

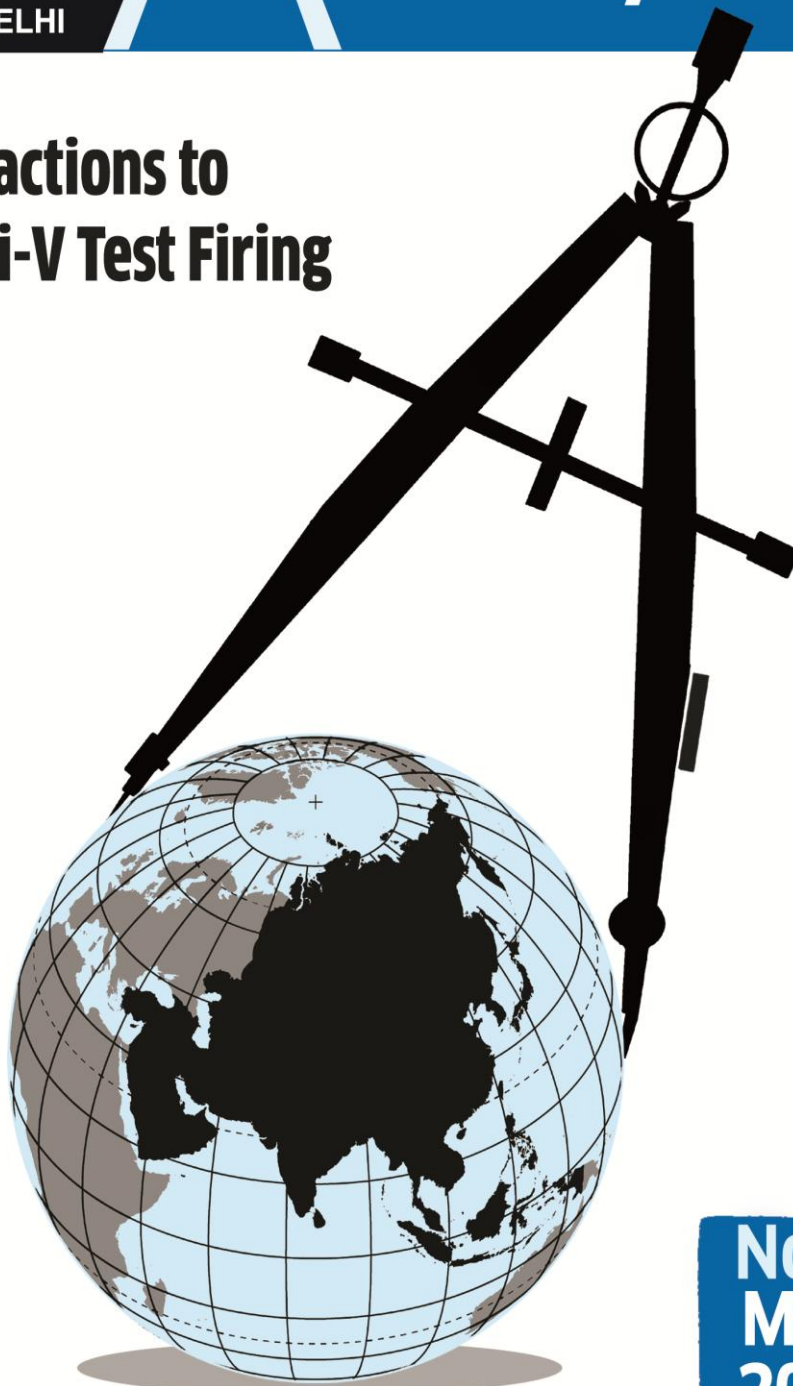
Institute of
Chinese Studies

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Analysis

Chinese Reactions to India's Agni-V Test Firing



**No.4
May
2012**

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Chinese reactions/responses to India's testing of Agni-V have been multifaceted. One type of response is quite dismissive, emphasizing China's own strengths and India's weaknesses. Another type of response focuses on the missile as a threat to regional stability and includes concerns about Agni-V's actual range. There is thus a kind of contradiction in the assessments made by these two categories of responses. Yet another type of response shows a willingness to recognize some sort of parity between India and China.

The 'dismissive' type of response is exemplified by Ma Dingsheng, a military expert, according to whom 'Agni V' is 30 years behind China's Dongfeng (DF)-31. He claims that China is far ahead of India in production of small-sized warheads, multiple warheads and anti-jamming technology. This kind response is based on the understanding that India had to obtain missile guidance components and related technology from Russia, and that the material for the body of the missile was also provided to India by a third country. In this context, one comment also suggested that Russia may not cooperate further with India, which becomes significant in view of Sino-Russian relations and the extent to which India is dependent on Russia for the future development of Agni. Song Xiaojun, CCTV military commentator and former navy personnel has dismissed the view that the missile can be used as a 'China Killer'. This category of response also includes assessments that India has many logistics problems such as the lack of transportation infrastructure for effective deployment of the missiles, and that the Indian military has still has to put in several years of work before this missile is ready for use. Within this category, the claim in Indian media of Agni-V as the "China killer" – translated as "Zhongguo shashou" – was met with derision. One commentator described a "deep rooted inferiority syndrome among some people in India." There has been criticisms of Indian media and Indian public perception of China as an 'enemy nation.'

Yet another category of response assesses India's missile test as a 'threat to regional stability'. This has been articulated by Li Wei, a defense analyst, and Wu Xuelan, a CCTV special commentator. Li claims that India has deliberately understated the range of the missile so as not to unduly alarm its friends in the Western world; that Agni-V poses a threat not only to the security of the Indian Ocean countries but also to Europe. He notes that this missile will help India gain dominance in the Indian Ocean region and that it can use this advantageously vis-à-vis any country.

