

India-US strategic ties

Pak-F. Relations

By Afzaal Mahmood *Dawn 24.1.04*

THE bestowing of strategic ally status on India by the United States is the culmination of a post-cold war process to strengthen and broaden relationship between the two countries which, in the words of US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, "goes beyond security, proliferation or regional issues."

The geo-strategic interests of Washington and New Delhi have brought them closer to each other and the newly-developed 'strategic partnership' will not only lead to major geo-political changes in the region but also enable India to fulfil its long-cherished dream of playing a greater role in Asia.

Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, hailing the relaxation of US controls on exports to his country — which comes after years of lobbying by New Delhi — expressed satisfaction that the vision of India-US strategic partnership, shared by him and the US president, was now a reality. According to him, the relationship is based increasingly on "common values and common interests."

President Bush, who described the expanded cooperation as "an important milestone" in their bilateral relations, is hopeful that the collaboration in new areas will "deepen the ties of commerce and friendship between our two nations and will increase stability in Asia and beyond." In his meeting with Indian foreign minister Yashwant Sinha on January 20, President Bush discussed the next steps in their strategic relationship.

The United States has had a testy relationship with India for almost half a century. Viewed against this background, the latest turn-around in their relations is remarkable. The reasons are not far to seek. China is no doubt an important factor in growing relations between Washington and New Delhi as the United States wants to build up India to counter-balance the growing power of China. Another important reason — far more urgent at the moment — is to muster Indian support to fight Islamic extremism and terror in the region.

According to reports appearing in US media, policy makers in Washington appear to be of the view that in the "most volatile" part of the world — the Islamic crescent from Turkey to Malaysia — only Israel and India can be depended upon to act as a regional stabilizing force. New Delhi and Tel Aviv represent the two most potent non-Muslim militaries in the entire region extending from one end of the Islamic crescent to the other.

This line of argument became even more convincing when an old and trustworthy ally like Turkey declined to help the United

States at a crucial time in last year's Iraq war. After that the neo-conservatives in Washington began focussing attention on developing three-way ties between Israel, India and the United States. The green signal from Washington to Tel Aviv to go ahead with the sale of its advanced Phalcon airborne reconnaissance system to India is indicative of the new trend. Some years back, the Clinton administration had disallowed the sale of Phalcon system to India. The relaxation of export controls will immensely increase technology cooperation between the two countries on space, missile defence and civilian nuclear programmes.

Some Indian security analysts think that by enhancing technology cooperation, Washington has given de facto recognition to India's nuclear status. Under the agreement, the US will gradually relax export controls

far more intemperate and extensive if Islamabad and New Delhi had not buried the hatchet and started a purposeful peace process. It also appears that the American offer to increase technology cooperation may have acted as one of the incentives for India to express its willingness to settle all disputes, including that of Kashmir, through a composite and meaningful dialogue with Pakistan.

For a change, the Pakistan foreign office has not come out with a knee-jerk reaction to Washington's announcement of 'strategic partnership' with New Delhi. As a matter of fact, Islamabad has wisely chosen to keep quiet over this issue because any public expression of dissatisfaction or displeasure by us would not have made any ripples in Washington. As far as the Indians are concerned, any adverse reaction from us would have nipped the recently launched peace process.

The time has come when Pakistan must face the ground realities as they exist and not as it would like them to be. Compared to India, we are a small country and cannot hope to be an effective rival of our big neighbour in international politics. It is therefore futile on our part to oppose India's efforts to achieve its potential and act as a big power in world politics — we simply cannot prevent it. Even the pretence to being the rival of India became meaningless after the

country had been halved by the separation of East Pakistan.

Pakistan's obsession with being treated as equal to India is actually a legacy of pre-partition days' rivalry between the Muslim League and the Congress. After the Cabinet Mission Plan, when the British withdrawal from India became a certainty, the Muslim League demanded 50 per cent share for 30 per cent Indian Muslims at the centre — equal representation for Muslim majority provinces with Hindu majority provinces at the centre, which of course was not acceptable to the Congress.

Instead of adopting a negative attitude towards India's progress, we should focus on making Pakistan a progressive, democratic, peaceful, stable and prosperous country. If rivalry with India has become a part of our psyche and we cannot live without it, then let us have a healthy rivalry — competition with our neighbour in the fields of individual freedoms, human rights, independent judiciary, free and fair elections, peaceful transfer of power, treatment of minorities, economic prosperity, the care of the elderly and poor, social reforms, literacy rate, the quality of education and, of course, sports. Let us hope this is not asking too much of most Pakistanis.

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through a series of "reciprocal steps" in which India will tighten its export regime. Washington and New Delhi will also expand cooperation on nuclear regulatory and safety measures and missile defence. It may be recalled that India was one of the first countries to welcome the Bush administration's missile defence plans in 2001 — in marked contrast to China's reaction.

The US decision to relax technology controls will also have a salutary effect on Indian business sectors — from space to information technology. Indian companies are particularly interested in importing from the United States products in the defence sector, biotechnology, space and software industries. At the moment, for example, in biotechnology Indian companies are prevented from importing from the United States sophisticated nanotechnology under existing restrictions. Therefore, the relaxation of technology exports, will give a huge boost to Indian industry as a whole.

It is interesting to note that the announcement about the relaxation of technology controls and the 'strategic partnership' between the United States and India was announced after the Islamabad peace process had taken off. Though US officials have denied any link between the two, the connection is too obvious to be brushed off.

The backlash in Pakistan would have been

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