also I took part in a G8 political directors meeting to help prepare for the G8 foreign ministers' meeting in Kyoto at the end of this month and then the G8 summit itself in early July. So again, thanks for coming, and I'm glad to take your questions.

QUESTION: My name is Takahata from *Sankei Shimbun*, a Japanese daily. Nice to meet you. Since you are from Russia ...

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I'm actually from the U.S. *[laughter]* I was in Russia for three years as the Ambassador. *[laughter]*

QUESTION: My question is, the Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, has floated the idea of excluding Russia from the G8. As a distinguished career diplomat, from your viewpoint how plausible would it be to kick out Russia from membership of the G8? And second question, if I may completely change the subject, could you tell us the prospect of six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: On your first question, I'm not going to comment on American presidential politics, which will certainly be fascinating and even historic this year. But you know the position of the American administration is that Russia is an important member of the G8, and we continue to work with Russia within that framework. On the six-party talks, the President, Secretary Rice, Chris Hill, and many others continue to work very hard from the U.S. side on the six-party talks. Our cooperation with Japan is a very important part of that. We're continuing to work hard on the second phase of those talks, and even now, one of my colleagues is in North Korea to continue discussions with the North Korean government about that. So as I said, we're working very hard. We've kept very much in mind the ultimate goal of this process, which is a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, and we're determined to continue to work toward that end.

QUESTION: Can I follow up? Ambassador Burns, as you are an expert in the Middle East, could you tell us your explanation about the proliferation from North Korea to Syria? And also, there are a couple of reports that Syria and Israel resumed negotiations through Turkey, so what is your prospect for those resumed negotiations? Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: On the first question, the IAEA is sending a team to Syria later this month, later in June, and I think it's very important that all of us support that effort so that the IAEA can get all of the facts in this case. I think it's especially important that the Syrian government fully cooperate with the IAEA in that effort. With regard to the efforts that Turkey has made to help facilitate indirect discussions between Syria and Israel, we see that as a constructive step on the part of Turkey. Certainly, anything that moves us closer to the comprehensive peace that all of us seek in the Middle East would be a good thing. The United States over the years has made no secret of our concerns about Syrian behavior. But in this instance, we see what Turkey is trying to do as a constructive step.

QUESTION: So the United States so far is not involved in that process?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: As I said, beyond offering our encouragement, we haven't been directly involved.

QUESTION: The government of Japan now is considering the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces to Afghanistan soil. So what do you make of that, and what kind of support do you expect in Afghanistan from Japan?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: We, the United States, would certainly welcome any further support that Japan can provide in Afghanistan. As you know, Japan is already doing a lot in Afghanistan, both indirectly in terms of the refueling that it offers for maritime interdiction operations, but also very significant support for reconstruction in Afghanistan. So the United States and Japan share a very strong interest in stability in Afghanistan, which is not an easy process, and anything more that Japan can do would be most welcome.

QUESTION: I have a couple of G8-related questions -- you mentioned the G8 -- and one is, how much pressure do you think either the foreign or finance or final summit will be prepared to put on OPEC to open the taps? We're beginning to see some rhetoric, but how far can this go? And the second question is, on climate change, again, given that we're still a year away from the final agreement on the post-Kyoto Protocol framework, and that President Bush is obviously on his way out. How much progress really can be made at the *[inaudible]*?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: On climate change first, we share Japan's view as the host of this year's G8 summit that climate change is a very important agenda item. When the prime minister visited President Bush in the U.S. about six months ago, they agreed on a set of principles to frame our joint efforts on climate change. We're both obviously committed to arrangements that are both environmentally effective and sustainable in terms of our economies. That's always easier said than done, but I think we're going to work closely with Japan through the G8 process and through the summit to see how much progress we can make. Obviously what is also very important is to engage all of the world's major economies in this effort, including some of the biggest and most important emerging markets like China and India. And so we're also going to work hard on that end. On the first question on OPEC, I'm not an energy expert, so I probably can't give you a very sensible answer.

QUESTION: On the G8 -- the targets that both Japan but especially the U.S. has set have been derided as too weak, too far. Will the U.S. be prepared to make any advances at the G8 summit in Toyako, anything more concrete?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I don't have a more specific or concrete answer to give you on that one, except again to stress our broad commitment to cooperating with Japan to make a success of climate change as an agenda item at the summit.

