

U. S. Losing Arms Race?

By JAMES MCCARTNEY
Of Our Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON.—Is the U. S. really falling behind in the strategic arms race with the Soviet Union?

The idea has been implied strongly in recent days by Pentagon reports that the Russians may be building a new and powerful missile system to present the U. S. with a serious new challenge.

But hard facts in testimony presented formally to Congress this week paint a somewhat different picture.

The testimony shows that the U. S. is still far ahead of the Soviets in key strategic categories — and in fact is currently deploying nuclear warheads at a rate three times as fast as the Soviets.

The Pentagon budget shows that the U. S. is plunging ahead with deployment of major new strategic systems on both land and sea — as well as continuing its anti-ballistic missile (ABM) program, which is a nuclear weapons defense system.

Headlines have been dominated by reports of what the Pentagon fears the Soviets might or could do — not by what they actually are known to have done.

Sen. Stuart Symington (D., Mo.) — a one-time secretary of the Air Force who is no novice in the field — says that the Pentagon is engaged in its annual spring campaign for a higher defense budget.

"Many new occurrences inevitably come with spring," he told the Senate with a wry smile the other day, including "warnings of grave new dangers to this country because of new developments in Soviet weaponry."

Here's the way the strategic picture now shapes up in key categories according to testimony by Defense Secretary Melvin Laird and Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This, in essence, is what the fine print says:

(1) —Deliverable nuclear warheads.

This is perhaps the most important category of all — and the U. S. has a huge lead which nobody thinks could be overcome in the next decade.

The U. S. had 4000 deliverable nuclear warheads at the end of 1970, compared to 1800 for the Soviets.

The Soviets are building — but the U. S. is building faster. The Soviets are expected to have 2000 by mid-1971 — the U. S. 4600.

U. S. growth is a result of the highly complex, little understood MIRV program in which multiple warheads are being installed on U. S. missiles, both land and sea based.

U. S. technology makes it possible to aim each of the warheads separately.

The Russians still don't know how to do this and nobody is sure when they might learn.

(MIRV stands for multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle.)

The U. S. has never said how many bombs it plans to build — but informed estimates have run from 10,000 to 15,000.

The Soviets continue to have an overall lead in "megatonnage" — meaning in explosive nuclear power. This is because of the immense power of their huge, 25-megaton SS-9 missile, by far the most powerful in the world.

President Nixon told the New York Times in an interview this week that "the Soviets now have three times the missile strength of ourselves." The White House explained later that the President was referring to megatonnage. Precise figures are classified.

The U. S. chose voluntarily not to try to build such a big missile years ago because scientists felt the power would be wasted. The U. S. could still do it if it wished.

(2) —Land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

The Soviets have a numerical lead, but have halted or leveled off deployment recently in all major categories — including the SS-9 missile.

The Soviets now have 1440 land-based ICBMs while the U. S. has 1054 — a figure the U. S. has maintained, and considered adequate, for several years.

But figures on the numbers of missiles can be misleading. An important question is how many nuclear bombs each of the missiles can carry and how accurate they are.

In this field the U. S. is ahead. It is proceeding to deploy nuclear warheads on land-based missiles far more rapidly than the Soviets.

The new U. S. defense budget calls for a 42 percent increase in funds for the U. S. Minuteman III Missile program —

the backbone of the U. S. land-based missile force.

The budget requests more than a half a billion dollars to build new Minuteman missiles with multiple nuclear warheads.

Defense Secretary Laird has said publicly that he has information that the Soviet Union is "going forward with the construction of a large missile system."

But he didn't pretend to know exactly what the Soviets are doing, beyond construction work on new missile silos, and he interpreted the Soviet program as indicating that they intend to maintain "parity" in strategic weapons, meaning equality.

(3) — Submarine-launched missiles (SLBMs).

The U. S. is far ahead in submarine-launched missiles with its virtually invulnerable fleet of 41 Polaris submarines and an on-going program to convert 31 of them to the much more powerful Poseidon.

The U. S. has 656 launchable missiles, compared to 350 for the Soviets.

The Soviets, however, are struggling to catch up. They are building submarines faster than anything else, and will deploy 50 new under-water missiles by the middle of this year.

