

## **Af-Pak Review**

C. Raja Mohan

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The visit of the US National Security Adviser, James Jones, to New Delhi this week offers an important opportunity to define an ambitious new bilateral agenda for security cooperation. As the senior most visitor from Washington since Dr. Manmohan Singh was sworn into office for the second time and the coordinator of US foreign and national security policies, Jones could help set the tone for the political conversation at higher levels in the coming weeks.

The PM will meet President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the G-8 summit next month in Italy and the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton should be in Delhi once she recovers from her recent arm injury.

If Dr. Singh's first term resolved the prolonged non-proliferation dispute with the United States and got India into the nuclear club, his second term could be even more consequential. Dr. Singh and his advisers now have a chance to turn the other major historic contention between India and the United States—Pakistan—on its head. For much of the six decades since the partition of the sub-continent, New Delhi and Washington have rarely stopped arguing about Pakistan.

There is a fleeting moment now to explore ways in which India and the US could nudge Pakistan towards political moderation, economic modernisation and regional integration. Obama's reassuring remarks this week that he has no intention to mediate between India and Pakistan, should put New Delhi at ease and encourage it to take a positive approach towards regional security cooperation with Washington.

### First impressions

As India prepares for an intensive engagement with the Obama Administration, South Block knows that first impressions matter. Four years ago when George W. Bush began his second presidential term, it was the early contact that cleared the ground for the historic nuclear deal.

Once they agreed on a new approach on civilian nuclear cooperation, neither Dr. Singh nor Bush wavered in the face of many obstacles that came in the way.

Clarity on what India and the United States could do for each other in the Af-Pak region should similarly set the stage for security cooperation in the coming years.

The Obama Administration's initial focus was entirely on defining an Af-Pak policy. It is yet to finalise its India policy. All we have at this stage is Hillary Clinton's suggestion that the transformation of the bilateral ties in Obama's first term could be dramatic. If New Delhi has any big ideas for future cooperation with Washington, this is the time to put them on the table.

It is a common refrain that Indian diplomacy tends to be reactive. As in his first term, and so in his second, Dr. Singh can show the world that this is no longer true and that New Delhi is capable of a pro-active foreign policy.

### Buy American

Over the long-term, there is one area that is more important than either the civil nuclear

initiative or working together in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is defence industrial cooperation. Any measure of comprehensive national power, that is so popular in Beijing these days, would put defence capabilities at the very top.

Why then is India squandering away its unique position in the international arms market today?

Unlike China which has no access to major defence suppliers in the US and western Europe and can buy arms only from Russia, New Delhi today can buy them from all the three. In playing the full field, India can extract the best possible terms from all the three.

If the Chinese Defence Minister, Chi Haotian, were to swap places with our own A.K. Antony, he would be leading and flaunting big defence purchase missions to the United States; because China knows how to grab a strategic lever when it sees one.

It is about time that the two national security advisers, Jones and M.K. Narayanan force the two bureaucracies to remove all the trivial obstacles to arms supply between the two countries. Yes, the arms supplies could flow in both directions, if Washington and New Delhi can encourage their private sector corporations to find mutual complementarities in the defence industry just as they discovered in the IT field more than a decade ago.