

Newest Delta Sub Pivotal In Latest SALT Violation

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Washington—Soviet Union is conducting sea trials with four enlarged Delta 2-class submarines armed with 16 SS-N-8 submarine-launched ballistic missiles before dismantling older SS-7 or SS-8 intercontinental ballistic missile launchers as required by the present Strategic Arms Limitation Agreement.

The move raises the number of SLBMs deployed to above the 744 maximum level established for the USSR in the interim SALT 1 accord under which both the U. S. and Soviet Union now operate in the absence of a SALT-2 agreement.

U. S. observers have detected the SALT violation but are now unable to continue surveillance because the last Lockheed Big Bird close-look photo-reconnaissance satellite covering that area of the USSR decayed Apr. 1 after 118 days in orbit.

There is normally a two-to-three-month delay between decay and launch of another Big Bird satellite.

The four new Soviet Delta 2-class boats now at sea are larger than the 450-ft., 8,000-ton surface displacement Delta boats that have been operating with 12 SS-N-8 SLBMs. The SS-N-8 has a range of more than 4,300 naut. mi. with its nuclear warhead. The 12-launcher Delta boat was the largest submarine ever built by any navy until the new 16-launcher Delta put to sea.

An even larger version of the Delta boat designed to carry more than the 16 SLBMs is under development.

Under the terms of SALT-1, the Soviets are limited to deployment of 744 SLBMs unless they first phase out older ICBMs to compensate for adding new SLBMs to the fleet. They are permitted to deploy up to a total of 950 SLBMs on 62 operational submarines by mid-1977 as replacements of 200 ICBMs.

When U. S. officials approached the Russians about the deployment of the additional Delta submarines without dismantling the older ICBM launchers, Soviet officials said that older ICBM silos have not been closed out because of "construction problems," according to one U. S. official, "and the U. S. seems now willing to wait and see just what the next move will be."

The sea trials of the new Delta 2 boats come as no real surprise, according to one senior U. S. official, who cited "alleged violations" in concealing SS-N-8 missiles and component assembly of Delta boats.

Late last year, the Soviets built a second way for launching Delta submarines at the Severomorsk shipyard, near Mur-

mansk, while the number of covers to conceal construction facilities at that location increased greatly to prevent U. S. satellite observation (AW&ST Dec. 8, 1975, p. 12).

The first Delta boats went to sea in 1973 after the Soviets completed a production run of 34 nuclear-propelled SLBM-armed Yankee-class boats. The Delta replaces the Yankee.

U. S. officials said that 18 or 19 Delta boats have been launched or are being assembled. Although the USSR still has the freedom to mix the number of strategic delivery vehicles under the terms of the Vladivostok understanding, it has become clear that it is going beyond the 740 baseline ceiling for SLBM launch tubes agreed on in SALT-1.

Until recent months, the Soviets had the capability to build about 12 nuclear-propelled ballistic missile submarines per year, plus eight other nuclear-powered submarines. That rate is being increased, officials said. Some experts believe the maximum capacity could be increased to as many as 30 boats per year.

U. S. has 10 Polaris subs armed with 16 Polaris A-3 missiles each, and 31 submarines armed with Poseidon C-3 SLBMs totaling 496 missiles. About half this SLBM fleet is at sea at any one time.

In addition to SLBM developments, the USSR is continuing development of nuclear-armed, anti-ship missiles, new anti-submarine warfare detection methods and anti-ballistic-missile weapons systems.

The S-NX-13 subsurface-launched nuclear-armed missile, with a range of about 600 naut. mi., was designed originally to be used against surface ships. Later versions are for use against submarines. The ballistic anti-ship missile reaches an apogee of about 150 naut. mi., where its sensor system locks on to the target. The new ASW variant in development could, along with new ASW technology, make the U. S. SLBM fleet vulnerable in the 1980s, according to senior Navy officials. Senior Defense Dept. officials testified to Congress this year that the Soviets are continuing their accelerated program in anti-ballistic missile developments at the same time the U. S. has scaled its program down drastically.

The Soviet Union has an intensive effort in ABM research with two new ABM

systems in development—a tactical anti-ballistic missile, and a "high accelerator interceptor system."

This new hypersonic interceptor system is being tested at Emba, northwest of the Aral Sea (AW&ST Apr. 7, 1975, p. 12).

The Soviets are labeling this system an anti-tactical ballistic missile defense weapon for use against shorter-range tactical nuclear missiles to protect the field army. It has inherent anti-ballistic missile application against U. S. ICBMs.

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