

Russia's military response to NATO deployments is not a joke

by Rachel Douglas

The President of Russia, heir to the nuclear weapons arsenal of the Soviet Union, addressed the State Duma (lower house of Parliament), on April 9. "I've told the NATO people, the Americans, the Germans: 'Don't push us into military action. Otherwise there would be certainly a European, and perhaps a world war,' " Boris Yeltsin said. His speech was not released in full. Gennadi Seleznyov, Speaker of the Duma, said afterwards that President Yeltsin had told him Russian nuclear missiles were now targetted "in the direction of those countries which today are fighting Yugoslavia."

Russian Defense and Foreign Ministry spokesmen hurried to announce that there had been no change in the status of the strategic missile corps. Intercontinental ballistic missiles are supposed to be maintained without their target programs loaded, although the codes can be installed in a matter of minutes.

The posture of the U.S. and British press, in reporting these matters, was nothing short of insane. A lulling line appeared, from Reuters to the *Washington Post* and back again, to the effect that Yeltsin's words were merely a domestic political maneuver against his possible impeachment by the State Duma. "Russia's Kosovo Threats? Think Domestic," headlined Reuters. The *Washington Post*: "Yeltsin's Warning Stirs a Temporary Tempest." The London *Guardian*: "Yeltsin Panics as Impeachment Threat Looms."

'Whatever the Armed Forces have'

Broadly ignored in the Western press, with just a few exceptions in the form of tough statements from individual Russian officers reported as "one-liners," is a pattern of mobilization and testing of Russian forces, since the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia began on March 24. The emphasis is on the strategic forces, Russia's conventional military capacities having been seriously debilitated in recent years.

One isolated statement that did reach the West was the March 31 warning by Chief of the General Staff Gen. Anatolii Kvashnin, that, "if the choice is between life or death for Russia, then whatever the Armed Forces have, in particular nuclear weapons, should be used." He said this, according to Interfax, after closed hearings in the Duma.

According to the daily *Segodnya* of April 1, those hearings were in the Duma's Defense Committee, and concerned not the Balkans as such, but "primary measures to upgrade the

combat potential of the Russian Armed Forces." The *Segodnya* article, by Oleg Odnokolenko, reported: "The Duma Defense Committee has submitted a proposal to include in the National Security Concept the possibility of delivering a preventive first nuclear strike if an aggressor's conventional forces are stronger than Russia's. . . . The Duma has reminded NATO and the U.S. that Russia is a state which still has plenty of ballistic nuclear warheads—some 6,600 units."

Segodnya then gave the Kvashnin quotation, before turning to Defense Committee chairman Gen. Roman Popkovich (a member of Our Home Is Russia, not an opposition party). According to Popkovich, wrote Odnokolenko, "We think we can include a provision about making a preventive nuclear strike, since we have no other possibility of stopping the policy of NATO. He also mentioned that analogous NATO documents include provisions about both preventive and first nuclear strikes." The article also analyzed the prospects for START-2 ratification, as significantly reduced.

On April 9, China's *People's Daily* covered the same Duma hearings, as part of the "particularly violent reaction" that the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia—which, the article said, "violates national sovereignty, is a crude intervention into internal affairs, violates the UN Charter, and destroys norms of international relations"—has provoked in Russia. The Chinese paper called attention to the formulation by General Popkovich, about the possibility of a pre-emptive nuclear strike, "because we have no other way to stop the implementation of NATO's policy."

The *People's Daily* also noted that "at the same time, Russia has carried out a series of large-scale military exercises from the Eastern Pacific to the Arctic Ocean, as well as in the interior of the country. What especially caught the attention of NATO is the fact, that (in the context of those exercises) a nuclear submarine of the Russian Arctic Ocean fleet [the Northern Fleet] launched a strategic missile, which flew across the whole of Russia to precisely hit a target area on Kamchatka [Peninsula]. It is recognized that these exercises were not just for show." The article quoted General Kvashnin, on the possibility of exercising the nuclear option in a life-or-death situation for Russia.

People's Daily reported offers by Russian military leaders for assistance to Yugoslavia, in the form of troops, weapons, technology, and know-how. It quoted Popkovich, once again,

saying that “a NATO attack on Yugoslavia is an attack on Russia; defending Yugoslavia means defending Russia.”

