

**Episode 12: Arms Race?**

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In this episode of the Editors we look at the recent US decision to sell F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan. Has the deal sparked a new arms race in the subcontinent? On the program, Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan's Correspondent for the Daily Telegraph in London, Prmit Pal Chaudhuri, Foreign Editor of the Hindustan Times and Christopher Kremmer, a contributor for the Sydney Morning Herald on issues related to India and Pakistan.

We also talk to Kishore Mahbubani about his new book 'Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding trust between America and the World'.

Grace Phan, presenter: Hello and welcome to The Editors, I'm Grace Phan in Singapore. Tonight, we speak to a world authority on global affairs who warns America about its role in Asia and the world.

Kishore Mahbubani, Author: The world is getting in one way or another increasingly alienated from America. All the reservoirs of goodwill that America has built over the years are being lost, and in some cases as you know being replaced with reservoirs of ill will or reservoirs of hate.

Grace Phan: That interview with Kishore Mahbubani, the author of a new book, 'Beyond the Age of Innocence, Rebuilding Trust between America and the World', later in the program.

But first, Pakistan a key partner in President George W. Bush's war on terror was rewarded recently by a US decision to sell it F-16 fighter aircraft. The decision drew a warning from India that such a move would destabilise the region. In 1990, under the leadership of George Bush senior, Washington barred the sale of F-16 jets to Pakistan in response to Islamabad's then undeclared nuclear weapons program. The bonds between the two countries strengthened as President Pervez Musharraf cooperated with the US against terrorism.

However, the US is also trying to forge closer ties with Pakistan's old adversary, India. Washington has agreed that US firms sell India sophisticated multi-role combat aircraft and develop broader cooperation in missile defence systems. The announcements come at a time when Pakistan and India are trying to resolve their differences over Kashmir. So could the US decision frustrate those talks and even foster an arms race between the two countries?

Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan Correspondent, London Daily Telegraph: Immediately after Pakistan got the F-16s they have also just bought four naval frigates from China, and India is buying billions of dollars worth of arms, and I think the fear is that there is going to be an arms race.

Prmit Pal Chaudhry, Foreign Editor, Hindustan Times: India will buy those weapons regardless of whether America offers the F-16 or not.

Christopher Kremmer, Sydney Morning Herald: The United States spokesmen on this have described it as virtually in terms of it being an aid project. What it is, is a piece of typical geo-political balancing filled with hypocrisy from Washington.

Grace Phan: In a moment we'll be joined by our panel but first let's take a look at what the media has been saying.

'India Today's' cover story shouted, "India goes shopping, American F-16s for both India and Pakistan add a new dimension to an ongoing arms buying spree in the Indian subcontinent". Peter Baker wrote for the 'Washington Post.com' in an article headed, "Bush to sell F-16s to Pakistan", that the "administration's move alters the equation in a part of the world where deep seated religious and national animosities have resulted in a long hair-trigger standoff between two nuclear armed giants.

In an article headed, "US F-16 sale to Pakistan upsets India", a senior Bush administration official was quoted on 'al-jazeera.net' saying that the "jets are vital to Pakistan security as President Musharraf takes numerous risks prosecuting the war on terror". US Senator, Larry Pressler, is quoted by the 'Hindustan Times.com' saying that the "Bush administration's decision to sell F-16 jets to Pakistan amounts to rejecting India at the altar". The Senator calls

the decision, "an atrocity that goes against everything the Bush administration has stood for". He says, "it raises Pakistan a country that doesn't stand for anything we stand for, to the level of India, the world's largest democracy".

India and Pakistan, a new arms race? Our panel after the break.

[PROMO]

Grace Phan: Welcome back. Tonight The Editors is examining a possible new arms race on the subcontinent in the wake of the US agreeing to the sale of F-16 fighter planes to Pakistan.

I'm now joined by our panel. From Lahore in Pakistan is Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan's correspondent for the 'Daily Telegraph' in London. From New Delhi, Prमित Pal Chaudhry the Foreign Editor of the 'Hindustan Times'. From Sydney, Australia, Christopher Kremmer, a contributor for the 'Sydney Morning Herald' on issues related to the subcontinent.

Gentlemen welcome to The Editors, Ahmed Rashid has US President George W. Bush opened up an arms race in the region?

Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan Correspondent, London Daily Telegraph: Well I think liberals on both sides of the border do fear that. It should be noted that immediately after Pakistan got the F-16s they have also just bought four naval frigates from China, and India is buying billions of dollars worth of arms, and I think the fear is that there is going to be an arms race. Although of course the Bush administration is very much trying to strengthen Musharraf, strengthen the military because it's a key ally in the war against terrorism.

Grace Phan: Prमित do you agree with that?

