

## BATTLE FOR WHITE HOUSE



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As Indo-U.S. engagement deepens, it is also increasingly sensitive to the political developments within the United States. Understanding the internal dynamics in the U.S. from an Indian perspective has become an urgent necessity for the Indian policy and business community. The United States Studies Programme of the Observer Research Foundation hopes to meet this requirement. The *ORF Monitor* aims to provide a fortnightly assessment on the November elections to the White House. We welcome comments and suggestions on the Monitor.

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### **The Republicans and Pakistan**

By C. Raja Mohan

The very pragmatism of the Bush Administration that allowed a redefinition of the agenda of the Indo-U.S. relations has now created the basis for a new relationship with Pakistan. Difficult as it might be, New Delhi will have to find ways to come to terms with this new reality in the wake of the Bush Administration's decision to designate Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally".

It is often said that the Republicans favour Pakistan and the Democrats, India. The

Bush Administration, it seemed, came very, very close to breaking this traditional paradigm in the early months of its tenure in 2001. Moving quickly on its promise, during the last Presidential elections in 2000, to treat India as an emerging great power the Bush Administration unveiled an intense engagement with New Delhi.

India's enthusiasm for the missile defence, one of the corner stones of President Bush's agenda, endeared the Vajpayee government to the White House. As it

sought to rethink the non-proliferation question, the Bush Administration decided to recast the nuclear agenda with India. Benchmarks like signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which were underlined by the Clinton Administration, were discarded. The new administration would quickly lift the sanctions imposed by the Clinton Administration after the Indian tests of May 1998.

The agenda with India was about constructing a new partnership, beyond the traditional framework of the limiting confines of the Subcontinent. Senior officials of the Bush Administration began to say that the past intense relationship with the military establishment of Pakistan was a mere quirk of history. It was no guide to the future. Some of them were quite ready to hint, even in public, that Pakistan was close to being seen as a rogue state. India, too, rapidly began to develop high expectations of a partnership with the U.S. under the Bush Administration. It sensed a moment when the “five wasted decades” of the past in Indo-U.S. relations could now be put behind and a new chapter in Indo-U.S. relations could be written.



### Who'll be Kerry's VP?



**John McCain** - Had run unsuccessfully for the Presidential nomination of the Republican Party in 2000, losing to George Bush. Seldom has a leader from the opposition been chosen to be running mate. Casting a senior Republican like Senator McCain on the ticket will be a political coup for Senator Kerry.



**Hillary Clinton**, former First Lady and serving Senate member, could electrify the campaign. But that could also imply one liberal too many on the Democratic ticket.



**John Edwards** had ended his quest for the 2004 Democratic nomination March 3, 2004, saying that John Kerry “has what it takes...to be president of the United States”. A charismatic crowd puller, he could be the most probable running mate for Kerry.



**Dick Gephardt** has unsuccessfully sought the presidential nomination a couple of times. Though known for his strong links with trade unions, his left liberal views could prove to be a liability.



**Bill Richardson** was elected as Governor of New Mexico in 2002. A Hispanic, he may help Democrats. But despite his enviable electoral record, Richardson remains an outsider.

**Sam Nunn**, a guru on defence issues, but is also too conservative on social issues.



**Bob Graham** became the first Democrat drop-out from the Race early October 2003 as he couldn't raise enough funds. He has been a bitter opponent of the Iraq war.



**Evan Bayh** is a conservative Democrat.



**Joe Biden** - A liberal Democrat from the East coast might not add much.

But Pakistan, it now becomes clear, was never really out of the regional calculus of the United States. As Secretary of State Colin Powell pointed out in his recent testimony to the Congressional Commission on 9/11, Pakistan was seen as central to the American war against the al Qaida even before the attacks on New

York and Washington took place. Mr. Powell said:

“We wanted to destroy al-Qaida. We understood that Pakistan was critical to the success of our long-term strategy. To get at al-Qaida, we had to end Pakistan’s support for the Taliban. So we had to recast our relations with that country. But nuclear sanctions, caused by Pakistan’s nuclear weapons tests and the nature of the new regime—the way President Musharraf took office—made it difficult for us to work with Pakistan. We knew, however, that achieving sustainable new relations with Pakistan meant moving aggressively to strengthen our relations with India as well. So we began this rather more complex diplomatic approach...”

Colin Powell told the Congress that President Bush in February 2001 wrote to Gen. Musharraf stating, “We should work together to address Afghanistan’s many problems. The most pressing of these is terrorism, and it inhibits progress on all other issues...The continued presence of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida organisation is a direct threat to the United States and its interests that must be addressed. I believe al-Qaida also threatens Pakistan’s long-term interests. We joined the United Nations in pressing

additional sanctions against the Taliban to bring bin Laden to justice and to close the network of terrorist camps in their territory....I urge you to use your influence with the Taliban to bring this about". Mr. Powell added: "Early on we realised that a serious effort to remove al-Qaida's safe haven in Afghanistan might well require introducing military forces, especially ground forces. This without the cooperation of Pakistan would be out of the question. Pakistan had vital interests in Afghanistan, and was deeply suspicious of India's intentions. Pakistan's and India's mutual fears and suspicions threatened to boil over into nuclear conflict as the administration got into the early months of its existence. To put it mildly, the situation was delicate and dangerous. Any effort to effect change had to be calibrated very carefully, to avoid misperception and miscalculation".

