

# The Asian Challenge

The Unanticipated Consequences of the War in India, Pakistan, China, and Japan

BY JAMES MANN

**O**N THE FACE OF THINGS, THE OVERSEAS FOCUS of America's antiterrorist campaign should be on the Middle East. Osama bin Laden is a Saudi. His al-Qaeda network is made up primarily of Saudis, Egyptians, and others from the Middle East. No matter how you define the underlying causes of the problem—whether you blame Islamic fundamentalism, state support for terrorism, the corrupt and undemocratic nature of regimes like Saudi Arabia, the inequitable distribution of oil wealth, America's need for military bases to protect oil supplies, or, in bin Laden's recent redefinition, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—they all have their origins in the Middle East.

Yet America's campaign against terrorism has now unleashed forces that could lead to dramatic, violent upheavals elsewhere in the world—and especially in Asia. The antiterrorist effort is necessary, but the potential side effects are scary. It will require not just skillful U.S. diplomacy but a lot of luck to avert some new, unforeseen disaster as an outgrowth of the worldwide campaign.

Consider some of the ramifications for Asia. There are three nightmare scenarios, any one of which could follow from the chain of events set in motion on September 11.

**SCENARIO 1: LOOSE NUKES IN PAKISTAN** With his support for the antiterrorist campaign growing increasingly unpopular, Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf, and his government collapse. The country either descends into chaos or is taken over by a Taliban-style regime, which gains control of the army and the nuclear weapons it has developed.

**SCENARIO 2: WAR BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN** Musharraf maintains control. Seeking to shore up domestic support and

prove that he has not become an American puppet, however, he provokes a new incident challenging Indian control of Kashmir. India responds with force, and the two countries go to war for the fourth time—this time, unlike the earlier conflicts, with both countries in possession of nuclear weapons.

**SCENARIO 3: INDONESIA ERUPTS** A wave of anti-Americanism engulfs Indonesia, whose population of 200 million includes more Muslims than any other nation in the world. As demonstrations mount, President Megawati Sukarnoputri steps down. A new Islamic government comes to power, expels Western businesses, and in a show of force seeks to restrict the oil supplies that pass through its waters en route from the Persian Gulf to America's allies in Japan and South Korea.

These just begin the list of concerns about Asia stemming from America's antiterrorist campaign. There are plenty of other, longer-term consequences that, while not quite so dramatic, certainly make plenty of people in Asia nervous.

For example, in the wake of the terrorist attacks, the United States rightly asked Japan, its main Asian ally, to provide more military support than it did during the Gulf War, and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi responded by moving to ease Japan's half-century-old constitutional restrictions on the use of force. For decades, Japan's constitution, dictated by the United States, allowed Japan to use its armed forces only to protect its own territory or the waters immediately surrounding the island nation. Now, under new legislation sponsored by Koizumi and given preliminary approval in the Japanese Diet on October 18, Japan's Self-Defense Forces will be allowed to provide noncombat support (such as transport, logistics, and search-and-rescue missions) far from Japan's shores and to use weapons not only in self-defense but to protect refugees or injured soldiers under the care of these forces.

China's response to this shift in Japan's policy has been muted up to this point. Premier Zhu Rongji warned Koizumi that Japan should be "prudent" in expanding its military role.

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Yet over the long run, as Japan widens its military cooperation with the United States, the result could be to increase friction between Japan and China, Asia's two leading powers.

For now, as it pursues the goal of disabling bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, the Bush administration seems to believe that all of these ancillary problems are manageable. Loose nukes? Pakistani officials soothingly reassure everyone that the country's nuclear weapons are securely under the control of its army—and anyway, the Paks insist, the nukes are disassembled in such a way that they cannot be easily used. Upheavals in Indonesia? The American embassy in Jakarta sends back warnings of trouble, but Washington, reassured by its Australian allies, decides that these warnings may be too alarmist.

Yet the danger is that in the isolated confines of Washington, foreign policy always seems cleaner and easier than it ever is. In dealing with the rest of the world, U.S. leaders, whether Republicans or Democrats, all too often operate with the same two assumptions: (1) that history started yesterday, or whenever America started paying attention, and (2) that the only thing that matters to other governments is their relationship with the United States.

**T**O SEE HOW THE WORLD AFTER September 11 looks different in other capitals from the way that it does in Washington, let's examine more closely how the antiterrorist campaign has affected India.

