

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Jitters over AWACS

*U.S. Defense Secretary Weinberger's promise to Pakistan creates new problems in the area.*

Caspar Weinberger's trip to India in mid-October had been held up here as a firm indication that the United States was at last willing to understand India's threat perceptions. But the joy was short-lived. Two days after his departure, the American Defense Secretary announced in Islamabad that Pakistan requires air defense and he would "get this defense capability in the hands of Pakistan as quickly as possible."

Weinberger's statement and subsequent moves in Washington to make good on his promise have set off an unusually angry response in India. K. Nawar Singh, minister of state for external affairs, told the Indian parliament that if the United States makes AWACS available to Pakistan, Indo-U.S. relations will receive a major setback. When U.S. Air Force Secretary Robert Aldridge came to Delhi to do business as a follow-up to Weinberger, the same message was bluntly conveyed.

An Indian defense delegation headed by Minister of State for Defense Arun Singh returned from Moscow in early November to announce that the Kremlin was prepared to satisfy India's technological requirement in answering a Pakistani AWACS capability. The MiG-31 is an obvious option—this latest model interceptor flies at 60,000-80,000 km per hour, has a radar with a 100 km range, and has missiles that can be fired at unseen targets 70 km away.

The excuse for the AWACS offer, of course, is the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan has been complaining for some time that Soviet and

Afghan aircraft were violating its air space.

But for India, this does not mitigate the perceived danger. Pakistan has invaded India three times since 1947, each time across India's western borders, and each time using U.S.-supplied arms.

Indian defense officials point out that the highly mountainous terrain on the Afghanistan border casts extensive "radar shadows," but with AWACS, the Pakistan Air Force will be handed the capability to destroy squadrons of the Indian Air Force in a sneak attack. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon is cited in this connection. Backed by the AWACS (Hawkeyes), the Israelis destroyed 80 Syrian planes while losing only one of their own.

As the defense experts here point out, AWACS' awesome capability for radar scan of air-space below, around, and above it, up to distances of nearly 700 km, will lay bare to the Pakistanis a large number of air and naval bases located within hundreds of kilometers inside India. And, if the AWACS is allowed to cruise close to the border, as one report put it, it will "rip the veil" of operational secrecy off three-fourths of the Indian Air Force's main operational command—western and south-western.

Since the AWACS acts also as a "force multiplier," it tends to raise the military ante in the region qualitatively—while everyone knows that, F-16 and AWACS notwithstanding, the Pakistanis will have to head for the sea or call in the Americans should the Soviets make a concerted drive south

from Afghanistan.

Not at all incidental to India's opposition to the U.S.-Pakistani arms relationship are the economic implications. For India to match the qualitatively more sophisticated military input into Pakistan puts a serious additional pressure on India's tight budget. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan has received more than \$1.5 billion in U.S. arms, including 40 M-16 fighter-bombers. The new U.S. arms package for the next six years, earlier estimated at \$1.7 billion, may actually rise to as much as \$3 billion of a total assistance program of \$4.02 billion.

The AWACS controversy once again finds the United States in the role of the devil. Given the alliance between Pakistan and China, Indians are convinced that the United States is deliberately pressuring India. It is widely believed here that the AWACS is part of a larger U.S. plan to involve Pakistan in the central defense command in the Persian Gulf.

Two related revelations have increased the jitters in New Delhi. First, the *Washington Post* quoted secret U.S. intelligence documents that Pakistan has already successfully obtained the triggering device and is now only "two screwdriver turns" away from having a nuclear bomb—right after President Reagan gave an official clean bill of health to Pakistan on the bomb-building question—and right after the defense secretary's departure from Delhi.

Second, the U.S. State Department has confirmed that the United States has been clandestinely operating the highly sophisticated P-3 Orion biplanes from Pakistan under a secret agreement between the countries—shades of the famous U-2 incident that led to America's unceremonious departure from Pakistan in 1959.