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USSR/WEAPONS

JENNINGS: The U.S. intelligence community has come to some new conclusions about the pace at which the Soviet Union is modernizing its military. As ABC's John McWethy reports from Washington, the latest assessments are something of a surprise.

MCWETHY: According to the U.S. intelligence community, the production of Soviet weapons turns out to be slower than previously advertised, particularly in production of new strategic nuclear weapons, things like missiles and missile-firing submarines. In a report to Congress, the CIA claims that since 1976, the growth rate of expenditures on new weapons has been zero. In other words, since the mid-1970s the number of tanks, ships, missiles, and aircraft rolling off the assembly lines has been the same year after year not steadily increasing as often claimed by the Reagan administration. Intelligence officials cite three possible reasons for why the purpose and production of weapons has slowed. One, the troubled Soviet economy cannot meet the military's demands for raw materials and weapons components; two, the Russians are buying more and more sophisticated weapons and are finding, just as the U.S. has, that these cost more, take longer to produce, and can only be afforded in smaller numbers; three, there may have been decisions in the Kremlin to slow the growth rate of new weapons, but no one knows why. Despite the new analysis, Reagan administration officials say the Soviets still far outspend the U.S. on weapons, and there should be no change in the president's five-year, \$2 trillion plan to modernize America's military. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.