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US STEALTH PROGRAMS AND TECHNOLOGY: SOVIET EXPLOITATION OF THE WESTERN PRESS

Summary

The Western press has reported extensively on US Stealth -- or very low observable (VLO) systems -- since the mid-1970s. Western reporters often intertwine fact and analysis when writing about US programs. This blending of fact and analysis probably keeps US Stealth programs shrouded in mystery and perpetuates false rumors about the capabilities of Stealth technology. We believe the majority of Stealth technology articles found in the press reiterate well-established signature-reduction techniques that have appeared in technical journals and books.

The Soviets read the Western press to learn about US Stealth programs and technology. They likely used this information to develop comparable offensive systems, to focus research and development efforts toward the design of defenses to counter the Western Stealth threat, and to guide their covert intelligence collection efforts. Although the Soviets use the press to learn about US military systems, we estimate that the special access controls surrounding the US Stealth programs have reduced the amount and quality of militarily significant reporting appearing in the press.

The Soviets likely have a good understanding of US Stealth programs and technology from successful Western technology acquisitions, their research and development efforts, and their analysis of the Western press. The relationship among Soviet Stealth acquisitions, the press, and the Soviet weapons development cycle leads us to conclude that the Soviets may be at the prototype stage of an indigenous Stealth program.

Background

The Soviets have a multi-channel Western technology acquisition effort that relies upon a network of covert intelligence operations, trade diverters, international trade agreements, and open source collectors. This well-funded collection effort is targeted primarily against US defense contractors, their affiliates overseas, and their competitors.

Soviets seek information about future Western military systems to develop comparable offensive systems, to focus research and development efforts towards the design of defenses to counter Western threats, and to estimate the relative technology level of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the West.

The Soviets use the Western press to guide their covert intelligence collection efforts and trade

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted], Office of Scientific and Weapons Research. It contains information available as of 1 August 1988. Comments and questions may be directed to the Chief, [redacted], OSW/R.

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