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# Matter of Fact . . . By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

## The Megatons Did It

AFTER NEARLY two years of backing and filling, the Eisenhower Administration is finally showing signs of tackling the American air defense problem in a serious way.

The difficulty that has to be surmounted is the same that has caused the delay to date. An honest and adequate air defense program can eventually add from five billion dollars to six billion dollars annually to our military expenditures.

Most of the increase in outlay will come the second year. The increase can, of course, be slowed down by slowing down the program. It can be made less honest and less adequate, in short. But even a half-measure program is likely to increase the 1956 military budget—the election year budget—by around \$2,500,000,000.

Thus the decision will not be painless under any circumstances; and it will be opposed by all those who give budgetary and fiscal convenience a higher priority than national security.

ON THE OTHER hand, it is very hard to see how the obstructionist tactics that have worked so well until now can continue to succeed hereafter. Nearly two years after the urgent need was first pointed out by the scientists of Project Lincoln, the Pentagon has at last set up a Continental Air Defense Command under Gen. Benjamin Chidlaw. The mere existence of such a command, specifically charged with specific responsibility for a life-and-death mission, will inevitably generate an almost irresistible demand for the tools that are needed for the job.

It has not been announced, but the National Security Council in effect prepared to answer this future demand even before the Continental Air Defense Command was set up. A new special commission composed of high officials and outside experts was

named by the NSC, to study the Nation's air defense requirements and report back this autumn.

This study has been going forward for some time in an altogether new atmosphere. There is none of the sleazy, interested outcry against "Maginot Line thinking" that was heard when an effective American air defense system was first proposed in the Lincoln report of two years ago. There is none of the defeatist talk, either, about an effective air defense being an impossible long-hair dream.

THE BRILLIANT success of Project Corrode has proven the value of the Lincoln scientists' designs for new early warning devices. Work has already started on the so-called McGill Warning Line, running across northern Canada. After Corrode, there is growing support for the once-ridiculed Lincoln proposal of a Far North Line, on the extreme continental fringe. And airborne early warning devices have been developed with such success that the planners even talk of detecting an attacking force almost at the moment of take-off, halfway 'round the world.

By the same token, important progress has been made with the other half of the air defense problem—the weapons of interception without which the best warning is useless.

Another of the Lincoln ideas that was once ridiculed and is now beginning to find acceptance is the use of "Hunter-Killer" aircraft. These will be planes of considerable size and range, perhaps even bombers. They will be able to exploit an early warning better than a short-range fighter. And they will be equipped with air-to-air guided missiles, probably with atomic warheads, to increase certainty of a kill.

The original Lincoln program, which was waiting for the Eisenhower Administra-

tion when it took office, had a maximum kill-rate of 80 percent of all attacking aircraft as its supposedly over-ambitious target.

THE PRESENT NSC commission is the fifth or sixth such body to review the Lincoln findings. In addition, a detailed technical review is being carried on, on behalf of the new NSC commission, by the Rand Corporation and the Johns-Hopkins University contractors of the Army's office of research on operations. And instead of being lowered, the air defense target has now been increased to a kill-rate of no less than 90 percent of all attacking aircraft.

If 9 out of 10 attackers can be brought down in the "remote air battle," this country may be damaged, but it will be neither crippled nor destroyed by A-bomb or even H-bomb attack. That is the incalculable increase of security which is now promised, providing the Eisenhower Administration's policymakers are willing to take the budgetary consequences.

They were not even willing to look the problem in the face, until their complacency was rudely disturbed by the Soviet hydrogen bomb test and the appearance of new Russian long-range jet bombers comparable to the best American types. As one of them sardonically remarked, "The megatons (of the H-bomb's power) did what the kilotons could not do."

Even now, however, no one can be sure whether half-measures or an honest effort will be decided upon. In high Administration quarters it is being said "that the country won't stand for the expense"—which is sheer nonsense, unless the policy of deceiving the country about the perils of the national situation is to be continued. At any rate, the problem is being looked squarely in the face, which represents great progress.