Wu has argued that the launching of Agni-V will lead to escalation of tension in the Asia-Pacific region. She has cited the SIPRI report on arms trade, according to which, India tops the list of arms purchasing countries, and mentions that India has planned a 17 percent increase in its expenditure for defence procurement for 2012-13. The SIPRI report in fact has been cited extensively in various writings, indicating that it is the source of information for most of the Chinese accounts.

A broader, mature and more nuanced ('accepting') type of response is represented by Hu Shisheng of CICIR, Ye Hailing of CASS and Prof. Zhao Gancheng, Director of South Asian Studies of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies. Hu has commented that China does not need to worry about Agni-V because India's missile programmes are still defensive in nature. He recognizes that India has the strategic resources, territorial size and demographic strength to become a powerful nation and that India's rise as such will take its own course and will not be directed against China. He contends that it would be easier to interact with India when it behaves confidently. Ye believes that China does not have any reason to stop India from developing a nuclear capability of its own.

Zhao Gancheng, in an interview with *Chenbao* on April 19 stated that he does not see any reason why India should utilize the China threat to justify missile tests. Both countries have vibrant markets and are engaged in

cooperation in many areas. It is also important to contextualize China's response to Agni-V within its perception of India's military modernization in general.

Possibly due to the fact that Agni-V is unlikely to overturn the overall balance in the short-run, the various reactions/responses from China, in general, have been fairly mild. Most of these responses appear to have understood/interpreted the test as a political message or signal. Therefore in the near term, matters are likely to go on as usual. Most of the participants in the ICS discussion on China's responses appeared to uphold the view that Agni-V was a "political missile" and that was seen as the reason why one Chinese comment viewed it in the context of India's bid for permanent membership of the Security Council. This was based on a reported statement from an unnamed Indian official.

The 'official' Chinese reaction from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) was largely balanced and moderate. Interestingly however, the response to Agni-V from the MOFA did not find mention in *Renmin Ribao* (overseas edition, print version) reports of the the Ministry's statements on 19 and 20 April. The online edition however, did carry the news. Later Chinese media reports in fact pointed out how the "cool" Chinese reaction had disappointed the West. The technical assessments could be seen as a useful pointer to India's shortcomings as well. The question as to how developments of this kind are depicted and analysed on public platforms and in the media, does raise some concerns. Some of the Chinese media reactions were indeed along predictable lines – particularly when it came to the implications for Pakistan. (Chinese press coverage on 'Shaheen' was in fact more extensive compared to that on Agni-V). India media projections actually diverged from/concealed the essential issues and focused on non-issues. In this context, the portrayal of Agni-V as a 'China killer' by the Indian media had indeed been somewhat over the top.

According to Yan Xuetong, a professor at Tsinghua University, although in the past China has been dismissive of India and unwilling to accord it 'great power status', the

2005 announcement of US-India civil nuclear cooperation has made China take India more seriously. There are indications of a Chinese fear that US-India civil nuclear cooperation can spillover into military cooperation as well. Some sections in the Chinese media were sharply critical of the "double standards" of Western countries who keep "one eye open and one eye closed" when they condemn the rocket launch by North Korea, but on the other hand not only encourage but abet India in its missile development.

The oft-quoted article titled "India Being Swept Up By Missile Delusion" published in the *Global Times* on 19 April immediately following the Agni-V test states that "India should not overstate the value of its Western allies and the profits it could gain from participating in a containment of China". This indicates that certain sections in China could be looking at India's test firing of Agni-V, which has a range that encompasses most of China, within the broader context of a US-led strategic encirclement and containment of China.

There are also signs that the testing of Agni-V can contribute to an arms-race between China and India. For instance, Zhang Zhaozhong a professor with the PLA's National Defence University has been quoted by *The Times of India* as saying that in response to Agni-V, China must strengthen its missile defence systems. India and China have both been testing missile defence systems since 2006.

Ye Hailing of CASS cited earlier, has also noted that given the 2004 international ICBM norm, which varies between 8,000 and 10,000kms, it is doubtful that Agni-V with a range of 5,000 km can be called an ICBM. Rear Admiral (retd.) Dr. S. Kulshrestha, formerly of the Indian Navy, has clarified that Agni-V is not an ICBM but an IRBM. However, the Indian media has overwhelmingly portrayed Agni-V as an ICBM. Therefore, some public statement specifying the range and/or proper category of this missile, would be appreciated and may be considered as even necessary to prevent speculation.

Given Chinese concerns that Agni-V can threaten regional stability in the Indian Ocean,

Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific, it may also be appropriate to think in terms of undertaking a public diplomacy campaign emphasizing the defensive applications of this missile and India's 'no first use' principle, in order to reassure China in particular and the international community in general. This type of campaign may also help in curtailing a potentially destabilizing and financially exhausting arms race between India and China.

Several Chinese commentaries have expressed concern about how the India-Pakistan balance is likely to be affected as a result of Agni-V as well as India's increasing arms purchases. In

this context, there is a high degree of probability that China would provide some kind of support to Pakistan to maintain strategic parity between India and Pakistan.

Another issue that was reflected in the Chinese responses is their worry about the exposure of India's technological advances in the direction of Multiple Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) and deficiencies in China's capability to intercept these missiles. In the light of these worries it might be worthwhile to think about expanding the existing security dialogue between India and China to include nuclear and missile issues.



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