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RADIO PROPAGANDA REPORT

RECENT SOVIET PROPAGANDA CLAIMS OF ICBM INVULNERABILITY

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PER E.O. 12958
Agency: CIA
Date: 9-17-99
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FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE

Current Developments Series
CD.126
12 January 1959

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JAN 29 1959 REC'D

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PROPAGANDA REPORT
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RECENT SOVIET PROPAGANDA CLAIMS OF ICBM INVULNERABILITY

Summary

1. A 29 December PRAVDA editorial article and a subsequent Radio Moscow commentary have described the ICBM as "invulnerable." The authors fail to suggest that any defense is or ever will be possible. These are the first unqualified statements about ICBM invulnerability to appear in Soviet propaganda media since the fall of 1957, shortly after the announcement of the successful Soviet ICBM test: Moscow at that time publicized Khrushchev's portrayal of the ICBM as the "absolute" weapon that could "not be stopped."
2. Soviet military spokesmen, on the other hand, have invariably tempered their claims of invulnerability for the ICBM with time qualifiers--"for the present," "so far," "at this time"--or specified that there are "almost no means" of defense against the weapon.
3. The recent unqualified claims by PRAVDA and the Radio Moscow commentator may be no more than a part of the current propaganda effort to dramatize Soviet strength in connection with the Berlin issue. The statement about ICBM invulnerability is more dramatic without a time qualifier spelled out. But the contrast between the unqualified claims of the political spokesmen and the carefully qualified statements of all the military spokesmen, without exception, has been strikingly consistent.

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BACKSTOP
L. K.RECENT SOVIET PROPAGANDA CLAIMS OF ICBM INVULNERABILITY

Two recent claims that the ICBM is "invulnerable," with no explicit qualifier that it is invulnerable only to known means of defense, are the first flat statements to that effect to appear in Soviet propaganda media since the fall of 1957. In two interviews at that time, shortly after the successful Soviet ICBM test, Khrushchev had portrayed the ICBM as the "absolute" weapon against which there was no defense.

The first of the two recent statements appeared in a 29 December PRAVDA editorial article on the just concluded Supreme Soviet session and on its decisions concerning a test ban and the Berlin question. Addressing "Western generals," the editorial article said "it was pointed out at the Supreme Soviet session that the USSR has the most modern arms including intercontinental rockets, which are invulnerable carriers of powerful thermonuclear warheads." A warning that the USSR has ICBM's was in fact made at the Supreme Soviet session by Marshal Sokolovsky. But according to Moscow's text of Sokolovsky's speech, he did not go on--as the PRAVDA editorial article did--to characterize ICBM's as invulnerable.*

The second instance of such a characterization occurred in a 5 January talk by Vetrov to the British audience. Commentator Vetrov, responding to a "belligerent" speech by General Norstad on the subject of West Berlin, reiterated the warning that ICBM's, possessed by the USSR, "are invulnerable carriers of powerful thermonuclear weapons." Vetrov's language was almost identical to that of the PRAVDA editorial article.

These two recent claims, like Khrushchev's in the fall of 1957, depart from the consistently cautious formulations used by Soviet military spokesmen in occasional discussions of the question of ICBM vulnerability. Of the known statements by military spokesmen on the subject since August 1957, when the USSR announced its successful ICBM test, all have added a qualifier to claims of ICBM invulnerability--"for the time being," "so far."

The recent unqualified claims by PRAVDA and Moscow commentator Vetrov may be no more than a part of the current propaganda effort to dramatize Soviet strength in connection with the Berlin issue. The statement about ICBM invulnerability is the more dramatic without the time qualifier spelled out, and failure to add that qualifier does not necessarily imply that the weapon is invulnerable for all time. But the contrast between the political and military spokesmen's formulations--between PRAVDA's, Vetrov's and Khrushchev's unqualified formulations and the carefully qualified ones of all the military spokesmen without exception--has been strikingly consistent.

* According to PRAVDA's and Radio Moscow's text of his speech, Sokolovsky said: "The Soviet armed forces possess such a powerful weapon as the ICBM, which is capable of transporting a thermonuclear warhead to any target, wherever it may be." Of the broadcast accounts of other Supreme Soviet speeches, including a full text of Gromyko's, none mentioned the ICBM specifically. Sokolovsky was the only military man to address the session during the foreign policy debate.

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BACKGROUND

1. Khrushchev Called ICBM "Absolute" Weapon in 1957

Khrushchev has been silent for more than a year on the issue of defense against the ICBM. In the fall of 1957, however, he went beyond PRAVDA's present characterization, even so far as to suggest that the ICBM is the "ultimate" weapon long dreamed of by military strategists.

Immediately following the August 1957 Soviet announcement of a successful ICBM test, Radio Moscow newscasts had cited Western characterizations of the weapon as "ultimate." But there was no approach to an original Soviet claim to this effect until Khrushchev, in his 22 November 1957 interview with Hearst, declared: "We now possess the absolute weapon, perfect in every respect and created in a short period of time." Follow-up comment on the interview did not repeat this claim.

Previously, on 14 November in his interview with U.P. correspondent Shapiro, Khrushchev had said "there is no stopping" the ICBM. This remark was similar to his statement at an 8 October 1957 reception at the East German embassy in Moscow: "There is no defense" against the ICBM. (Moscow did not report on Khrushchev's remarks at the embassy reception, but they were released by ADN, the East German news agency.)

2. Statements by Soviet Military Invariably More Cautious

Ever since the announcement of a successful Soviet ICBM test, Soviet military spokesmen have been careful to put a temporal qualifier on characterizations of the ICBM as an invincible weapon. Soviet missile expert Maj. Gen. Pokrovsky (in the 31 August 1957 IZVESTIA) and Air Marshal Verzhinin (in the 8 September 1957 PRAVDA) maintained only that the ICBM could not be destroyed by "contemporary" means of antisircraft defense. In an 11 September 1957 SOVIET PATRIOT article, Pokrovsky specifically acknowledged a possible future defense against the ICBM. Three days later in SOVIET RUSSIA, Maj. Gen. Semenov said that there were "almost no means of defense" against the ICBM.

In the March 1958 issue of INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, Maj. Gen. Talensky, editor of the authoritative MILITARY THOUGHT, wrote that "in general [the ICBM] is invulnerable so far to known antisircraft means." Elsewhere in his article Talensky cited Stewart Alsop for the remark that "there is no known way to intercept long-range ballistic missiles; defense against ballistic missiles will remain strictly theoretical for a long time."

One of the most extensive discussions of the relative invulnerability of the ICBM appeared in an article in BANNER (No. 11, 1957), the monthly organ of the Soviet Writers Union. The article said:

At the time ICBM's are practically invulnerable. This is because combatting them by existing methods can be done only by way of destroying the rocket at starting [launching] sites.

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But to wipe out these sites at the remote distance of several thousand kilometers is practically impossible, as they occupy a very small area and up to the moment of launching are not revealed in any way. At the present time, moreover, there are no means for combatting rockets already in flight.

Radio Moscow broadcasts have not acknowledged Western discussions of the development of an antimissile missile, but an article in the Defense Ministry journal MILITARY HERALD for March 1958 said that "at the end of 1957 in the American press, evidently in connection with the successes of the USSR in developing rocket technique..., information appeared that the United States has gone far in the development of intercepting ballistic rockets."

In a 3 September 1958 article in SOVIET FLEET, Col. S. Reidel presented a supposed U.S. view of antirocket defense that seemed to put more emphasis on the relative invulnerability of submarine-launched missiles* than on that of land-based ICBM's:

American specialists know that all their systems of anti-rocket defense still are very imperfect. They think that the very best of these will have no more than a 25-percent probability of destroying an enemy rocket, and even then only on condition that such rockets are fired from land bases in sectors kept under constant observation by distant reconnaissance stations. Against rockets fired from submarines, which can be located at different points in the four oceans, all the systems now projected in the U.S.A. are practically impotent.

The author did not challenge this alleged American estimate.

* For indications of the Soviet view of missile-launching submarines as a major strategic weapon, see FBIS Radio Propaganda Report RS.20 of 28 November 1958, "Soviet Propaganda on Missile-Launching Submarines: Indications of Concern over U.S. Capabilities."

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