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Introductory Observations:

United States has historically muddied peace and stability in South Asia by its consistent ill-conceived weapons supplies to Pakistan. That such American weapons supplies to Pakistan habitually take place when Pakistan needs more economic aid and less weapons for its sluggish move to democracy and economic advancement is a telling comment on United States priorities in South Asia in terms of conflict prevention.

The United States current decision to supply Pakistan with the following high technology weapons systems, once again comes at an inopportune time:

- F-16 fighter aircraft (nuclear capable).
- P3C Maritime Surveillance and Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft.
- PHALANX Close-In Weapon Systems for Pakistan's naval ships.

- TOW-2A anti-tank missiles-2000
- TOW-2A (Fly to Buy) missiles.
- VULCAN gun systems.

By themselves, these American weapons supplies to Pakistan do not un-nerve India militarily. But that is not the question. The major question that arises is that with United States “strategically entangled relationships” with Pakistan, would it be strategically wise for India to enter into any form of strategic partnership with the United States?

The above becomes more relevant when United States officially maintains a dismissive attitude on the subject in response to India’s concerns and more alarmingly when India’s “American Apologists” try to justify the weapons sales. The latter needs looking-into first.

Justification for United States Weapons Supplies to Pakistan- The Indian Apologists View:

This is being touched first, because while the United States has not officially and publicly advanced such reasons, their reflection in strategic analysis in Indian media, gives an insight as to what the Americans would be telling India’s political leadership on the subject in their closed door discussions.

Writing in “The Pioneer” of December 15, 2004 a prominent Indian military columnist states:

- “If India wants longer term normal relations with Pakistan, it must help Pakistan feel “less threatened” and more secure militarily and economically.”
- “What the US is trying to do is precisely this: Enhance Pakistan’s perception of its security. The award of major Non-NATO ally status, arms sales and financial assistance are part of this security package.”
- “But India has to be on board with the US while it is augmenting Pakistan’s military capacity by ensuring responsible and accountable behaviour from the military rulers.”
- “Calibrated arms supplies to Pakistan, close the conventional forces gap with India; (Musharraf’s constant demand on USA) and prevent a low nuclear threshold”.
- “India should not quibble over US arms sales to Pakistan. If Pakistan has been awarded MNA, India has NSSP!”

The above logic is strange because it runs contrary to the very basics of a realistic strategic analysis of the Indian sub-continent. The following points need to be noted by the United States and Indians inclined as above:

- India’s national security imperatives are to be determined by its own threat perceptions and not by Pakistan appeasement

policies of the United States.

- India cannot Balkanise itself to please Pakistan and lessen Pakistani insecurity/vulnerabilities.
- Indian sub-continent's strategic stability can only come about by its "natural balance of power" and not by infusions of arms supplies to Pakistan to offset India's superior military capabilities arising out of its size and resources.
- India's conventional military capabilities in terms of size, structures and weaponry are determined by its long land borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar besides the oversized requirements imposed by Pakistan's proxy war. India also has a long coastline of over 6000 km. Pakistan's similar requirements are miniscule in comparison to India.

United States Official Responses to India's Concerns are Dismissive:

United States official responses on India's concerns, officially articulated both in Washington and during US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld recent visit to New Delhi seem to be dismissive in nature.

In November 2004, US State Department Spokesman, Ari Fletcher made the following points:

- Insisted that there was "no contradiction between having strong relations with India and meeting the defense needs of other countries through the sale of US arms."
- US arms policy was "governed by US interests and Congressional legislation".
- "There should be no question that you can have good relations with one country and sell arms to another country. Its not a mutually exclusive proposition, and nor should it be."

It is not India's viewpoint that the arms sales by the United States to other countries are to be governed by India. However, when it comes to Pakistan, the United States has to be cautious and be governed by the following questions:

- Does Pakistan face a credible threat from India necessitating US arms sales to Pakistan?
- Do Pakistan's strategic and political instabilities justify arms sales additives to such a volatile environment?
- Does Pakistan have a record of conflict restraint or on the other hand does Pakistan have a propensity for conflict repeatedly demonstrated after every US arms infusion?

The answers to the above are obvious to any discerning South Asia watcher and it is a reflection how ill-conceived US arms sales to Pakistan are.

It was therefore surprising that the first visit of a high-level new Bush Administration official should have ignored the above

considerations. Indian media reports on Rumsfield's visit reflect the following:

- US Defense Secretary did not issue any 'suo moto' assurance on the subject.
- USA policies towards India and Pakistan were not zero-sum games
- USA understood India's sensitivities on arms sales to Pakistan.

At a joint press conference, the US Defense Secretary and the Indian Defense Minister refused to take any questions. All that the US Defense Secretary is said to have impressed on Indian leaders was that the United States wanted good relations with both India and Pakistan and that the United States accorded importance to India in global affairs.

The above does not mean a thing. The visit did not address India's concerns of US decision to over-militarise Pakistan. In that context Rumsfield's visit can be said to have been dismissive about India's concerns.

United States Makes its Strategic Choices Clear in South Asia:

The inopportune timing of United States to provide high-technology force-multiplier combat and surveillance aircraft (F16s and P3Cs) to Pakistan, when no credible external threats to Pakistan are existent reveals that the United States is making its strategic choices in South Asia clear.

