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**Moscow Has Fast,
 Offensive Bombers**

By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

THE Russian air industry is now producing two new heavy bomber types capable of round trip strikes at American targets, carrying atomic or hydrogen bombs. These are the Tupolev-200 and the Ilyushin-38.

This highly significant fact of international life has been suspected for some time. The probability that one of these new bombers had passed the prototype stage was reported in this space last summer. Now it is confirmed, however, that both bombers are in active production, and are already being flown by regular formations of the Soviet strategic air army.

The news is a depressing commentary on Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson's contention that Soviet military preparations are "not offensive" in character. It proves that the Soviets are pressing the development of offensive weapons with great energy. The Secretary was talking through his hat.

The existence of these new bombers radically changes the whole air-atomic balance. Until now the TU-4, an improved version of the B-29 crudely comparable to our B-50, has been the workhorse of the Soviet strategic air army. The TU-4 is entirely capable of striking any American target, but it cannot do the round trip from Soviet air bases to American targets and back again.

Thus the strategic air army is essentially a one-shot air force, so long as it must mainly depend upon the TU-4. Expert opinion is unanimous that the Soviet air crews are trained to fly one-way missions, and that the Soviet high command will order one-way missions, if need be. Nonetheless, it was and is a severe handicap to have a one-shot air force. The importance of the new bomber types is that they will give the Soviet air planners the power to strike and strike again.

BOTH the new Soviet bombers have their American parallels. The Tupolev-200 is the size of our giant B-36, with a wing span above 230 feet and a length of 200 feet over-all. Its enormous size indicates great range. It is powered by six turbo-prop engines. The quality of these engines, plus certain features of the air-frame design, give positive evidence of superior speed.

It is thought to fly at more than 450 miles an hour and above 50,000 feet. These are substantially better performance characteristics than the best the B-36 can boast. Because the engines are turbo-props, the new Russian intercontinental giants can also attack efficiently at very low altitude, "on the deck," where existing radar detection systems are seriously deficient.

The Ilyushin-38 is a somewhat smaller and more compact aircraft with sharply swept-back wings and a speed estimated at close to 500 miles per hour. Four turbo-prop engines provide its present power plant. But its aerodynamic characteristics suggest that it has been designed to permit substitution of jet engines for turbo-props when the time comes.

Even now this bomber has many of the qualities of the American B-52, which is not yet in active production. When and if the jet-turbo-prop substitution is made, the comparison will be exact.

To conclude this collection of disturbing data, both the Tupolev-200 and the Ilyushin-38 are equipped with radar bomb-sights. The Pentagon's merchants of complacency used to claim the Russians would never make radar bomb-sights.

WHEN first reported, the Ilyushin-38 was known as "Type 31," while the Tupolev-200 was commonly called the TUG-75. (Besides the brilliant Tupolev, who built the TU-4, another famous Russian air designer, Gurevich, collaborated in the development of the Tupolev-200.) The early reports of both bombers were rejected as inherently incredible by the same merchants of complacency who swore the Russians would never learn to bomb by night and in bad weather.

Now, however, the existence of both these bombers is somewhat glumly accepted even by the Pentagon's civilian overlords, who have learned some hard lessons in recent months. The new Soviet bombers are already in squadron formations.

No operating unit of the American Strategic Air Command will get new bombers of comparable range, speed and weight for many more months. The hope of SAC for the present is the B-47, a superb aircraft but a medium-range bomber. And the number of operating squadrons which have exchanged their B-50s for B-47s is still very small.

In short the Soviets may soon be able to claim parity with the United States, in point of equipment at least, in the great military specialty which has always been supposed to justify our neglect of other forms of armed strength. In these circumstances it is plain dishonest for the Pentagon to go on smugly boasting about American air-atomic striking power, without at least uttering a warning word or two now and then about Soviet air-atomic striking power.