Nevertheless, U. S. submarine technology is way ahead of that of the Soviets. Their submarines aren't nearly as effective. They still do not have a solid fuel missile and are operating with highly dangerous liquid fuel.

Laird said if the Soviets continue building at the current rate they would have a fleet comparable to the U. S. Polaris-Poseidon fleet by 1974.

But he and Adm. Moorer declined to point out that the U. S. Poseidon-building program will multiply the strength of the U. S. submarine fleet vastly in this same period it involves added hundreds — in fact thousands — of nuclear warheads that can be separately aimed.

The Soviets haven't learned how to do this yet, and thus the U. S. has a huge



Poised for launch... Soviet missile

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(4)—Strategic bombs

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The U. S. is also pushing to note that they are developing a new

(5)—Anti-ballistic missile

The Soviets have developed complexes around Moscow. The Defense Department's failure to note that they are a modest and ineffective

The U. S. is continuing Safeguard ABM system two sites and plans to build the first elements within national in 1974. The effect of U. S. ABM is a matter of debate.

Over-all, Laird and Moorer emphasize on their own Soviet capabilities.

Adm. Moorer said he believed it is "fair" to note that the last five or six years have shifted in favor of the U. S.

"Our comfortable lead has vanished," he said, "in five or six years we are ourselves in a position of strategic inferiority, in numbers of offensive and megatons, and all are concerned."

Sen. Symington, however, is a skeptic.

"One cannot fall to comparable spring previous years," he said, "in the early 1950s those thousand range bombers the Soviets to build, but never built those hundreds upon range missiles the Soviets build, but never built."

"As a result, the U. S. payer is currently spending tens of billions of dollars of weaponry we now have for his and our security."



Russian ICBM on parade... they have numerical advantage

Losing Arms Race?

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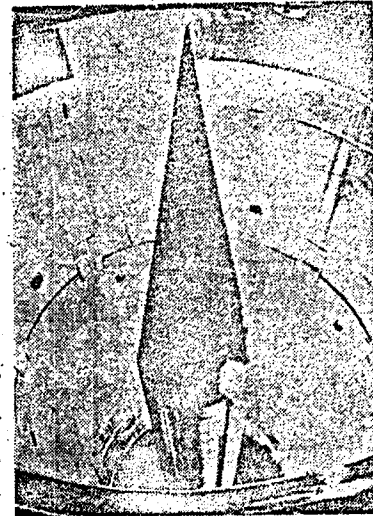
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Poised for launching
Soviet missile in silo

margin in one of the most important parts of the strategic equation.

(4)—Strategic bombers.

The U. S. has a huge lead in bombers as well. It has 517 bombers and is adding to the force, while the Soviets have 195 and are cutting down.

The U. S. is also putting \$371 million into developing a new bomber.

(5)—Anti-ballistic missiles (ABM).

The Soviets have deployed four ABM complexes around Moscow, but the Defense Department's official statements fail to note that they are considered out-moded and ineffective.

The U. S. is continuing to expand its Safeguard ABM system. It is building two sites and plans to build two more. The first elements would become operational in 1974. The effectiveness of the U. S. ABM is a matter of scientific dispute.

Over-all, Laird and Moorer put great emphasis on their fears of eventual Soviet capabilities.

Adm. Moorer said, for example, that he believed it is "fair to say that the over-all strategic balance, during the last five or six years, has drastically shifted in favor of the Soviet Union."

"Our comfortable lead has now all but vanished," he said, "and within the next five or six years we could actually find ourselves in a position of over-all strategic inferiority, certainly as far as numbers of offensive delivery vehicles and megatons, and air defense systems, are concerned."

Sen. Symington, however, expressed skepticism.

"One cannot fail to remember several comparable spring announcements of previous years," he said, "... in the early 1950s those thousands of new long range bombers the Soviets were going to build, but never built. In the late 1950s those hundreds upon hundreds of long range missiles the Soviets were going to build, but never built ...

"As a result ... the American taxpayer is currently bearing the burden of tens of billions of dollars of additional



Russian ICBM on parade

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