

# Burying Pressler's legacy

Pak. Defence

By Anwar Kemal

Dawn 8/4/05

NOT since Britain withheld two dreadnoughts and other warships from Ottoman Turkey in 1914 has denial of military equipment to its legal buyer caused as many headaches for all concerned as the 28 F-16 aeroplanes withheld from Pakistan in the 1990s.

In the case of the warships Turkey felt so let down that it gravitated to the central powers, the side that lost World War I. The Middle East crisis of today owes its origins to that single event.

In the more recent case of denial Pakistan and the US became estranged. The swift loss of American interest in Afghanistan enabled Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda to move in and use that country as a base for planning attacks against the United States. Blocking the delivery of F-16s also acted as a catalyst to Pakistan's decision to develop a ballistic missile capability.

The Bush administration's decision to lift the ban on the sale of this aircraft has boosted the United States' stock in Pakistan far beyond the weapon system's substantial military value. A sense of relief and satisfaction greeted the long awaited death knell of former Senator Pressler's bankrupt legacy of sanctions and embargoes against Pakistan.

Ending the 15-year embargo on F-16s is a major gesture acknowledging Pakistan's key role in the war on terror. American Secretary of State Dr Condoleezza Rice, while defending the decision in a recent press interview, cited the views of the 9/11 Commission underscoring the crucial importance of Pakistan in the struggle against "Islamist terrorism".

No doubt the United States also wishes to strengthen President Musharraf's hand internally. Of releasable weapon systems the F-16 alone is the true measure of Pak-US bilateral relations, exceeding by far the earlier honorific designation of Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally".

True to form, Mr Pressler pressed his erroneous views in a rearguard *New York Times* op-ed article on March 21, 2005, virtually on the eve of the F-16 announcement. What a pity the *New York Times* allotted space to this brazenly partisan anti-Pakistan, anti-China tirade.

The *New York Times* editorial of March 29, "Fuel for South Asia's Arms Race", also opposed the sale of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan. The editorial declared that the aircraft's "only plausible use is to threaten India", and that the supply of F-16s to both sides would "encourage them to engage in a new, American-fuelled arms race."

This pessimistic conclusion does not tally with South Asia's emerging ground realities. Pakistan is engaging India in a peaceful composite dialogue, not an arms race, to resolve the decades-old Kashmir dispute as well as other differences. We have neither the financial resources nor the desire to engage our big neighbour in an arms race. For every F-16 that Pakistan buys India can afford to buy four.

A trans-Kashmir bus service between the capitals of Azad Kashmir and Indian occupied Kashmir, across the LOC, has commenced for the first time in decades. For the first time in years many Pakistani and Indian nationals who do not necessarily come from divided families are also crossing the international border on private visits. Sentiments of goodwill abound. If India responds in kind to Pakistan's peace initiative, genuine peace and harmony could prevail in South Asia.

Across the Wagah border, especially in New Delhi's corridors of power, the initial reaction to the F-16 decision was one of exaggerated, if not feigned, disappointment. Subsequently the Indian establishment became ecstatic when they realized that the Bush administration was offering India much more.

Indians probably realized that vociferous

complaints and clamour appear odd coming from a country aspiring to be a world power, in fact promised world power status on a silver platter. India's objections to the F-16 sale also lack validity because the proposed sale of aircraft to Pakistan will not upset the military balance.

The PAF, to be sure, is looking forward to the morale-boosting induction of new F-16s. During the years of the Pressler sanctions, air forces in the Arab world whose pilots the PAF pilots had helped train in the 1970s and early 1980s had in the meantime acquired more advanced versions of the F-16 and comparable aircraft. India had inducted the Mirage 2000, the MIG 29 and the Su-31. The PAF had to scrounge for older aircraft, like the Mirage III from Australia and Lebanon and the Mirage V from France.

To the PAF's credit, its pilots and techni-

Having made the US economy dependent on Indian human skills, and having gained an influential voice in American politics and industry, India is now being offered crucial help to become a world power. Surely, that is a far more momentous development than the sale of a few F-16 aircraft to Pakistan, and our government needs to draw the appropriate lessons from it.

cal staff have been able to squeeze the maximum performance from these ageing aerial platforms, in some cases exceeding the manufacturer's estimates, with the help of improvisation and self-reliance. To counter the IAF's numerical superiority and technological edge, our pilots have undergone the most rigorous training.

