
Despite Cold War's End, Russia Keeps Building a Secret Complex

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

MOSCOW, April 15 — In a secret project reminiscent of the chilliest days of the cold war, Russia is building a mammoth underground military complex in the Ural Mountains, Western officials and Russian witnesses say.

Hidden inside Yamantau mountain in the Beloretsk area of the southern Urals, the project involves the construction of a huge complex served by a railroad, a highway and thousands of workers.

The project, some Russian officials say, was begun during the era of Leonid I. Brezhnev, when the Soviet Union was locked in an arms race with the United States, the Communist Party ruled the country and the military budget seemingly knew no bounds.

Russia's decision to proceed with the costly venture underscores the continuing influence of the military at a time when the Government is struggling to pay its workers back wages and to cope with a growing

budget deficit. The construction of the project, which has been observed by United States spy satellites, mystifies American specialists, who speculate that it may be anything from an underground nuclear command post to a secret weapons production plant.

But while there is uncertainty over its purpose, it has already become a politically delicate issue for the Clinton Administration.

The United States is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to help the cash-starved Russian Government dismantle old nuclear weapons. To win Congressional approval for the money, the Clinton Administration has had to certify that the Russians are not undertaking new military projects that go beyond their defensive needs.

The project is also being carried out despite complaints from members of Russia's Parliament that the

Continued on Page A6, Column 1



Russia is building a huge military complex in Yamantau mountain.