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Halt in Construction at Major Soviet Solid-Propellant Strategic Missile Plants: Reasons and Implications

A Research Paper

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This paper was prepared by _____ and _____
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Summary

Information available as of 1 August 1991 was used in this report.

In the mid-1980s, expansion projects were well under way at nine major Soviet facilities involved in the production of solid-propellant strategic missiles. However, [] since 1988, expansion has stopped at all but two of those plants, leaving many critical production buildings half-built. Nevertheless, the Soviets retain the capability to produce solid-propellant strategic missiles at current levels.

We judge that these halts resulted from a perception in Moscow in the late 1980s that the Soviets would need fewer ballistic missiles through the 1990s than they had originally planned. With the reduced need for such missiles, the extensive expansion projects initiated in the mid-1980s became largely unnecessary. The requirement for fewer solid-propellant missiles—relative to the Soviets' mid-1980 plans—was probably influenced primarily by two factors: an ability to decrease force size, in accordance with START provisions, as the lethality and survivability of the Soviet strategic missile force increased, and the need to reduce defense expenditures to assist the ailing civilian economy.

The halts do not mean that development of Soviet solid-propellant missiles has stopped. We continue to project that, although Soviet strategic forces under START will be smaller than today's forces, they will continue to be modernized. Moreover, even with these halts, [] development work—much of it at the plants where the halts have occurred—continues on several new or improved solid-propellant missiles []

Even though developmental work on these new systems is continuing, the possibility that production of one or more of them will be delayed or canceled cannot be ruled out. By continuing developmental work, planned upgrades could be validated and new design concepts tested.

We judge, as apparently do the Soviets, that current plant facilities contain sufficient capacity to meet Soviet requirements for production of solid-propellant missiles through the 1990s. Moreover, we believe that reduced production requirements are also encouraging the Soviets to consolidate strategic missile motor production at fewer plants in order to streamline production, to reduce costs, and to release excess capacity and divert resources to the civilian economy.