These lengthy citations from Mr. Powell's testimony on March 23 are to help delineate the context of the U.S.-Pak relations in early 2001. The importance of Pakistan became that much more after September 11. Although India had offered military cooperation for the American war against terrorism after September 11, there was no question where American

priorities lay—in Pakistan. Once Gen. Musharraf promised the necessary reversal of policy in Afghanistan on September 19, there was no doubting the importance of Pakistani military in the American war on terrorism. In essence, the Bush Administration was keen to develop ties with both India and Pakistan.

But the latter was central to the challenge of eliminating the al Qaida. To the extent it could, the Bush Administration managed the problems that arose from the Indo-Pak tensions after the attack on the Parliament on December 13, 2001. It put pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terrorism while urging India not to go to war with Pakistan. In the end, the difference between the approach of Republicans and Democrats is at best marginal. The Republicans have less concern for normative concerns like democracy when issues like its own national security are involved. The Democrats might make more noise on the normative issues, but are in no position to ignore primary national interests.

The reality today is that the cooperation of Pak Army is vital for Washington. For President George W. Bush who is facing a tough challenge from Senator John Kerry,

the capture of the leaders of al Qaida, now believed to be hiding in the remote tribal territories of Pakistan is of crucial importance in demonstrating a major success in the war on terrorism. India must recognise this reality that the U.S. had to reward Gen. Musharraf and the Pakistan Army for its willingness to let the American war on terrorism unfold on Pakistani territory. At the same time, India is well within its rights to point out to Washington the dangers of miscalculation from an emboldened Pakistan which might believe it can get away with reviving terrorism when the summer sets in Jammu and Kashmir and undermine the delicate peace process.

If the U.S., then, is prepared to look the other way, India will have no option but to respond in the best manner it can.

Whether its views are heard in Washington are not, India has few reasons to lose sleep over the new relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. New Delhi has seen and survived the best years of strategic partnership between Washington and Islamabad in the past. And India today is much stronger than it was during the Cold War and has enough options to deal with the negative consequences of a U.S.-Pak military relationship.

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### **9/11 Commission and November elections**

Avanti Bhati

The 'National Commission on Terrorist attacks upon the United States' looking into the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington may well turn out to be one of the decisive factors in the Presidential elections. The Commission over the past few days grilled senior

officials of the Clinton Administration as well as the current policy makers. But it is the testimony of former White House terrorism expert, Richard Clarke that has clearly defined the battle lines. With the carefully timed release of his book "Against all Enemies: America's war on terror", Clarke had launched a powerful indictment of the Bush Administration. His main contention is that the White House did not take seriously the threats of

an impending Al Qaida attack and that even after 9/11 terror attacks the main focus of the Bush administration was on engineering a regime change in Iraq.

This is after all the election year and the war on terrorism and national security are the twin electoral planks for President Bush in his re-election bid. In fact polls reveal that these are probably the only two issues on which President Bush leads the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee Senator Kerry. Thus for the Bush administration defending and even countering Richard Clarke's testimony is proving to be a major challenge. President Bush's National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, after initial reluctance to testify before the Commission has now agreed to do so. While she might have had some technical arguments on the turf to avoid testifying, it now has become a political necessity. Having been put on the defensive, for the first time on the conduct of the war against terrorism, the

Bush Administration has adopted a two pronged counter attack. One is to question the personal credibility of Mr. Clarke by releasing confidential documents which detail Clarke's own assessments, during his tenure, that the administration was doing a good job of fighting terrorism. The other is to make a reasonable case that the Administration was fully engaged with the challenge of al Qaida even before the attacks on September 11.

With the election promising to be a bitter one, and the Democrats determined to undercut, by all means the President's claim to be a successful wartime president, all eyes in the U.S. will now be focused on Ms. Rice when she testifies before the Commission on Thursday. Given the high political stakes, expect some fireworks, through media leaks, even before she is grilled by the Commission.

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## **POLL ANALYSIS**

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The poll results have reached a single conclusion, which is that Elections 2004 are going to be much more closely fought than the race in 2000. The most recent poll results (March 29) from **CNN/USA Today/Gallup** shows Senator Kerry's lead over President Bush cut down from a healthy 8 percent to a deficit of 4 percent point. Ironically these poll results have come after a week - long media offensive by the Bush administration in response to Richard Clarke's testimony before the 9/11 Commission. Ironically the only other poll to have placed President Bush ahead of Senator Kerry is the **New York Times/CBS News** poll where the former led the latter with 46 percent points to 43 percent points. Other polls including the **Washington Post/ABC News** poll found results that tended to confirm Senator Kerry's lead over President Bush. Poll results primarily tend to reflect the changing dynamics of the Presidential elections invariably prompting justification for poor approval ratings and match - up figures. Republicans tend to rationalize poor ratings as a result of months of Democratic bashing during the primary season. This they counter through

an aggressive ad campaign. Unfortunately, such intense media blitz has alienated the voter. A recent survey among cable viewers showed a startling 46 percent responding in the negative when asked whether they felt they had a say in the government. **The National Annenberg Election Survey** revealed that Americans are divided not only on Iraq but also on issues emerging from within Iraq. The survey showed that 49 percent did not approve of the way President Bush was handling Iraq. A **Gallup** poll in March showed, optimism over the state of the economy dipping to 44 percent, down from a high of 66 percent in January. The same poll, however, pointed to a 5 percent increase in consumer spending intentions to 31 percent, a factor which the Bush administration is keen to cash in on.

What is probably most disconcerting for the two camps is a recent poll result from the **Pew Research Center**, which reveals that Americans by a large majority, 52 percent, deemed the campaign to be too long. Endurance and a strategy to survive this extended campaign will now be demanded of the two candidates.

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**Editor: Avanti Bhati**