

Russian Sub Patrols Sink to Zero in 2002

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Russia did not send any ballistic submarine patrols out to sea in 2002 but restarted the patrols in 2003, according to the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), which monitors Russian fleet movements.

According to documents procured under the Freedom of Information Act by Joshua Handler and Hans Kristensen, consultants to the Natural Resources Defense Council, first reported in the July/August issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, the number of patrols declined from 37 in 1991 to zero in 2002. Russian ballistic submarine patrols resumed in 2003, however, but an unnamed source from ONI said in a July 5 Washington Post article that only “a very small number” have been made so far.

The gradual deterioration of Russia’s ballistic nuclear submarine fleet due to financial constraints and the advanced age of the ships contributed to the absence of Russian patrols last year. Highlighting these problems, a decommissioned Russian nuclear submarine sank August 30 while being towed. Yet, despite these difficulties, Russia remains committed to extending the life of its ballistic submarine program. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov announced July 25 that in 2006 the Russian navy would receive the Yuri Dolgoruky, the next-generation submarine currently under development. Although the hull was laid in 1996, the program’s financial difficulties postponed the boat’s completion from the original 2002 delivery date.

Russia hopes to launch two more submarines soon thereafter, Jane’s Defence Weekly reported August 13. Col. Gen. Alexei Moskovsky, Russian deputy defense minister, indicated that, with sufficient funding, the two additional boats will be in service by 2010. Moskovsky told the weekly that the three new submarines will carry Bulava ballistic missiles, which closely resemble the SS-27 Topol-M. Moskovsky warned, however, that “underfunding may result in postponing the deadlines by one-and-a-half to two years.”

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