Last spring, soon after George W. Bush took office, the administration pushed forward an important foreign-policy initiative in Asia: a concerted, long-overdue effort to upgrade American relations with India. This endeavor wasn't entirely new, actually; President Bill Clinton had already begun to lay the groundwork during his final year in office when he made a five-day visit to India—the first trip by a U.S. president in more than two decades.

For the Bush administration, the strategic rationale for courting India was obvious. India is the dominant military power in its region. The old Cold War calculations in which India was viewed as a Soviet ally no longer apply. Within Asia, a strong India could serve as a counterbalance to the rising power of China. And in economic terms, India's population of one billion represents a huge potential market. (Admittedly, the American business community has never displayed the same desire to "capture the India market" that it has shown for a century in regard to China, in part because of America's missionary experience in China and its long-standing fantasies about changing the Chinese. By contrast, Americans somehow always seem to think of India as changeless and forever closed to the outside world. Perceptions aside, however, the reality is that India's and China's markets are of comparable size.)

So the Bush administration began carefully laying down its markers. When its top Asia hands, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, made their first tour of Asia in May, both diplomats visited

Japan and South Korea, America's allies. Then Armitage, the more senior official, went off to India, leaving the lower-ranking Kelly to visit Beijing. Everyone in Asia caught that signal. A few weeks later, President Bush served notice that he was planning to lift the economic sanctions that were imposed against India after it conducted nuclear-weapons tests in 1998.

Then suddenly, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration found it necessary to reach a new accommodation with Pakistan. From an American standpoint, courting Musharraf made obvious sense: Pakistan's intelligence service knew a lot about bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Pakistan had close relations with Afghanistan's Taliban. And any American military operation against Afghanistan would be helped by the bases, support facilities, personnel, and airspace in neighboring Pakistan.

But India reacted like a lover in the first flush of romance who suddenly catches a new partner dating someone else. Indian leaders asked how Americans could possibly cozy up to Musharraf when only a few months earlier U.S. officials had themselves been warning India that Musharraf was not trustworthy.

From the cool, detached perspective of Washington, India's

reactions seemed insecure, if not downright immature. Why should India worry? Of course, the United States needs to do business with Pakistan right now, and of course that fact shouldn't affect America's broader desire for a long-term relationship with India. Why can't India realize that it's possible for America to carry on two separate relationships, a short-term fling of convenience with Musharraf and a new, long-term strategic relationship with India? For years, officials in New Delhi have been preaching to the United States to



Colin Powell (left) and Pakistan's President Musharraf

stop thinking of India only in relationship to Pakistan and instead think of India for its larger strategic importance in Asia. Isn't that precisely what the Bush administration is now doing?

But from India's perspective, things aren't that simple. In some ways, what happens on the Indian subcontinent is unavoidably a zero-sum game and America's new relationship with Pakistan *does* affect India. Musharraf's regime has not only been the Taliban's main supporter; it has also aided groups, including terrorists, that are contesting Indian rule in Kashmir. If the Bush administration opens the way for new military aid to Pakistan, that aid helps to strengthen Pakistan's army in dealing with India. When the Bush administration lifts economic sanctions and supports new international lending to Pakistan, those actions free up economic resources that Pakistan can use for its military. In American terms, the Bush administration's new courtship of Pakistan may be necessary. But in saying that none of this should matter to India, whom are we kidding? In Indian terms, Pakistan, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda have all been so closely intertwined that the United States, by providing economic goodies to Pakistan, in effect is paying off India's own attackers.



In Pakistan, too, our policies are perceived very differently from the way that they are in Washington. For Musharraf, the main issue (outside of the stability of his own government) is the future leadership in Afghanistan. The Bush administration, to its credit, appears to have few illusions about the Northern Alliance, the Afghan opposition forces who are seeking to overthrow the Taliban. Yet from the standpoint of Washington, if the United States demolishes the Taliban and, as a consequence, the Northern Alliance gains some degree of control in Afghanistan, Musharraf has little grounds to complain. Tough luck. Yet from Pakistan's perspective, the Northern Alliance isn't an independent opposition force; on the contrary, it has been supported and cultivated by India and Iran, Pakistan's rivals.

These are the Asian dynamics that American policy will have to reckon with as a result of the new war on terrorism. Until now, the top levels of various U.S. administrations have paid only intermittent attention to the Indian subcontinent—weighing in occasionally to prevent nuclear war but otherwise not getting intensely involved in the daily political machinations. American policy has had the luxury of indifference.

