

## Bush urges Pak, Afghan allies to unite in terror war

AP, Washington

Before they sat down with President Bush for a peacemaking dinner at the White House, the bickering leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan shook hands with their host but not with each other.

Pakistani President Gen Pervez Musharraf and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whom Bush considers key bulwarks against Islamic radicalism in a volatile region, barely looked at one another as Bush appealed for cooperation against the common enemy of terrorism.

"I look forward to having dinner with friends of mine who don't happen to share the same faith I do but nevertheless share the same outlook for a more hopeful world," Bush said in a brief Rose Garden appearance before Wednesday's light dinner of soup, sea bass and salad.

The meeting was a command

performance for leaders who have joined their fortunes to Bush's anti-terror drive since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks but who for months have picked at one another's efforts to fight terrorists along their long, remote, mountainous border.

"These two men are personal friends of mine," Bush said. "They are strong leaders who have an understanding of the world in which we live. They understand that the forces of moderation are being challenged by extremists and radicals."

After the private meal, the White House issued a bland statement that called the session a "constructive exchange" but outlined no new agreements or initiatives. The White House did not make any officials available for questions.

"They committed to supporting moderation and defeating extremism through greater intelligence sharing, coordinated action against terrorists, and common efforts to

enhance the prosperity of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan," the statement from press secretary Tony Snow said.

Bush's three-way dinner party, just weeks before the November congressional elections, comes as he is working to persuade voters that Republicans are best able to guide the US-led war against terrorism. He faces declining American support for both the US-led war in Iraq and the US military commitment in Afghanistan.

Afghan officials claim that Pakistan lets Taliban militants hide out and launch attacks into Afghanistan. Musharraf says Karzai has bad information and notes that Pakistan has deployed 80,000 troops along the porous border.

Karzai says Musharraf turns a blind eye to hatred and extremism being bred at Islamic schools in Pakistan. At one point, Musharraf said Karzai is behaving "like an ostrich," refusing to acknowledge

the truth and trying to shore up his political standing at home.

Right up to Wednesday night's White House dinner, they also have pointed fingers at one another over al-Qaeda's Osama bin Laden and other terror leaders. Each says bin Laden isn't hiding in his country and suggests the other might do more to help find him.

The heated accusations had put the White House in the middle, and Bush clearly thought it was time to clear the air.

Standing between the pair, Bush emphasized "the need to cooperate, to make sure that people have got a hopeful future" in both countries.

The Afghan and Pakistani leaders stood stiffly on either side of Bush as he spoke without notes or a lectern. Musharraf was tightlipped, hands clasped awkwardly before him. Karzai nodded agreeably as Bush spoke. Neither of the foreign leaders spoke.

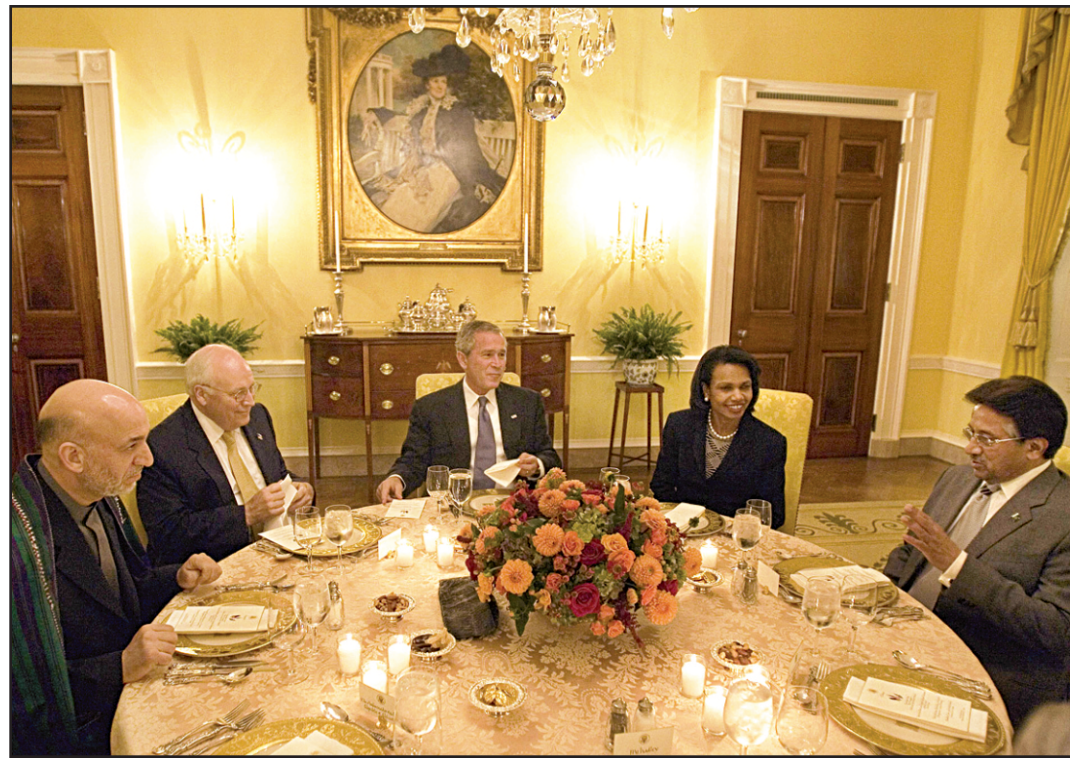


PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (C) sits with US Vice President Dick Cheney (2L) and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (2R) as they host a working dinner at the White House in honour of Afghan President Hamid Karzai (L) and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf (R) on Wednesday in Washington, DC.