Prमित Pal Chaudhry, Foreign Editor, Hindustan Times: No I don't actually. The F-16 sale, I mean India's purchase of weapons was planned and was well planned well before Bush's announcement. All America did was offer to enter into a contract that India was already tendering to three or four other countries. In other words, India was buying weapons on a blueprint for its own defence expansion that the Bush administration really had nothing to do with. In fact India was a bit, basically said that the F-16s...so far the feedback from the Indians has been the F-16 aircraft may not fulfill what India requires in terms of defences. India will buy those weapons regardless of whether America offers the F-16 or not.

Grace Phan: Christopher Kremmer, you wrote in 'The Sydney Morning Herald', the "US resumption of arms sales to Pakistan is ominous for the region". So do you think an arms race will develop?

Christopher Kremmer, Sydney Morning Herald: I think my piece was basically talking about the credibility gap that's opened up, rather than the arms race. I mean, the United States spokesmen on this have described it as virtually in terms of it being an aid project. What it is, is a piece of typical geo-political balancing filled with hypocrisy from Washington. And to illustrate that I think you only have to look at the US rhetoric trying to force the Europeans not to lift an arms embargo on China on the grounds that if the Europeans sell weapons to China it will spark tensions with Taiwan. Now here in South Asia you have exactly the same situation with two countries that have been at war, that are nuclear armed and yet if the United States decides to make a buck by selling weapons to them then it's all in the interests of peace and stability.

Grace Phan: Prमित, which country is currently the strongest militarily and how are these two countries placed in terms of where they get their weapons from?

Prमित Pal Chaudhry: Well, I think India clearly has a superior position in conventional arms. Just specifically on the question of air superiority, I think we have roughly a two-point-five to one ratio in superiority in terms of combat aircraft, but more importantly than just the numbers is that the quality of our aircraft is much better.

Pakistan has been under various sanctions or has been disallowed from buying arms from a lot of countries. For example Russia will not sell arms to Pakistan. The French, partly for fear of losing Indian contracts will not sell to Pakistan, and America has declined to sell for the past 15 years. So therefore, Pakistan has a situation where it's been buying only from China, and I think it's the F-7 that they've been buying from China is a seriously sub-standard aircraft.

India's actual firepower superiority is overwhelming in the air, and is replicated on the ground. But in many ways this is irrelevant because as Mr Kremmer is pointing out, we're both nuclear powers, and as overt nuclear nations we don't, we're almost never likely to wage conventional war with each other.

Grace Phan: Ahmed Rashid, who has the greatest nuclear weaponry, Pakistan or India?

Ahmed Rashid: I think what the Pakistanis are saying is that their missile rocket technology, which has been bought from China and North Korea is superior to India's, and secondly Pakistan has been able apparently to miniaturise nuclear weapons so that they can be placed on these missiles, which is something that India is trying to do but hasn't done yet.

But, above and beyond that, I think it's very important to understand that apart from the dynamics between India and Pakistan this gesture of arms sales is really an attempt by the American administration to send a signal of support to Musharraf and strengthen him within the domestic battles that he's facing inside Pakistan. So there's a very strong signal here that is coming now from the Americans that we support Musharraf, we support the military, he is our guy and don't try and rock the boat in Pakistan. And that's something that has upset the fundamentalist parties, it has upset liberals, although, of course, it has pleased the military. And it's a signal that's also come perhaps at a very awkward time because precisely at this moment Musharraf is facing challenges and threats at home from many different sides.

Grace Phan: Prमित, can it be that Washington is being even-handed by agreeing that US arms can be sold both to Pakistan and India?

Prमित Pal Chaudhry: Well I think that's actually the bigger concern as far as India is concerned. We have basically been trying to tom-tom the argument to Washington that India, given that it's on a shall we say a different trajectory in terms of the future in both economic, military, technological growth, that we can no longer as we like to say, hyphenate India and Pakistan together. And that India's argument is that America needs to break that hyphenation, and accept that its policies towards India are separate from its policies towards Pakistan. And preferably, as far as India is concerned, that India's interests or India's concerns get priority.

This hasn't worked, partially because since 9/11 [the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US] of course Pakistan is strategically very important to the United States, even if India remains in many ways the future player as far as American policy is concerned. And the struggle should we say between short-term and long-term policies within Washington in South Asia is one of the key reasons why America continues to play or at least give the appearance of trying to play off both sides simultaneously.

Grace Phan: Christopher on the issue of why this reversal of US policy now, in an article in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' titled, "We're all bunnies with these F-16s", you wrote, "democracy and nuclear non-proliferation are important but not as important as defending jobs in the United States and catching Osama bin Laden". Can you expand on this?