Now, as a consequence of the war against terrorism, the United States will have to care. Suddenly, for example, the United States has a new stake in bringing about a peace settlement in Kashmir that rivals (well, almost) the American interest in a settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. If you want to wipe out al-Qaeda and to focus Pakistan and India on fighting terrorism, then you first have to keep these two countries from obliterating each other.

**B**EYOND INDIA AND PAKISTAN, CHINA IS THE ASIAN power whose foreign-policy interests seem to be most greatly affected by America's antiterrorist campaign. And China sees plenty of reasons to be jittery.

No matter who leads China, its foreign policy is usually based on trying to reduce the number of conflicts around its periphery. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the People's Republic was mainly worried about a Soviet invasion from the north and west, Mao Tse-tung opened up to the United States and Japan, in effect pacifying China's southeastern coastal areas. In the 1990s, as China focused on regaining Taiwan and saw U.S. naval forces as a threat off its eastern coastline, Beijing upgraded its relations with Russia, India, and the Central Asian republics to the north and west.

The changes in Asia since September 11 unsettle these Chinese calculations by creating new uncertainty all around China's periphery. To the east, Japan's well-equipped navy will be expanding its reach. To the north, Russia, which China had courted as a partner against the United States, is now aligning itself more closely with Washington. Pakistan, Beijing's long-standing partner in South Asia, will at least temporarily have a new relationship with the United States.

Worst of all, from China's point of view, U.S. troops are now operating in Uzbekistan, closer than ever before to China's inland borders in Central Asia. In one recent interview, Pang Zhongyang, a scholar at Qinghua University in Beijing, raised anew the recurrent Chinese fears that the United States might seek control of Central Asia's oil-and-gas reserves and that China could have "NATO on its borders."

The Chinese leadership has nonetheless given its official backing to the Bush administration's antiterrorist campaign, partly because President Jiang Zemin and others in the regime hope to join the ranks of the world's leading nations. The last thing China wants is for the United States, Europe, and Japan to get together to make decisions about the future of Asia at meetings from which the People's Republic is excluded.

The other, darker reason for China's acquiescence is that Jiang hopes that the American war on terrorism can be used internally to strengthen the hand of the Chinese regime against its opponents. One little-discussed aspect of the American campaign is that its thrust, throughout the world, will be to favor the cause of stability over popular unrest. Certainly the Bush administration will have a new stake in ensuring that the governments, police, and armies in Pakistan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Kuwait can all dampen down street demonstrations or other opposition to their regimes. And to the extent that America shows itself supporting the cause of order and rejecting popular unrest in these other countries, China hopes that it will become harder for the United States to complain as the Chinese police and army continue to repress all street demonstrations and other forms of dissent.

Within days of September 11, China sought to link the worldwide campaign against terrorism with its efforts against "separatism" in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan. By Chinese logic, if America supports Musharraf as his army puts down riots in Islamabad and Quetta, how can the United States object if China suppresses demonstrations in Beijing or in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang? The Bush administration will have to be careful that it doesn't get trapped in inconsistencies and end up apologizing for sheer political repression in China or elsewhere.

**T**HE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S CAMPAIGN WILL REQUIRE an extraordinary degree of farsightedness in figuring out the long-term implications of its necessarily hurried decisions. And even then, sometimes things will go wrong. After all, some previous administrations have paid attention to long-term consequences and things still didn't always work out well. In early 1991, just after the Gulf War ended, Iraq's Saddam Hussein began using armed helicopters to suppress his internal opponents, the Shia and the Kurds. The administration of George H.W. Bush had to decide whether to try to stop him.

It didn't. The first Bush administration decided that if it intervened against Saddam, Iraq might fall apart, possibly giving rise to Iran's eventual emergence as the main or only power in the Persian Gulf. As Colin Powell describes in his memoirs, the American goal was "to leave Baghdad enough power to survive as a threat to an Iran that remained bitterly hostile toward the United States." Bush the elder and his advisers calculated that Saddam himself wouldn't be a problem because his own army would probably overthrow him in the wake of the military defeat.

That was long-term thinking, for sure. But the first George Bush administration calculated wrong. Saddam remained in power, slowly regained his strength, and continues to pose a major challenge to the United States today. So as the second George Bush administration tries to cope with the ramifications of its antiterrorist campaign, it will not only need to be farsighted in its thinking: It will have to be right—and fortunate, too. ♦