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Symington Cites Slash In Red-Missile Guess

The official intelligence estimate of Soviet missile strength has been reduced by 25 per cent in less than two years, according to Senator Symington, Democrat of Missouri.

Answering charges that he and other officials had been acting in bad faith when they predicted a dangerous missile gap, Senator Symington said many officials had said publicly, and intelligence officers said privately that a missile gap was expected and would continue for a long time.

The gap, however, "had an unaccountable way of narrowing, closing and occasionally vanishing altogether," the Senator said in an article in Reporter magazine, out today.

Senator Symington pointed out that the missile gap prediction had been reported not only by Democrats, including then Senator Kennedy, and by military men, but also by two Republican Secretaries of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency director Allen Dulles.

The gap sometimes changed, he said, "by official proclamation," and once, in 1959, by adding unmanned bombers to planned American ICBMs and leaving them off of Soviet estimates.

"The contradictory and confusing estimates of Soviet ICBM strength that we have received in the past two years raises serious questions about the accuracy and effectiveness of our intelligence apparatus," Senator Symington said.

"Fortunately, there is no reason to believe that President Kennedy has underestimated" the Soviet military strength, the Senator said.

The President, he said, is increasing the number of Polaris submarine missiles by 50 per cent by the end of 1964; has increased the number of bombers on 15-minute ground alert by 50 per cent and is increasing Minuteman ICBM production facilities by 100 per cent.

MORI/CDF