Christopher Kremmer: Well yeah, I mean the jobs issue has been well ventilated, the F-16 production line in Fort Worth Texas has been under a cloud due to declining orders, and it's quite interesting again if you look at the Taiwan parallel that the last time the F-16 production line was bailed out was in 1992 when the United States sold 150 F-16s to Taiwan.

Prमित Pal Chaudhry: Well I would say jobs is an issue definitely, but I don't think it's a major one, because in the end Lockheed Martin, in fact all defence contractors in the United States, are deeply in the black simply because of the enormous expansion of US military expenditure since 9/11 and because of the Iraq war.

I think what is particularly crucial here was, and I think as what Ahmed Rashid mentioned, the need to give something to Musharraf to support his position domestically. At the same time the need to give something to India that was much larger. I think the real issue was the offer of civilian nuclear technology, which is something that India has been desperate for because our civilian, I mean the Indian government, and there's a consensus on this within India; the belief that they need to rapidly expand the amount of nuclear power that's needed to fuel the growing Indian economy. And it cannot be done so long as US sanctions on civilian nuclear technology remain. The need to break that sanction barrier is something that is overriding in India, and that was the real sweetener. And I think it's been relatively clear from the media reports, quoting Indian officials, that the F-16 deal, the F-16 itself is no big deal as far as India is concerned,

it's an inferior aircraft to our main strike fighter, which is the Sukhoi-30, but if it is part of a much larger "geo-political package" and this would incorporate civilian nuclear technology, then India would be prepared to consider the purchase.

Grace Phan: Primit, let's move to the issue of Kashmir. How will this affect the peace process that has begun between the two countries over Kashmir?

Primit Pal Chaudhry: That's actually one of the one areas at least rhetorically where India and the US differ on the F-16 sale, which is America believes that it will strengthen or stabilise the peace process or have no impact, while India has questioned whether that would actually be the case. My impression is its impact will actually be quite minimal.

Grace Phan: Ahmed, to what extent is this action by the US aggravating those talks in your view?

Ahmed Rashid: No, I would agree with the previous speaker. I mean I don't think it'll have any impact whatsoever. This is more to do with US relations with Musharraf and US relations with India separately, as it were, rather than anything to do with Kashmir. America has been a very strong facilitator on Kashmir since 9/11, it played a major role in 2002 in preventing three major escalations between India and Pakistan that nearly led to war. Since then it has nudged both sides to talk about various issues. I don't think this, a role of America as facilitator is either going to be enhanced or diminished by the sale of these weapons.

Grace Phan: Gentlemen thank you very much, from Lahore in Pakistan Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan's correspondent for the 'Daily Telegraph' London. From New Delhi, Primit Pal Chaudhry, the Foreign Editor of the 'Hindustan Times', and from Sydney, Christopher Kremmer, South Asia specialist for 'The Sydney Morning Herald'.

After the break, sizing up America, often a force for good but in recent times blind to its shortcomings, that's according to a leading global analyst.

[PROMO]

Grace Phan: Welcome back. "Many Americans know in their heart of hearts that something has gone wrong in America's relations with the world. But they don't quite know why", so says the dust-cover summary of 'Beyond the Age of Innocence, Rebuilding Trust between America and the World', by Kishore Mahbubani. It says the "majority of the 1.2 billion Muslims are clearly angry with America. Similarly America has been imprudent in its dealing with 1.2 billion Chinese. Reservoirs of goodwill have been replaced with reservoirs of anger and resentment".

And this from someone who calls himself an old friend of America. I spoke earlier with Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, a former Singapore ambassador to the United Nations, and a regular contributor to the 'Wall Street Journal', the 'New York Times' and 'Foreign Policy' magazine.

You say the United States has done more than any country to change the world, yet Americans are among the least prepared to cope with the world they've changed. Why did you say that Americans are not coping well with those changes?

Kishore Mahbubani, Author: Well I think the reason why they're not coping well is that if I can give a very simple explanation, American power has become so enormous, vis-a-vis the rest of the world, that it sits on the rest of the world in many ways. But the Americans are not aware that American power sits on the rest of the world. It's like having as use the image in my book, like having somebody else's car parked on your toes. The Americans are sitting in the car looking at people gesturing at them and can't figure out why are these guys gesturing me, what have I done on them? That's because Americans are not aware of how American power makes decisions that affects the rest of the world.

And the purpose of my book is to provide a wake-up call to Americans, to make them aware that the world is getting in one way or another increasingly alienated from America. All the reservoirs of goodwill that America has built over the years are being lost, and in some cases as you know being replaced with reservoirs of ill will or reservoirs of hate.

Grace Phan: You describe America as turning more insular, becoming more unilateralist. What sort of problems does that create?