QUESTION: Let me go back to six-party talks, especially North Korea's proliferation of its nuclear activities. You received 18,000 pages of documents related to the operation of the Yongbyon facility, and I understand you've been scrutinizing the documents. There seem to be some reports that there is some kind of discrepancy between North Korean declaration of the amount of plutonium they have produced and the estimate by the U.S. intelligence community. Provided that the difference does exist, have you been able to find reasons in the documents why there is any difference between the North Korean declaration and the U.S. estimate?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I'm not aware of any discrepancies, and the thing I should stress is that we're still in the process of studying these documents, which

given their size and breadth, is going to take some time. But we're determined to go through them thoroughly. We're determined to push for a credible and complete declaration. And we in particular are determined to try to ensure that this whole process is verifiable, and that's going to take a lot of work on all our parts within the six-party framework. But that's what we're determined to do. But as I said, we're still in the process of analyzing the documents that have been provided to us.

QUESTION: On a related issue, the abductee issue, we have an impression that the United States and North Korea are nearing an agreement to delist the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. And there have been reports that the North Koreans might return more abductees or the hijackers of the Japanese airliner back in the '70s. Have you got any impression or information suggesting such from North Korea?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: What I would emphasize is two or three points. First, we continue to firmly support Japan on the abductee issue. We've stressed repeatedly to the North Koreans the importance of them addressing Japan's concerns. We consider those concerns to be important and legitimate. The recent informal bilateral talks that took place between Japan and North Korea are, in our view, a positive step. I understand that there are going to be further formal bilateral talks in the next few days, and we hope very much that they'll produce concrete results. Having said that, decisions or actions with regard to the U.S. terrorism list are going to be shaped by compliance with U.S. legislation and U.S. law, in other words the steps that are required under U.S. law, and second by progress toward denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. But I'd stress once again our continuing strong support for Japan's concerns on the abductee issue.

QUESTION: Can I follow up? There is a floating rumor in Tokyo that there might be some minister-level six-party talks sometime very soon to discuss the North Korean nuclear issue. Could you confirm that, or if not, could you tell us if you are working on that or not?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: The issue has been with us for some time, but I don't have anything new to offer on that today. I can't confirm that those are scheduled or planned at this point.

QUESTION: About the formal bilateral talks between Japan and North Korea -- what kind of concrete results do you expect? And is there any criteria of the result which should be good enough for the United States to remove North Korea from the list?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I can't offer you anything specific on that except to say that we support Japan's position on this issue, and we hope very much that those talks will be translated into tangible steps, but I can't offer anything more specific than that.

QUESTION: Suppose there were no concrete results. Do you think the United States' position on delisting could be a little bit different?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I have always learned that when questions begin with "suppose," I probably shouldn't answer them. *[laughter]* All I can say, again, is you know as I explained what shapes American decisions with regard to the terrorism list -- they are defined by U.S. law and also by our determination to make progress toward denuclearization. But we will continue not only to stress our support for Japan's position on the abductee issue but continue to press North Korea on that.

QUESTION: One question about the G8 summit -- I think the food crisis is one of the important topics of the meeting. Do you think Japan and the United States have been in good coordination to deal with that issue, for instance, in the area of the production of biofuels or other things?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes, I think our consultation, certainly in recent weeks, has been very close on those issues, and I think we've worked well together. That doesn't mean that there are easy answers for that problem, either between the two of us or anywhere else in the world. But obviously food security is becoming a more and more important issue. I'm sure it will feature in the G8 process and in the summit itself.

QUESTION: Different subject. You were the Ambassador to the Russian Federation. I'd like to ask about your prospect on U.S.-Russian relations. Since inauguration of Medvedev administration, do you see any change in Russian politics, especially the Putin administration has strictly limited the freedom of the media? Medvedev is supposed to be one of the liberal leaders in Russia. Do you see any change or expect any?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well first, on the broad relationship, I mean the United States and Russia have a big complicated relationship, which today is a mixture of cooperation and competition. There are some areas where we have obvious differences, and the United States has not been shy about expressing those. There are other areas, an increasingly important economic relationship, where American investment in Russia increased by 50% each of the three years I was Ambassador, as Russia has emerged as a more important global economic player, especially in energy, but also in some other areas.

But also in the nuclear field, where the United States and Russia, I think, have both unique capabilities and unique responsibilities. Nonproliferation -- proliferation of nuclear weapons -- is as big a challenge as any of us faces today, and that's an area where the United States and Russia need to work together and where we also need to set a good example for the rest of the world in how we manage our own remaining nuclear arsenals. So in terms of our broad relationship, it is one that is important not only to the two of us, but to the interests of stability and security in the rest of the world.

With regard to whether there's been a change, you know, in recent months -- we've seen some interesting things said by Dmitri Medvedev since he was sworn in as president, and even in the election campaign before that. He gave a couple of speeches, which were interesting in their emphasis on the importance of rule of law in Russia, and obviously if Russia is going to take advantage of the opportunities before it -- opportunities to innovate economically, to diversify beyond oil and gas, to take advantage of what is in many respects the biggest resource that it has, which is its people, its well-educated population -- it's not so much the minerals that are in the ground -- then, the rule of law and the kind of system which allows people to take advantage of those capabilities is going to be very important. But I think we'll just have to see how much that translates into real changes on the ground and real changes in policy. Certainly it's in the self-interest of Russia -- it's not a matter of American preaching or advice from anybody else -- to move in the direction of institutionalizing rule of law.