In spite of the PAF's best efforts, however, the gaps in Pakistan's security could not all be bridged. Consequently, Pakistan had to safeguard its security by developing its nuclear and ballistic missile capability.

The Bush administration's decision to resume the sale of F-16s to Pakistan has no doubt taken all these aspects into account. The US now intends to pursue friendly policies towards both India and Pakistan. American aircraft manufacturers have clearance to sell F-16 and the supposedly more advanced F-18 aircraft to the Indian Air Force.

Far more significant than the lifting of the F-16 ban against Pakistan are indications from high-level official sources in Washington that the United States has decided to help India become "a major world power in the 21st century". The two countries are due to pursue a strategic dialogue to cover missile defence and various security initiatives and new weapons systems. Expanded cooperation in high-tech and energy, including nuclear energy, is expected.

This report is consistent with Mr Pressler's article which advocates "a robust pro-India stance" so as to build it as "a major bulwark against China in East Asia." He goes further by suggesting that the United States should inform China of its intention to help India match China's arms build-up.

One needs to examine carefully the implications of such a policy. Does it fit in with the requirements of today's post Cold-War world?

One can, of course, defend the closest economic, scientific and defence cooperation between the two countries in order to help raise the standard of living of the people and to protect them from likely aggression. But it is unheard of for one country to help make another country a world power. During World War II, the United States helped Britain because they were fighting a common enemy. The purpose was decidedly not, as Roosevelt's closest advisers made plain, to preserve the British Empire although Churchill wanted this to be so.

The hazards of helping India become a world power for the purpose of opposing China should be evident to all but the most

simple-minded novice in international relations. Far from "containing China", such a policy is almost certainly a recipe for disaster.

America needs China as a willing partner in maintaining peace and stability in the post-Cold War era, especially in East Asia in on-going efforts to help resolve the nuclear issue with North Korea through negotiations.

Regardless of differences over Taiwan and trade and currency issues, China is at least as important for the United States as India in terms of geopolitics, economics and trade. The volume of US-China trade (\$177 billion) is eight times greater than US-India trade (\$21.6 billion). The flow of global FDI into China stood at \$53.5 billion and was largely capital-intensive, while FDI flow into India was \$4.3 billion and skill-intensive, concentrated in information technology.

India's greatest strength is that it has forged a symbiotic relationship with the US based on its ability to adapt its IT industry to American requirements. Indian scientists, engineers, accountants and other technical personnel are taking full advantage of the Internet's growing capacity and the level playing field it provides to play an increasingly important role in servicing the US economy.

Similarly, the organized efforts of many highly educated, affluent, politically

active Indian immigrants in the United States have translated into unusual clout for the mother country in Washington.

Once during the Cold War Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev threatened Pakistan with annihilation and in the 1980s the Soviet Union warned that unless support to the Afghan mujahideen was stopped, it would take "a strategic decision" to deal with Pakistan.

The bald fact is that India has never, ever, during its 58 years of independent existence sided with the United States on any vital strategic issue. But past behaviour is not determining American policy towards India.

Likewise, the fact that Pakistan laid its neck on the line on several occasions in history. The present is more important than the past and the future will one day become the new present. Pakistan therefore needs to broaden the base of its cooperation with the US to encompass as many mutually beneficial activities, just as India has done with telling effect.

India, commensurate with its size and growing economic strength, has regional and global aspirations, some of which do not necessarily comport with the interests of its smaller neighbours. Its ambition to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council is a case in point.

The smaller states of South Asia worry that India is more likely to wield its growing clout to further its narrow interests rather than collective regional interests. A Pax Indica in South Asia is unacceptable to them simply because India has yet to earn the credentials of a benign power.

Pakistan's leaders have finally understood that India is forging ahead because its private sector has made available to it a very large number of English-knowing engineers, scientists, technologists and managers. The Indian government has merely facilitated this economic revolution by allocating resources to education and ensuring that the money was actually spent on schools and teachers. This did not happen in Pakistan to the same extent.

Having made the US economy dependent on Indian human skills, and having gained an influential voice in American politics and industry, India is now being offered crucial help to become a world power. Surely, that is a far more momentous development than the sale of a few F-16 aircraft to Pakistan, and our government needs to draw the appropriate lessons from it.

The writer is a former ambassador.