

India's Missile Options

Synopsis: The strategic position and situation demand that India develops and deploys its missiles at the earliest because the time is the essence. The development and deployment of Prithvi is a right step but it is not enough. The Western Powers are never happy at the country's self-sufficiency in defence matters and have always been trying arm-twisting and are indulging in anti-India propaganda. India should denser be pressurized and soon develop the strategic weapon Agni in the face of security dangers form missiles already deployed in Pakistan and China. Agni options need to be revived and the weapon made operational. Such a deterrent is a must amidst missile proliferation in the sub-continent, idea should also develop its own/CBMs for future wars will be fought and son only with these weapons. India's deployable missile capabilities must be transformed into deployed capacities. India has a strong indigenous missile capability and it would be nothing short of a catastrophe if its Agni programme is shelved or put on hold to be activated at some future date.

In view of its huge size, it's very long international borders, coastline and strategic position in South Asia; India cannot offer to neglect, put on hold or abandon its missile development programme. It should be continued and taken to its logical conclusion and missiles deployed. India has already developed the Prithvi missiles which have a range of 150 km. This 8.5 meter short range surface-to-surface missile has been new inducted into the Indian army after its successful completion of user trials in 19994. But there has been constant pressure on India from the West not to deploy it in spot of the fact that Pakistan has acquired Chinese M-11 missiles with matching capabilities.

The Western military powers have been deliberately creating tension in the subcontinent by spreading rumors from time to time. Recently a selected western media falsely reported that India has deployed Prithvi missiles in Jalandhar, new Pakistani border. These "media missiles" being fired from the west are dangerous and create tension in the region. In this regard the Defence Minister Mulayam Singh yadav said on July 12, 1997 that the country had spend huge sums on the project. Scientists had been working for the last 14 years to make the nation self-reliant and independent," Prithvi has not been prepared, "he said, "to be kept in museums. We have not yet deployed it on the Pakistan border. We will decide where to deploy it and said." These words are rally re-assuring but in regard to Agni missile the Government has created an impression that it is just a sleeping giant and will be awakened and activated when the need arises.

India's defence preparedness seems to be in a sorry state. According to the recent Parliamentary Standing Committee Report the defence budgetary allocation for the year 1997-1998 is totally inadequate. The defence expenditure has actually decreased by 24 per cent in the past 7-8 years while those of Pakistani and China have appreciably increased. The defence committee report feels sorry that Government has shelved the Agni programme. Agni can be the only real deterrent in the India arsenal with long range capability going up the Tibet in China.

India should not be pressurized by the western super-powers in the matter; India should remove the imbalance in the sub-continent by having a matching missile regime to that of Pakistan and China. Such a deterrent is a must amidst missile proliferation in the sub-continent. Expert believes that India should not only develop and deploy Agni missiles, but also begin a meaningful programme for developing its own intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Besides 5 nuclear power, India is only one of the three countries who was in a position to develop and deploy ICBM in a reasonable time. The other 2 countries are Israel and Japan. It takes over 10-14 years to develop and deploy a missile like Agni for a country like India.

China is busy upgrading its medium range missiles with newer mobile systems designed to hit targets in India, Russia, Taiwan, Japan and other parts of East Asia. "China's IRBM forces translate into overwhelming strategic leverage in Asia," according to a US defence specialist Mr. Richard Fisher. According to him Chinese medium range missiles, including a future variant of CSS-5 called Mod-2, are designed to provide strategic dominance over East Asia.

It is high time that India is aware of these strategic developments and gives up to go slow on its integrated guided missile development programme. India's 'deployable' rather than 'deployed' missile system capabilities are deplorable. Missile is the right weapon to defend and to attack and to work as an effective deterrent. India has a strong and indigenous missile capability and it should be suitably exploited. It would be regrettable if India succumbs to pressure from the U.S. or any other country and loses the advantage in terms of time, technology and know-how.