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Canada Looks To Northern Air Ring

By Marquis Childs

OTTAWA, Canada.—In the great empty spaces far to the north of the thin line of population in this relatively empty land, the future of the American Continent—whether in fact it is to have a future—may be determined. This is one of the great cloudy, unresolved issues about which the people, both in Canada and the United States, remain in almost complete ignorance.

If the United States with its vast industrial potential is to have a fair degree of protection from an atomic Pearl Harbor launched by the Russians across the top of the world, then a radar warning fence must be built somewhere to the north. But how far north, how extensive, how it is to be manned, all these questions remain to be settled between the two countries.

This is a part, a vital part, of the problem of continental defense with which the top policy-makers in the Eisenhower Administration have been wrestling for many troubled weeks. With President Eisenhower giving the final assent, the National Security Council has now agreed on a decision to let the public know at least the outlines of the danger and what can be done to meet it. This may also mean increased pressure to get on with a working agreement between the United States and the neighbor on the north that now and then feels itself too readily taken for granted.

There have been a half dozen technical studies of this problem, all of them highly secret. One was known as Project Lincoln, carried out by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for the Air Force. In a joint operation with Canada under the direction of Project Lincoln, some important tests were made in the late spring and early summer in the Arctic wastes on Canada's northern boundary.



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THE AIR FORCE provided 20 million dollars to carry out these tests. They were concerned with such difficult technical questions as whether a radar warning system can function at that northern latitude against the interference of the Aurora Borealis and other natural obstacles. When the northern lights are active in the winter months, wireless communications are disrupted often for days at a time.

Study and appraisal of the results of the test were estimated to take a year. Not until next spring, therefore, will the data be available. But many Americans and some Canadians are beginning to wonder whether the basic decisions can wait that long. For after they are taken, months and years of planning and construction will be required to build a fence which would give an attack warning of from an hour to 2½ hours for America's cities.

In the past Canadians have felt unhappy over widely advertised plans of the American Air Force to send bombers across Canadian territory to attack Soviet targets by the northern route in the event of war. It was felt that this might bring retaliation from Russian attacks falling short of the United States, but causing widespread destruction in Canada.

Some of this apprehension has been removed by construction of the Air Force's great base at Thule on Greenland. The Department of Defense is currently taking a group of newspapermen on an inspection of that forward post for launching a retaliatory strike. If it is decided to build a far north warning system, Thule would also be a useful point from which to extend operations.

A JOINT Canadian-American radar network is now being built in what has been described as the "seminortherly parts of Canada." This will cost when completed hundreds of millions of dollars, two thirds of which is being furnished by the United States, one third by Canada. The exact amount is secret since it would reveal too much to intelligence agents able to break down such figures. In a discussion in the Canadian House of Commons it was disclosed that construction and development of one radar station, at St. Margarets, New Brunswick, had cost \$3,223,688.

This warning system covers only selected target areas in the United States. It falls far short of the kind of protective alert urged in Project Lincoln and similar studies.

Here the experts disagree. Gen. Omar Bradley, retired chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff and a close friend and collaborator with Canada's Lieut. Gen. Charles Foulkes, Canadian Chiefs of Staff chairman, had long held that a truly effective system could be built by pushing north from the northernmost railway line. Others insist that the line must be started in the Arctic north and pushed south. But a measure of the gravity and the urgency of the problem was Bradley's final warning that it should be taken up as quickly as possible between President Eisenhower and Prime Minister St. Laurent.