

# US, India need to work together to



By C Raja Mohan

*India Pakistan USA*

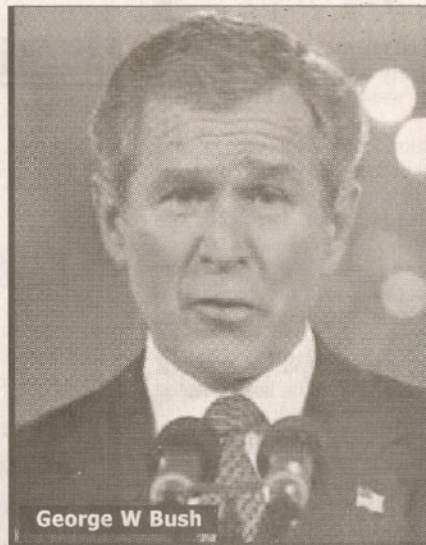
Bush and Singh will have to focus on the profound crisis that has engulfed Pakistan and Afghanistan

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more than three years ago.

As they meet, probably for the last time in their current official capacities, Manmohan Singh and Bush should do a little more than pat each other on the back for the nuclear imprint they leave on the bilateral relationship. If they wish to nudge the two establishments into thinking creatively about the future of Indo-US relations, Bush and Singh will inevitably have to focus on the profound crisis that has engulfed Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Amidst the current obsessive emphasis on the civil nuclear initiative, it has been easy to overlook how far India and the US have travelled during the Bush years on the question of Pakistan. For nearly six decades, the single most important divide between New Delhi and Washington was defined by the American security partnership with Pakistan and



George W Bush

American attitudes towards the Indo-Pak dispute over Jammu and Kashmir.

To his lasting credit, Bush has removed J&K as a source of contention between New Delhi and Washington. Until the early years of this decade, it was always J&K that drew the screaming headlines on US policy towards India. Bush's decision to end the American tilt towards Pakistan on Kashmir could turn out to be far more significant for India's national security than civilian nuclear co-operation, if the two sides choose to build on it.

In fact, the rapidly deteriorating situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan demands that New Delhi and Washington move quickly towards a pacification of the lawless Indus territories that now threaten the entire world. Without peace and stability on the Durand Line that divides Pakistan and Afghanistan, New Delhi and



Manmohan Singh

Washington will be hard pressed to vacate the threat to their nations from terrorism.

Both Bush and Singh have invested heavily in the relationship with Pakistan. Yet both are under increasing domestic pressure to demonstrate a reasonable dividend from this effort. In the American elections, the Democratic Party's nominee, Senator Barack Obama, is now concentrating his foreign policy fire on the perceived mis-steps of the Bush administration in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Recognising the dangers of a failure in Afghanistan, the US is now turning its full military attention to the Durand Line.

In India, too, thanks to the wave of recent urban bombings, terrorism promises to dominate the national political debate in the run-up to the general election next year. Singh needs no reminder of the abiding connection

# to stabilise region

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between domestic terrorism and the stalled peace process with Pakistan.

Although Bush moved towards neutrality between India and Pakistan, and has welcomed India's economic activity in Afghanistan, he has been hesitant to engage New Delhi on Kabul's security. The US has been equally reluctant to be seen talking to India about Pakistan, thanks to the political sensitivities in Islamabad.

India, which had complained so bitterly since the mid-'50s about US partnership with Pakistan, is yet to digest the meaning of the escalating military tension between Washington and Islamabad over Afghanistan. Earlier this month, we have had the spectacle of US troops entering Pakistani territory to unilaterally act against Al Qaeda and Taliban. And Pakistan has been torn as never before in coping with the simultaneous challenges from the militants on

the one hand and the military forces of the international coalition ranged across the Durand Line on the other.

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The first visit to the US next week by Pakistan's new president, Asif Ali Zardari, who is meeting both Bush and Singh, offers a valuable occasion for both Washington and New Delhi to discuss a wider regional approach to cope with the current security challenges in the North western parts of the subcontinent.

Such a framework would involve guaranteeing permanent and secure borders for Pakistan in return for a decisive clampdown on the sources of international terrorism, full normalisation of its relations with India and Afghanistan, easing the Pakistan Army's burdens on the east to let it focus on the current internal threats on the Western borderlands, assisting Islamabad to develop counter-insurgency capabilities, promoting Pakistan's economic integration with India and Afghanistan to ease its economic crisis, and above all letting democratic forces gain control over Pakistan's destiny.

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