Kishore Mahbubani: The world has shrunk, we no longer in some ways live in different countries incidentally, where once when living in different countries you used to live in different boats, today all the boats have become fused into one, and we all live in the same boat. But when we live in the same boat we do not have a captain or crew that takes care of the crew as a whole, instead we have every country just looking after its cabin. Now the most powerful cabin on this common boat is America. Now when it makes decisions it is making decisions that are intended to benefit only the occupants of one cabin and not intended to take into consideration the interests of the other members of the common boat. And that's why there's this resentment against America.

So, what I'm telling Americans is that be aware that the decisions you make affect others and let me give you a simple example ok, as you know because of domestic electoral reasons 25,000 cotton farmers in the south get these massive subsidies, billions of dollars of subsidies. As a consequence of that the world cotton prices go down. Now when the world cotton prices go down 10 million West African farmers get impoverished. So obviously when America give domestic electoral subsidies for domestic electoral reasons, he wasn't trying to damage 10 million West African farmers, but they did. And if you do that, if your domestic actions hurt people overseas you have to be aware of that. You can't say I didn't know that was going on.

Grace Phan: Let's talk about Asia. How would you characterise the United States relationship with and attitude towards Asia?

Kishore Mahbubani: The US attitude towards Asia I would say are at a crossroads, there's a huge amount of uncertainty now in the US-China relationship, and I think there's a need for the world to wake up and try and do something now to get the US-China relationship right, because if you don't get it right now and there is a polarisation between China and America, that would be very, very bad. It'd be better for the whole world if indeed you could create some kind of cooperative relationship between United States and the majority of the Asian countries, because we don't have to go back to the 19th century world where a victory for one country is a loss for another.

Grace Phan: What about Australia? The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad, compared Australia to a deputy sheriff to America in the Asia Pacific, and that Australia cannot be well accepted by countries in this region if it takes that role. How do you see Australia?

Kishore Mahbubani: Well I'll be going to Melbourne in early May to deliver one of the Deacon, Alfred Deacon lectures you know, and the topic I've chosen is what I call the triple A group, America, Australia and Asia. And I believe that this is what I'm going to say in my lecture that Australia has a very important role to play in keeping the relationship between America and Asia on an even keel, because the advantage that Australia has is that it has a very close relationship. And it's close not just in political or economic terms, but in psychological terms as you know. There's a huge amount of cultural comfort with the Americans and Australians, and that bond of trust is a valuable bond.

At the same time by its geographical location in Asia Australians understand Asia, they know, they know it because it's right at their doorstep. And so if they can take this deep understanding that they have of Asia and they have this close bond of trust that they have with America and bring together, I think Australia can play an extremely important role. I'm a great supporter of a bigger role for Australia and I'm also a big supporter of the integration of Australia into Asia.

Grace Phan: Kishore Mahbubani thank you very much indeed for sharing your insights with us today.

Kishore Mahbubani: My pleasure.

Grace Phan: That was Kishore Mahbubani, author of 'Beyond the Age of Innocence, Rebuilding Trust between America and the World'.

Coming up next after the break, matters of opinion.

[PROMO]

Grace Phan: Welcome back. And now it's time for matters of opinion, a selection of media opinion and observations on Asian affairs over the past week.

'The Economist' leaders pages ran a piece headed, "China, Japan and the UN, a collision in East Asia", which it summed up by saying, "there should be no enlarged security council without Japan". The writer gave as one reason for the recent anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, "Japan's temerity in seeking permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council", and said "that's why China's authorities allowed the demonstration to go ahead". It concluded, "the Japanese belong in an enlarged Security Council, not least so the Chinese come to understand that they cannot have everything their way in East Asia's future".

India's 'Frontline' referred to a "new momentum, regardless of concerns of an arms race between India and Pakistan". It said, "driven by popular enthusiasm and political initiatives on either side the India-Pakistan peace process appears to be on the high road to success, despite obstacles like unresolved disputes and the American intervention with the offer of fighter jets". Indonesia's 'Tempo' looked at one aspect of government process in the fledgling democracy, under an opinion page heading, "Seeking senior ministerial staff". It said, "this procedure is so fault ridden that it has caused countless mismatches and delays". It went on, "to say that a minister is extraordinary but has dim-witted aides or that a president is excellent but his ministers are dense, is a contradiction in terms. If the ministers are really good they should be able to select and appoint more than just adequate staff".

And that's the end of our program for this evening. I'll be back same time next week, until then, do visit our website at abcasiapacific.com/editors. You can check our program times and take part in our online poll. The question this week is: has the sale of US fighter planes to Pakistan started a new arms race on the subcontinent? You can vote anytime, the results are tabulated live.

I'm Grace Phan in Singapore, goodnight.

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