

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

Development Organization, the developer of Indian missiles, is moving toward the next stage with Agni III, which will have, among other characteristics, a longer range. The missiles already developed in the integrated guided missile series are: Prithvi (surface-to-surface), Akash (medium range surface-to-air), and Trishul (short range surface-to-air). India has also developed an anti-tank missile, Nag. While these four missiles are reportedly ready for deployment, New Delhi is not yet committed to deploying the Agni II.

Agni II, like its predecessor, Agni I, is a two-stage launch vehicle, with the first stage derived from the solid-fuel satellite launch vehicle developed by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). But unlike the Agni I missile, whose second stage is fueled by liquid propellant, Agni II's second stage is also solid-fueled. One of the missions of Agni is to establish "re-entry technology" with a two-stage missile system.

As an adjunct to the integrated guided missile system to bolster the nation's security, India is presently negotiating with Russia for the procurement of the S-300, an advanced ballistic missile defense system to be deployed along the borders.

Strategic aspects

Testing of the Agni II is a natural and crucial step in filling India's gap in missile technology, according to analysts. Prime Minister Vajpayee attributed the test to the rapidly changing security environment in the world: "We have to develop our own indigenous capabilities. Agni is a symbol of that resurgent India which is able to say: Yes, we will stand on our own feet," he said.

The primary defensive characteristic of Agni II, and its successor, Agni III, is the fact that the intermediate range ballistic missile is an ideal second-strike weapon. New Delhi will have to ensure that its neighbors, small and big, fully understand Indian strategy. This means active diplomatic efforts to help wed the Agni system to the overall security of the region. Both China and Russia have a large number of land-based missiles, and even Pakistan has a few Hatf-I, Hatf-II, and Ghaury missiles in service, capable of delivering warheads. But a transparent diplomatic effort to convey to its neighbors in the right spirit India's reasons for pushing forward its missile development program, will ease the security situation considerably. In this context, India's prior notification to Pakistan about the testing of the Agni II is a positive step.

The first reactions from Western countries, particularly those which possess nuclear weapons and delivery systems, raise some uncertainty. While it is unlikely that a fresh set of sanctions on India will be proposed by either Washington or London, it is possible that the nuclear weapons powers will dangle a carrot or two before New Delhi to prevent the deployment of Agni II.

One such carrot could be the lifting of sanctions against

ISRO, and even possibly membership in the Missile Technology Control Regime, if India opts out of deploying the missiles.

In the present security environment, New Delhi has no reason to accept such humiliating conditions. Instead, India should push for universal missile disarmament, as it has done over the years for nuclear disarmament. Washington had made noises some time ago about a zero-ballistic-missile regime, but this has not been pushed actively. India should do well now by utilizing its strength to pursue this issue vigorously, and at the same time should declare unilaterally that it will not export the indigenously developed missile technology to other countries.

Political aspects

The testing of Agni II was done at a time when the Vajpayee government, a coalition government of 16 parties led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is facing an existential crisis. There is a strong possibility that erosion of allies from the coalition may reduce it to a minority government, making its survival increasingly difficult in the coming days. One of the 15 partners, the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, with 18 members in the Parliament, is on the verge of quitting the coalition to sit with the opposition.

Vajpayee, addressing the nation on April 11, made clear the political uncertainties in the country. He conveyed an impression that his government may have to live on borrowed time till the next general elections. Some observers are betting that the next parliamentary elections could be held as early as this November.

In the run-up to the next parliamentary elections, the government, and particularly the BJP, will emphasize the importance of the testing of the nuclear devices and the Agni II missiles and how they achieved the objective against heavy international odds. The Vajpayee government will no doubt point out the previous governments' failure to pursue the development of Agni.

It is widely believed that the earlier governments had in fact caved in under pressure from Western countries and shelved the Agni tests.

From the nationwide response following the testing of the Agni II, and the Prime Minister's handling of the post-test situation, it is evident that the Vajpayee government has every reason to feel a sense of achievement. The timing of the test, particularly in light of the ongoing action by NATO against Yugoslavia, was perfect. Most Indians, pacifists and non-pacifists alike, disturbed by the unilateral bombing of Iraq and Yugoslavia, have come to the same conclusion as Prime Minister Vajpayee. They now have begun to believe that the United Nations, like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, can be manipulated one way or the other whenever the powerful Western nations so choose. With that comprehension, it is widely recognized that, yes, India will have to stand on its own feet.