

CLINTON'S THIRD TERM

By Satjiv S. Chahil

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER I WAS HONORED TO ATTEND THE inaugural meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative, a three-day, nonpartisan gathering of government officials, businesspeople, academics, and celebrities from around the globe to discuss what we can do about poverty, corruption, climate change, and religious conflict. The always astute Bill Clinton ensured a high-powered attendance by scheduling the Midtown Manhattan event to coincide with the Millennium Summit of the U.N. General Assembly.

Among those in attendance were Jordan's King Abdullah II; British prime minister Tony Blair; U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan; Israeli vice premier Shimon Peres; U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice; the presidents of the Dominican Republic (Leonel Fernandez Reyna), Nigeria (Olusegun Obasanjo), South Africa (Thabo Mbeki), and the Ukraine (Viktor Yushchenko); economist Dr. Hernando de Soto; Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams; News Corp. CEO Rupert Murdoch; Time Warner CEO Richard Parsons; and an array of other distinguished global leaders. The politically active glamour set were also there in force, including Angelina Jolie and her main squeeze Brad Pitt as well as Mick Jagger, Barbra Streisand, Tony Bennett, and Leonardo DiCaprio.

As for the 42nd president of the United States himself, he looked trim and in command as he held court wielding a wireless microphone. It was a slick production, and all the breakout sessions were handled in meticulous fashion—the most dramatic and timely one coming about when Ms. Rice, Mr. Blair, and the Jordanian king joined Mr. Clinton on stage to speak about the Middle East peace process, international trade, terrorism, alternative energy, and nuclear proliferation. They also engaged in an amazingly bold discussion on how to use religion for reconciliation and conflict resolution. Mr. Clinton closed the session by asking participants to commit to take action on one of the areas discussed, reminding them that “all of us have an unprecedented amount of power to solve problems, save lives, and help people see the future.”

Other highlights included the Museum of Modern Art opening cocktail reception, where I had wide-ranging conversations with

my heroes Ted Turner and John Glenn, and the gala second-night dinner at which Tony Bennett sang a number of his hits, including “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” Eating it up were a bunch of bigwigs from Silicon Valley, including Vinod Khosla of Kleiner Perkins and eBay founder Pierre Omidyar. Earlier at the event, Mr. Omidyar joined a panel discussion on poverty including Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank and Jacqueline Novogratz of Acumen Fund, and was moderated by Paul Brest of the Hewlett Foundation. Omidyar cited microfinance as proof beyond eBay that business can be a tool for social good. And Mr. Bennett didn't just sing: He also auctioned off one of his paintings (it fetched \$150,000) for the Katrina Hurricane Relief Fund, the program spearheaded by Mr. Clinton and George Bush Sr.

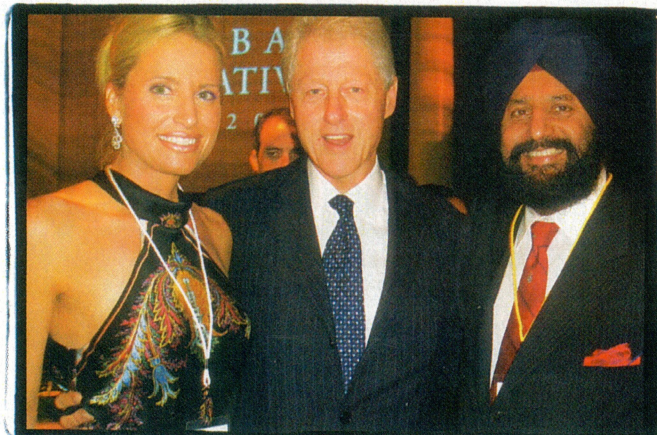
In the end, Mr. Clinton's CGI affair overshadowed many of the U.N. events and was viewed in a largely positive light—a refreshing change in a world that's felt increasingly polarized since the beginning of the Iraq conflict and the declaration of the “war on terrorism.” This is due largely to the man himself: Mr. Clinton remains popular on the world stage. He knows how to connect with people at a basic level and is amazingly articulate on a wide range of subjects—from how to implement new

business strategies and technologies to combating climate change to the social leveling power of the Internet. At a time when it seems that the United States is in a standoff with much of the rest of the world, Mr. Clinton used his natural political skills to engage these heads of state in a constructive manner.

As President Bush steps up his own public relations efforts to reassure a suspicious public at home and abroad, Mr. Clinton is using his natural charm and savoir faire to bring the world a little closer together at a critical time in history. As he remarked at the end of his gathering, “In my life now, I only obsess about two things: I don't want anybody to die before their time, and I don't want to see good people spend their energies without making a difference.”

Hear! Hear! ■■■■

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KELLIE CAREY (OF KELLIE CAREY PRIVATE JETS), BILL CLINTON, AND AO EDITORIAL ADVISOR SATJIV S. CHAHIL BUDDY IT UP AT THE CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE.