

Soviet Military News

Missile-Firing Submarines Reported At Sea—Rocket Program Growing

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New evidence of Soviet missile progress has reached the United States.

Soviet submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles, the first of their type in the world, have been reported operating at sea in recent months. At the same time Soviet long-range missile launchings have increased this spring and about twenty missiles have now been fired at ranges of 3,500 miles or more.

This progress was expected and it has not resulted in any alteration in the United States evaluation of Soviet missile capabilities.

Soviet submarines, apparently converted for missile launching, were reported several months ago. A converted submarine of the long-range W class, was recently photographed off Iceland. The superstructure was extraordinarily large, possibly sixty feet in length, and after the submarine had surfaced a tarpaulin was hastily pulled over the stern to conceal vertical launching tubes for what are believed to be 500-mile-range ballistic missiles.

Atomic Engines Reported

Other new submarine types are either in construction or in operation, including at least two that are believed to be atomic-powered. The first Soviet nuclear-powered ship, an icebreaker, has not yet ventured to sea, an indication that the Soviet marine nuclear reactor may have encountered some difficulties.

More impressive than the advent of the anticipated new types of submarines has been the accelerated submarine-training program. For the last three years the far-ranging deep-sea cruising activities of the Soviet submarine fleet have doubled each year. Before 1956 the Soviet submarine navy was essentially a coastal fleet; its ships rarely cruised the high seas. Now Soviet submarines are to be found in all the waters of the world. They operate under maximum security, with numbers and identifying data obscured, and with careful reins on their communications.

Since March the Soviet ballistic-missile range with launching point near the Caspian Sea has fired about three to four long-range missiles a month. Of the twenty fired at ranges of 3,500 miles or more, only one has achieved a 5,000-mile range. One apparent satellite launching attempt was a failure.

There is no evidence that the Soviet Union has an operational ready intercontinental ballistic missile, although a few

may be in place later this year. No launching sites for operationally ready intermediate-range ballistic missiles, with less than 1,500-mile range, have been reported in the East European states.

There have been no significant Soviet advances in piloted aircraft. The Soviet bombing fleet consists of more than 1,000 medium bombers and about 150 heavy bombers, which can be used as tankers. The training program, particularly in air refueling, has been speeded up, but the total effort is not comparable to that of the United States Strategic Air Command.

A new bomber, previously reported, has been seen, but apparently only a single prototype is operating. It has been described as similar to the supersonic Convair B-58, but with a very long fuselage. Some believe it may be intended as a test bed for a nuclear power plant, but there is no evidence that a nuclear aircraft engine has yet been flown.

Balance Is Unchanged

The latest evidence of Soviet progress in military technology has not altered materially the power balance of the United States and the Soviet Union.

The first United States intercontinental ballistic missile, the Convair Atlas, has had a number of recent failures in the first test firings of the operational model. Some of these were there what is called "random" failures; two were of the same type. Changes and modifications involved are slight but will take time; consequently the target date for the first operational Atlas has been delayed from July 1 to September or October.

The United States Navy is far ahead of the Soviet Union in the development, construction and operation of nuclear submarines. But the Soviet ballistic-missile-firing submarines have preceded United States models by six to nine months. The George Washington, first of nine submarines being built to carry the Polaris ballistic missile, will not be commissioned until December, and she will not be operational, except on an emergency basis, until the autumn of 1960.

The test program of the Polaris, despite some anticipated failures, is proceeding satisfactorily, and will increase between now and next autumn to between two to four firings a month, with a total of about sixty shots scheduled. The first Polaris to be fired from shipboard will be launched from the test surface ship, the Observation Island, probably in July.

News
Analysis