

India tests long-range missile capable of striking China's cities

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In its continuing quest for “world power” status, India has successfully test-fired a ballistic missile capable of striking with nuclear warheads targets at a distance of 5,000 kilometers (about 3,100 miles). When tests are completed and the missile is inducted into India’s nuclear arsenal, a process Indian officials claim will be completed in three years, New Delhi will be able to strike all of China’s major population centers, including Beijing and Shanghai.

The Indian media celebrated last Thursday’s missile launch with declamations that India is now “part of the big boys club” and on the way to achieving strategic balance with China—a country with which it fought a border war in 1962, that has an “all-weather” strategic partnership with its archrival Pakistan, and with which it is increasingly competing for oil and other resources globally.

The Indian government did nothing to counter or dampen the media’s contention that the long-range missile, known as Agni V, is aimed first and foremost at China, although it did issue pro forma and hypocritical claims that India’s aims are entirely peaceful.

India is believed to be only the sixth country to develop such a long-range missile.

Despite presiding over a country in which three-quarters of the population, some 800 million people, survive on less than \$2 a day, the Indian elite is engaged in a relentless arms buildup, acquiring fighter jets, surface ships, nuclear-powered submarines, missiles and tanks. This military build-up arises inexorably out of India’s development as an aspiring capitalist great power that is increasingly dependent on foreign trade and resources and anxious to assert its global interests by securing geopolitical advantage.

“It is important that the country develops a nuclear and missile power which can adequately protect its interests that come with its increasing economic and political strengths,” declared the *Deccan Herald* in an April 20th editorial titled “Great Leap Forward.”

The three-stage solid-fuelled missile has been developed by India’s Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) using both indigenous and imported parts. For last Thursday’s test it carried a dummy warhead weighing 1.5 tons. The missile was launched from Wheeler Island, which lies in

the state of Orissa on India’s east coast, and struck a target in the Indian Ocean.

India already possesses shorter-range missiles named Agni III and Agni IV with ranges of 700 kms and 3500 kms respectively, giving it the capacity to hit targets anywhere in nuclear-armed Pakistan.

According to V.K. Saraswat, the Scientific Adviser to the Defense Minister, the Agni V is “a game-changer.” He noted that it could be used to shoot down enemy satellites and to carry multiple warheads allowing several targets to be hit with a single missile. India, however, is far from mastering the technology for Multiple Independently-targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRV).

The initial official Chinese reaction to last week’s test was moderate and restrained. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said China did not feel threatened by the test: “China and India are large developing nations. We are not competitors but partners.”

However, subsequent reaction in China expressed far more concern and included hints that in response Beijing may intensify efforts to develop anti-ballistic missile defense systems. The official Xinhua news agency published a dispatch that read: “The [Agni V] missile brings the whole of Asia, 70 per cent of Europe and other regions under its strike range....”

The English-language daily *The Global Times* based in Beijing and owned by *People’s Daily*, the Communist Party’s mouthpiece, quoted a Chinese military expert as saying that the Agni V’s range is actually 8000 km, but that New Delhi has deliberately downplayed this so as to not cause concern in Russia and other countries in Europe and Asia. In an editorial titled “India being swept up by missile delusion,” the *Global Times* warned India not to get carried away and “overestimate its strength.” “Even if [India] has missiles that could reach most parts of China,” said *Global Times*, “that does not mean it will gain anything from being arrogant during disputes with China.”

Expectedly, there was a cacophony of chest thumping and mind-numbing nationalistic euphoria from India’s print, television and radio media with each outdoing the other in hailing the test as proof of India’s technological prowess.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh welcomed the successful

test as “another milestone in our quest for our security, preparedness and to explore the frontiers of science.” Subsequently Manish Tiwari, a senior leader of the Congress Party, the dominant partner in India’s coalition government, said the Agni V test served as an answer to those in the ruling class who fear the government, in the face of mounting popular opposition and mounting economic problems, has lost its resolve to push through further pro-market reforms. Said Tiwari, “All those people who talk of policy paralysis need to very seriously reflect on the manner in which India’s strategic space has expanded and its profile as an emerging great power has grown over the last eight years.”

The US, in marked contrast to the condemnations it heaped upon Stalinist North Korea for reputedly destabilizing the Asia-Pacific region by staging its recent unsuccessful missile launch, effectively welcomed India’s emergence as a long-range missile power. State Department spokesman Mark Toner underlined that the US has a “very strong strategic and security partnership with India.” When asked to comment on Washington’s contrasting reactions to the North Korean and Indian missile tests, White House spokesman Jay Carney said, “India’s record stands in stark contrast to that of North Korea.”

In fact during the latter decades of the Cold War, when India was aligned with the Soviet Union, the US was a determined opponent of India’s emergence as a nuclear-weapons state. Washington had India very much in its sights when it pressed for the development of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

But since the late 1990s, Washington has been assiduously courting India as an economic and geopolitical counterweight to China. Under George W. Bush, the US announced that it wanted to assist India in becoming a world power and, so as to cement a “global strategic partnership” with India, secured New Delhi a unique status within the world nuclear regulatory regime under which it can purchase advanced civilian nuclear technology, although it is not a signatory to the NPT and developed nuclear weapons in defiance of the NPT’s provisions.

The Indo-US civilian nuclear accord has major military implications. By securing India access to advanced civilian nuclear technology, it allows New Delhi to concentrate its indigenous nuclear program on nuclear weapons development. In lifting the embargo on nuclear trade with India, the US also removed related embargos on the transfer of other advanced technologies with military applications.

Under the Obama administration, the US has intensified its efforts to strategically pivot its military power toward containing China. This has included pressing for the creation of a US-led military-strategic alliance, uniting among others Japan, the Philippines, Australia, Indonesia and India and encouraging, if not inciting, the rivalry of these states with Beijing.

New Delhi, for its part, has tilted closer to the US, with the

aim of exploiting Washington’s offers of support. Its hope is to straddle the growing geopolitical divide between the US and China. In practice, however, India has repeatedly succumbed to US pressure on the related issue of Washington’s campaign to bully and threaten Iran.

India’s relations with China are highly complex. China is now India’s single largest trading partner, although the balance of trade is heavily in Beijing’s favor. India and China are aligned in several forums that seek to limit western dominance, including BRICS.

Both countries are highly dependent on oil imports and find themselves competing in Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere for oil and other natural resources.

The Indian government has encouraged the state-owned multinational Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to enter into a partnership with Petro Vietnam to drill for oil in the hotly disputed waters of the South China Sea. China has warned India against proceeding with drilling there but New Delhi is pushing ahead nonetheless. Earlier this month the issue of the South China Sea was a major topic of discussion at the 5th Indo-US intergovernmental “Dialogue on Asia-Pacific.”

While India gets entangled with US imperialism’s machinations in Asia, Indian strategic analysts accuse China of seeking to encircle India. To support this charge, they point to China’s close partnership with Pakistan and to China’s “string of pearls” strategy that involves Beijing seeking influence in south and southeast Asia and building and gaining access to ports and airfields across the Indian Ocean region.

In reality, Chinese’s strategic push into southern Asia is largely a response to the US’s predatory wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, its naval predominance, and the Pentagon’s well-known strategy of seeking to maintain a vice-like grip on the Straits of Malacca and other key Indian and Pacific Ocean choke points, so as to be able to threaten the sea lanes through which most of China’s oil imports and much of its trade pass.

India, meanwhile, is pursuing its own plans to build a blue-water navy and assert a leading role in policing the Indian Ocean. Here too the US is encouraging India’s ambitions, helping fuel an arms race that threatens the people of Asia and the world with catastrophe.



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