QUESTION: On another nuclear issue -- Iran. As you might know, I guess, there seems to be some diplomatic efforts made by the Japanese government under the table between Tehran and Tokyo, and Mr. Sasae maybe has given a briefing to you, when he visited Washington. My question is whether you are going to support those Japanese efforts, and do you expect Japan to take that kind of facilitating role in the coming months, between Tehran and Washington?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well first, on Japan, we value highly our diplomatic cooperation and consultation with Japan on a whole range of issues, but we certainly consult closely with regard to Iran and the Iranian nuclear issue. On the Iranian nuclear issue, as you know, this is a serious concern that is not just about the United States and Iran. It's about Iran's long-standing refusal to abide by its obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as to the UN Security Council. And that's really the issue here. The issue isn't Iran's right to develop civilian nuclear power. The issue is whether or not it answers the legitimate questions that the IAEA has posed over the years and whether or not it lives up to its UN Security Council obligations. What we and our partners in the so-called EU3+3 -- but also working with other allies around the world -- have done is to try to employ a two-track diplomacy. On one track, we've made clear the consequences through three successive Security Council resolutions of Iran's failure to comply. And on the other track, we've made clear what's possible in terms of economic relationships, in terms of dealing with regional issues which matter to Iran, as they do to the rest of us. And that's the purpose of Mr. Solana's trip to Tehran over the course of the coming days. So the choice is very much Iran's, but I would underscore once again the serious concern that not only the United States has, but I think Japan and many other countries in the world have about Iran's refusal thus far to comply with its obligations. So we'll see how it responds to the message that Mr. Solana is going to convey, the so-called incentives package, the second track of our approach to make clear to Iran what's possible, if it lives up to its obligations. So we'll see.

QUESTION: So let me repeat the simple question: Do you support -- do you welcome -- Japanese efforts or not?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Welcome Japanese efforts with regard to ...?

QUESTION: Iran.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I mean, we welcome any efforts that are going to make it more likely that Iran is going to comply with its obligations, and we certainly welcome the opportunity to stay in close touch with Japan about Iran and lots of other issues.

QUESTION: May I ask on China? I think there are a lot of big events happening in China. First Tibet turmoil, and then Olympic torch races riots, and then big earthquake. And the international community is looking at sort of two sides of China: on the one hand, lack of freedom, lack of freedom of religion and things like that. Also the totalitarian regime. The other side is, on the earthquake, China is slightly opening up, welcoming international aid and things like that. How do you evaluate China and its relations with both, all of the strategic dialogue nations – the United States, Japan and Australia? I guess that the topic may have come up in the dialogues.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Sure. I mean the simple answer is that China's emergence matters enormously to all of us, and certainly to the three parties you just mentioned – Japan, the United States and Australia. It's in all of our interests for China to become, as former Deputy Secretary Bob Zoellick phrased it, a responsible stakeholder in the international system. And we're all working hard in our individual relationships with China to try to encourage that. China's response to its recent earthquake and humanitarian tragedy I think stands in sharp contrast to the response we've seen from the Burmese regime. We've offered assistance to China just as Japan has, and we'll continue to do everything we can to help.

QUESTION: Welcome to Tokyo. I see you are a specialist on Russia and the Middle East, so I'll ask you about South Korea. The rising pressure to rewrite the beef agreement – I was just wondering what the American government ...? Obviously it's going to affect us quite a lot. Would the U.S. be receptive to such a renegotiation? What could come out of it if Korea does ask?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: It's a good question, and I'm not an expert on beef imports or beef trade. As you know, President Bush and President Lee spoke on the telephone last weekend, and I know there have been conversations at lower levels going on since then to try to resolve the issue, but beyond that, all I'll do is step on any number of landmines by offering my thin expertise on beef.

QUESTION: Just a very quick last question. Today I heard the news that Mr. Shinn in the Pentagon said that he will very much welcome if Japan changes its rules or Constitution to utilize collective self-defense rights, in terms of Afghanistan or anywhere else. Would you agree to that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I didn't see the report – I'm sorry – so I can't really comment on it, on what was said allegedly at the Pentagon. On Afghanistan, as I said in response to the earlier question, I mean anything more that Japan chooses to do would be most welcome, not just by the United States, but by all of our partners working in Afghanistan. As I also stressed, Japan is already doing a lot with regard to Afghanistan.

Thank you all very much.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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