Accidents do happen

The reconnaissance ship *Liman*, from the Black Sea Fleet, set sail for the Adriatic Sea on April 2. As of April 15, the Turkish General Staff confirmed that eight more Russian Navy vessels had been cleared to pass through the Bosphorus into the Mediterranean Sea. Amid widespread references to these deployments as “symbolic,” the Russian military columnist for *Segodnya* daily, Pavel Felgengauer, suggested to *EIR* on April 12 that “there is a possibility of a flare-up between NATO and Russia,” in the Balkans region. “Our ships in the Adriatic will use radar to look at what NATO is doing. This will soon lead to accusations that ‘Russia is sending the Serbs information.’ There could be an attempt to jam Russian ships’ communications. Then, there is the matter of weapons. While we won’t officially send the Serbs weapons, certain trading operations will likely go on. A Russian ship could be sunk.”

While affirming that a nuclear confrontation coming out of this is “not very probable,” Felgengauer stressed that he and his circles did not exclude the possibility of a “nuclear exchange,” or, if not that, “nuclear alerts” similar to what President Richard Nixon did during the Arab-Israeli War in October 1973.

The *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye (Independent Military Review)* weekly for April 2-8 reviewed recent and planned Russian Armed Forces measures. It reprised a *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* report on the simultaneous exercises by three of the Russian Navy’s four fleets (see *EIR*, April 9, 1999, pp. 32-24), and reported on stepped-up Russia-Belarus military coordination since NATO started bombing Yugoslavia.

The military escort for the Primakov government delegation’s March 30 flight to Belgrade was carried out under joint Russian-Belarusian air defense command, wrote Vladimir Mukhin. Now, “the staffs of the two republics are exchanging action plans for the eventuality of expanding NATO aggression in the Balkans and NATO’s further activation on the territory of its new members” (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic). The “operational directorates” of the respective Armed Forces are “developing a coherent regional security system,” he said.

According to the *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* report, there are to be “about 60 different staff and command exercises and 50 training missions in all,” involving Russian and Belarusian forces. Additionally, “in order to preserve the military infrastructure of the Republic of Belarus, stepped-up controls have been instituted at the [now vacant] launch sites of Russian ICBMs that were withdrawn from Belarus. This indirectly confirms the readiness of Belarus to accept the deployment of nuclear weapons on its territory.” The Belarusian Ministry of Defense has halted the process of transferring various military bases and facilities to civilian use.

India pushes ahead with its missile program

by Ramtanu Maitra

With the successful testing of the intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) class Agni II missiles on the Orissa coast, India has removed the uncertainty concerning its determination to enhance the integrated guided missile development program. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in a telecast to the nation on April 11, said that the Agni II has been developed and tested as “a purely defensive step.” He assured the nation that the missile will not be used for aggression against any nation.

As anticipated, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States criticized the test-firing and expressed hopes that the testing of the Agni II would not raise tensions on the subcontinent. Pakistan, India’s neighbor which has missile capability, considered the development of great concern because India has now introduced a “new weapons system.” Islamabad, however, was not taken by surprise; the Vajpayee government had informed Pakistan beforehand of the test on April 9.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry’s reaction was also negative, asserting that the test violated a UN Security Council resolution that called on India to stop developing nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them. Expressing concern that “this could initiate another round of the arms race in South Asia,” China noted that the test may jeopardize efforts by both Pakistan and India to mend their relations. The response from Russia, on the other hand, was decidedly subdued. Russia’s official news agency, Itar-TASS, said that Agni II is an “important component” of India’s nuclear deterrent force for self-defense.

The integrated guided missile program

The Agni II missile, which can deliver a payload of 1 ton to a range “in excess of 2000 kilometers,” had been tested thrice in its “technology demonstrator phase,” the last occasion in February 1994—more than five years ago. The recent test takes on a new meaning in light of India’s five underground nuclear tests in Pokhran one year ago. Defense Minister George Fernandes told newsmen that the Agni II could carry a “special payload,” but avoided answering questions on the missile’s warhead characteristics.

Agni II is the latest in India’s indigenously developed missile program. It is anticipated that the Defense Research