

U.S. Subs Spying In Soviet Waters

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The United States maintains a fleet of electronic eavesdropping submarines operating close to the Soviet coastline to monitor Russian submarine activity and secret military communications.

These submarines, described as "underwater U-2s," roam within Soviet territorial waters, according to intelligence sources with access to documents describing the spying operations.

The Pentagon declines to comment on the underwater intelligence gathering program on grounds that public discussion of the activity would be "detrimental to what we're doing." Other knowledgeable sources contend that the Russians have been aware of the U.S. submarine surveillance for years, as they were of the U-2 flights over the Soviet Union in the late 1950s.

The U-2 flights over Russia were ended in an atmosphere of high international rancor with the shooting down of Central Intelligence Agency pilot Francis Gary Powers.

Sources familiar with the submarine eavesdropping operations say that the monitoring has been conducted within the Soviet Union's three-mile territorial limit since the late 1960s. Pentagon officials, while neither confirming nor denying the surveillance activities, assert—in the words of one spokesman—that we don't go mucking around in other people's territorial waters. . . . All the things we do are mindful of other people's airspace and territorial waters."

Soviet vessels also conduct eavesdropping operations in U.S. continental waters although chiefly by means of surface buoys. Russian subs

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are not believed to have the immensely sophisticated electronic capability of the U.S. underwater snooping craft.

The highly secret U.S. submarine surveillance program, which has been alluded to in scattered public references, has assumed major strategic importance since the capture of the electronic spy ship Pueblo off the coast of North Korea six years ago this month. The Pueblo was captured 13 miles off the North Korean coast.

One of the principal lessons of the Pueblo incident was the vulnerability of surface intelligence ships to capture, especially in the vicinity of hostile coastlines. Questions were also raised in the ensuing debate, particularly in a Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff study on the Pueblo incident, whether military intelligence and diplomatic interests were being sufficiently coordinated in the spying operations.

Prior to the capture of the Pueblo an American submarine on an intelligence mission, the Ronquil, narrowly avoided capture by Soviet naval forces. The sub caught fire near the Soviet coast and was surrounded by Soviet destroyers which attempted to force it to the surface. The sub eluded the Russian destroyer gauntlet and escaped to safety.

In another case, according

to intelligence sources, a U.S. surveillance submarine collided with a Soviet sub near the Russian coast but also avoided capture.

The underwater eavesdropping program, code named Holy Stone, is probably the most hush-hush of all U.S. electronic intelligence operations which are also conducted by spy satellite and aircraft. The subs are equipped to gather a wide variety of electronic, communications and radar intelligence.

One of their chief missions is to monitor Soviet nuclear submarine activities, a function which figures importantly in the strategic arms limitation negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The operations are coordinated by the 40 Committee of the National Security Council, which presides over all "black" — covert — intelligence activities of the United States.

One of the reasons cited by Pentagon officials in declining to discuss the submarine eavesdropping—in addition to the claim of sensitivity—was current litigation over a book manuscript by two former intelligence officials. The book, "The Cult of Intelligence," by Victor Marchetti and John Marks, reportedly describes U.S. electronic surveillance techniques which were censored by the CIA under court order.

"Lawyers on our side suspect that things in the book are beginning to pop up in the hands of other people," said a Pentagon spokesman. Marchetti, a former CIA analyst, and Marks, a former State Department intelligence officer, are challenging 225 deletions made in the manuscript on security grounds.

The Marchetti-Marks manuscript, to be published by Knopf, has been classified "top secret-sensitive" by the government, according to attorneys in the case.

"We do some things with submarines," said one Defense official. "Any speculation about what we do is something our people think would be detrimental to what we're doing. It is not an area we'd like to see opened up."