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Soviet arms procurement was flat for 6 years, two agencies now agree

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WASHINGTON — Soviet spending to buy tanks, ships, planes and other implements of war was virtually flat between 1977 and 1983, both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency now agree, say U.S. government analysts.

But the Defense Intelligence Agency is estimating that 1983 saw a substantial increase in this procurement spending, while the CIA says its figures so far indicate a much more modest jump.

These disputes are usually carried out behind the shield of high security classification, but they have become public because of a series of disclosures by the CIA that seem to undermine assertions by administration policy-makers of a relentless

Soviet military buildup.

Last year, it was disclosed that the CIA had reduced its estimate of overall Soviet military spending, including procurement and other important categories of spending, such as research and development.

The agency said that it appeared that its previous estimate of an increase of 4 percent or 5 percent a year was incorrect. The correct figure was closer to 2 percent a year, the agency said, suggesting that this was still substantial, since Soviet spending was already high.

The new round of controversy over the figures was occasioned by release last week of the congressional testimony of Robert Gates, deputy director of CIA and chairman of the inter-agency National Intelligence Council. Mr. Gates said, among other things, that Soviet military procurement had been stagnant since 1976.

At a Pentagon briefing yesterday, reporters were told that the Defense Intelligence Agency, which is part of the Defense Department, now agrees with this assessment. The briefing

was held on condition that speakers be described only as government analysts. They were able to talk authoritatively for both CIA and DIA viewpoints.

At the same time, the Pentagon released a statement by Mr. Gates in which he said his testimony "is being misread and misused."

It was not made clear to what Mr. Gates referred. It was Pentagon critic Senator William Proxmire (D, Wisc.) who released the testimony with a statement of his own that said: "It is time for Washington to take official notice that Soviet military procurement has been stagnant for the past seven years and to stop acting like nothing has changed."

Pentagon spokesmen said they could not recall incidents in which Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger had discussed the essentially flat procurement estimate in talking about the Soviet military buildup.

Analysts at the briefing contended that both DIA and CIA expected to see Soviet procurement expenditures increase again and cautioned that estimating Soviet spending was a difficult task.

Nevertheless, when pressed for figures, the analysts revealed that the two agencies were at wide variance in their current estimates of what happened in 1983, supposedly the pivotal year for procurement spending.

The CIA estimate is that the dollar value of Soviet military procurement expenditures increased 1 percent or 2 percent from 1982 to 1983, while the DIA estimate placed the increase at from 5 percent to 8 percent.

The analysts said disagreement stemmed largely from differing estimates of when new weapons would be put into production. Moscow is fielding or is about to field new intercontinental missiles, submarines, interceptor aircraft and other systems, including a ground-based laser system, according to the analysts.

DIA estimated the same increase for procurement from 1983 to 1984, but the CIA has made no estimate for 1984, according to the analysts.

Moreover, DIA apparently has no figure comparable to the CIA's estimate of 2 percent overall military spending from 1976 to 1983. The DIA figure for the same period is 5 percent a year, but the analysts insisted that the different methods used in arriving at the figure made meaningful comparison impossible.