Two United States political leaders, cutting across party lines i.e. Democratic Party Co-chair of United States Congress India Caucus and Congresswoman Ilena Rose-Lehtinen, Republican Party likely co-chair of Indian Caucus have circulated their proposed letter to President Bush on the subject, which states among other things that:

- **“US proposed arms sales to Pakistan have moved further and further from the requirements of the war on terror”**
- **“Since neither Al Qaeda nor the remnants of the Taliban have submarines, armoured fighting vehicles or airplanes, we (US Congress members) are gravely concerned that the systems being provided to Pakistan are intended to be used against Indian capabilities.”**
- **“If the US provides F-16s to Pakistan, planes inherently capable of delivering nuclear weapons, the message will be that our true strategic partner in South Asia is Pakistan.”**

Very aptly and rightly put by US Congress leaders who in the same letter also remind President Bush that the American relationship with India as “a growing world power with which have common strategic interests” should underscore “**trust and closeness.**”

It therefore becomes important to next focus on the political, military and strategic impact that the proposed US weapons deliveries to Pakistan have on India, in which “**trust and closeness**” are the first casualties.

Political Impact on India of US Weapons Deliveries to Pakistan:

Indian political leaders have in no uncertain terms made it abundantly clear that the political impact on India of US weapons deliveries to Pakistan will be as follows:

- India-Pakistan ongoing peace dialogue process would be endangered.
- Decision may cost the United States heavily in terms of Indian good will.

United States is free to ignore these friendly cautions on grounds that India habitually becomes piqued when US provides weapons deliveries to Pakistan. Nevertheless, Indian Government’s political cautions are opportune and accurately reflect India’s sentiments.

The United States can ill-afford to ignore that Congress Governments have traditionally been suspicious and distrustful of US strategic motives in South Asia, and this could become intensified despite there being an India Prime Minister in chair who has spent many years in Washington on economic assignments with global financial institutions.

Military Impact on India of US Weapons Deliveries to Pakistan:

Indian Armed Forces are very sensitive to the blunting of the cutting-edge of their conventional military superiorities. The United States weapons deliveries to Pakistan of high–technology “force multiplier” combat and surveillance aircraft are sole aimed at blunting the Indian military superiority.

The United States, which has in the last fours years tried to enhance its “military to military contacts” with the Indian Armed Forces, will be hard put to convince the Indian military hierarchy of the military logic for weapons deliveries to Pakistan.

United States intentions will come under serious questioning by the Indian military hierarchy.

The major military impact would be that with US attempts to over-militarise Pakistan, the Indian military hierarchy would demand matching counter-responses in terms of weapons systems and certainly not of American origin. The Indian military will have to look elsewhere.

Militarily, such American decisions have enhanced Pakistan's established "propensity for conflict" and "military adventurism" against India. In this author's last paper "United States Relations on Glide Path Towards Estrangement" (SAAG paper No 1183 dated 10.12.2004). US Prof. Harold Gould stands quoted: "**Every time this (revitalization of Pakistan's military capabilities) has happened it has impacted negatively on India, usually in the form of open hostilities, proxy insurgences, or nuclear blackmail. US-India relations will quickly sour should any of these happen.**"

Strategic Impact on India of US Weapons Deliveries to Pakistan:

The major strategic impact on India would be in terms of overweightage of the following considerations on the future and the course of the "United States-India Strategic Partnership" envisioned in 2000:

- India would become more reserved and cautious in its policy attitudes and formulations towards a strategic relationship with USA.
- Even if the Indian Government tries to steer the strategic relationship on its intended course, the Indian military hierarchy's distrust of US strategic priorities in South Asia will persist and likely to become an impediment in the process.
- India so far has exercised its restraint in the development of her ICBM and SLBM capabilities and other strategic assets, under US pressure. India may have to shrug-off this pressure now.
- India would be forced to look for creating a more multi-polar world with other nations equally fretful of American unilateralism.

The net loser in this game could be the United States for ignoring the strategic realities existent in South Asia

Concluding Observations:

India is not piqued at United States arms deliveries to Pakistan as American officials are habitually wont to characterise. India is disillusioned that the United States-India strategic partnership, in which it has invested so disproportionately, more than the Americans, should have been sacrificed to suit United States strategic expediencies vis-a-vis Pakistan. Strategic partnerships

take decades to build their underlying parameters and the glue which binds them are “mutual trust” and “shared strategic convergences” regionally and in the international arena. **The United States decision to provide advanced weapons systems to Pakistan highlights that between United States and India there are no “shared strategic convergences” regionally.** And if that be the case where does the question arise of “shared strategic convergences” in the international arena. As for mutual trust having been the first casualty, enough has been said earlier.

It is a sad commentary to see the worlds sole super-power i.e. the United States demonstrating helplessness that without “rewarding” Pakistan (read “bribing Pakistan with military supplies”) American operations against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan cannot succeed. It is like paying “hush money” to a local neighbourhood hoodlum. America’s image is put seriously at stake with such dealings and policies and no amount of “realpolitik” can justify it.

The United States seems to be entering a period of “imperial overstretch” with its self-created crises in West Asia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea. It would be advisable for the United States not to be generating conflict in South Asia through ill-conceived policies of providing advanced weapons systems to Pakistan--- a failed state with a record for WMD proliferation and propensity for conflict and military adventurism on both its flanks i.e. India and Afghanistan.

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