## Olmert hopes to meet Abbas in coming days

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he hoped to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas within days for a summit the international community believes could help revive peace talks.

But Olmert cautioned against expecting quick results, especially with the Islamist Hamas movement running the Palestinian government. Hamas is sworn to destroy Israel.

"I am making a very great effort to have a dialogue ... I want to meet with him, we should start a process," Olmert said in an interview with Israel Radio broadcast on Thursday, referring to the moderate Abbas.

"(But) the distance is long ... we don't have to be hasty. How it will work out, how it will end, that we shall see."

Olmert said he hoped the meeting with Abbas could be held in the coming days, although he gave no precise time frame.

## No damage after Samoa quake generates small tsunami

REUTERS, Sydney

A strong earthquake with a magnitude of up to 7.0 hit near the South Pacific nation of Samoa on Thursday and triggered a small tsunami but there were no reports of damage, officials said.

The center of the quake was between Samoa, Tonga and American Samoa and at least 250 km (155 miles) from the nearest major populated centers.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said a tide gauge in Pago Pago, American Samoa's harbor side capital, had measured the wave at 8 cm. Australian seismologists said Samoa was lucky the quake wasn't bigger and that it was a long way from populated centers.

Keni Lesa, editor of the Samoa Observer newspaper, said the quake was felt across the Samoan capital, Apia, when it hit early in the evening but no unusual wave activity had been experienced.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman feeds pigeons close to the Royal Palace in Bangkok yesterday. A 59-year-old farmer has died of bird flu in northeastern Thailand, bringing the country's death toll from the H5N1 virus this year to three, the kingdom's top health officials said.

## Syria defies US threat, still backs Hezbollah

REUTERS, Damascus

Syria will keep supporting Hamas and Hezbollah despite US threats to impose more sanctions on it, a government newspaper said on Thursday.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice threatened this week to toughen sanctions Washington imposed on Syria in 2004, mainly because of its support for the two movements, which Washington regards as "terrorist organisations."

"Syria is more determined to stand by the resistance until the land is liberated and Israel is defeated," an editorial in the newspaper Baath said.

Both Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia movement whose July 12 cross-border raid into Israel triggered a 34-day war with the Jewish state, and the Islamist group Hamas which won elections and runs the Palestinian government, refuse to recognise Israel.

"If the US administration is serious about combating terrorism

then it should play a constructive role in pushing forward the peace process on the basis of UN resolutions 242 and 338," the newspaper said.

The UN resolutions, passed decades ago, emphasize the inadmissibility of acquiring territory through war, call on Israel to withdraw from Arab land it has occupied since 1967 and call for negotiations to reach a "just and durable peace" in the Middle East.

"Absolute US support for Israel is one of the main causes behind regional instability. The United States has helped Israel in the United Nations stand against any proposal for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict," the newspaper said.

Rice said this week that the United States was going "to have to look at tougher measures if Syria continues to be on the path that it's on." She said Washington would like other nations to join it in imposing "other kinds of sanctions" on Syria.

## Gunman kills hostage, self in US standoff

AP, Bailey

A gunman took six girls hostage at the high school in this mountain town Wednesday, using them as human shields for hours before he shot and fatally wounded a girl and then killed himself as a SWAT team moved in, authorities said.

The confrontation at Platte Canyon High School unfolded just a short drive away from Columbine, the site of one of the nation's deadliest school shootings. The gunman, believed to be between 30 and 50 years old, was cornered with the girls in a second-floor classroom, and he released four of them, one by one.

Park County Sheriff Fred Wegener said authorities decided to storm the classroom after the man cut off negotiations and set a 4 p.m. deadline. Wegener wouldn't say what the man threatened to do. He said authorities used explosives as they entered the classroom, only to have the suspect fire at officers, shoot one of the girls and then himself.

## Iran-EU 'positive' talks fail to reach accord

AFP, Berlin

Talks between Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani and European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana failed to produce an accord but were positive and constructive, both men said yesterday.

"It has been a long, constructive negotiation," Larijani told reporters at the end of two days of meetings in the German capital.

"We have been able to arrive at some positive conclusions."

"Today we have discussed modalities with the aim of coming back to the main negotiations as soon as possible."

In a businesslike press conference, Solana told reporters: "We have been progressing. We will have a new contact in the middle of next week."

Sources close to the talks said the contact could take place over the phone and did not necessarily mean they would be meeting face to face.

Larijani was to hold talks with German Foreign Minister Frank-

Walter Steinmeier later on Thursday at the request of Solana.

The talks in Berlin were the first time Solana and Larijani had met for more than two weeks.

During that time European diplomats have tried to ratchet up the pressure by warning that time is running out for Iran to agree to UN Security Council demands to suspend uranium enrichment activities and thus avert possible United Nations sanctions.

Iran defied the Security Council's August 31 deadline for it to stop uranium enrichment, which makes fuel for civilian nuclear power reactors but also, in highly refined form, the raw material for atomic weapons.

Iran insists its enrichment work is solely for peaceful purposes.

Although European powers have expressed some hope for a breakthrough, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remained defiant Wednesday in the face of Western pressure.