

MIAMI HERALD

But We Still Haven't Heard All

Why U.S. Policy Has Flipped On Exposing Red Space Duds

By ROBERT S. BOYD
Of Our Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The sudden U.S. decision to publicize Russian space failures climaxes a long, behind-the-scenes strategy argument inside the government.

The civilian space agency announced late Wednesday night that Russia struck out on five attempts to reach the planets in the last two years



Boyd

and the sixth try was only a partial success. Some officials in the Space Agency, the State Department and the U.S. Information Agency have been urging all along that, the world be told about Russian failures as well as successes. Military men and the Central Intelligence Agency had vetoed the idea, however, on the grounds that it would give away their secret sources of information.

Their view — that security considerations outweighed possible propaganda benefits — had been government policy until now. The decision to break the truth loose was apparently ratified at the meeting of the National Security Council Wednesday. The announcement came in the form of a letter from Space Agency Director James Webb, replying to a request for information from the chairmen of the Senate and House space committees. But this was only a smokescreen. The congressional committees had been told, in confidence, of the Russian failures long ago.

They simply went along with the administration's decision to release the information now.

SPACE AGENCY spokesmen refuse to say why it is considered all right now to talk about Russian failures but not earlier.

But one reason was that word of the next-to-last Russian failure, an attempt to shoot a rocket to Venus on Aug. 25, two days before our Mariner II, leaked out last week.

Pieces of the Russian missile were observed circling the earth by members of a civilian moon-watch team organized by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory.

When they reported what they had seen, the Space Agency was forced to confirm it.

"When we knew of the failure, and they knew that we knew, there wasn't much point concealing it," one source said.

The other, more important reason for the publicity was apparently the worsening international situation.

"It's all involved in cold-war strategy," a space expert said. "I wish I could tell you that whole story, but it will probably never come out."

OTHER factors affecting the timing of the announcement were the successful mid-course maneuver to straighten out the U.S. Venus shot Tuesday, and the break-up of the Russian Sputnik IV over Wisconsin early Wednesday.

"It seemed an appropriate occasion in view of the confusing times," said Sen. Spessard Holland (D., Fla.), a member of the Senate Space Committee.

The U.S. Information Agency began broadcasting reports on the Soviet failures over the Voice of America Thursday. It also relayed the story

world via its wireless press network.

"We intend to pound this message home," a USIA spokesman said. "The world should know about Soviet failures as well as Soviet successes."

One high space official said he thought the decision to tell the world was long overdue.

"I hope it shows we're maturing," he said. "Our detection methods are fairly well known. They don't involve people inside the Soviet Union who could be hurt, so it seems safe enough to release it."

ANOTHER source said military men fought the announcement until the very last.

"It's so ridiculous," he said.

"They didn't want to identify the country where the shot came from—as if it could be any place but Russia."

Officials declined to discuss U.S. detection methods. It is known, however, that the Space Agency and the Defense Department maintain a world-wide missile tracking network. The Air Force publicly brags about the ability of its ballistic missile early warning system—huge radar screens in Alaska, Greenland and Britain — to detect Russian missile shots as soon as they rise over the horizon.

The Space Agency also declined to talk about other possible Russian failures, such as the many rumors about unsuccessful attempts to put men into orbit.