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Matter Of Fact By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

Importance of the Kelly Report

THE TEST of the seriousness, and indeed of the common honesty, of the new Administration's defense planning is coming very soon. It will take the form of a report on the American air defense problem by a special committee headed by this country's leading industrial-scientist, Mervin Kelly of the Bell Laboratories.

Only a few Pentagon planners, scientists and other specialists know about this Kelly report, which may even have been rendered already. Yet the nation really ought to be waiting for the Kelly report with the anxious interest, and the intense concern, of a patient waiting to hear his doctor's verdict in a life and death case. The circumstances are enough to explain why.

As previously revealed in this space, the American Government was shaken, last autumn, by drastic findings about our air defense situation. These findings were made by Project Lincoln, a research group directed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on Air Force contracts, which comprised the most authoritative scientific team ever assembled in this country in peacetime. The Lin-

coln findings may be briefly summarized as follows.

FIRST, the existing and presently planned American air defense system is virtually worthless.

Second, the parallel growth of the Soviet atomic stockpile and the Soviet strategic air arm will enable the Kremlin to launch a "devastating" air-atomic attack on this country within two or three years.

Third, therefore, if we do not wish to be nakedly exposed to air-atomic destruction at the will of the Kremlin, a costly and urgent effort must be made to build a truly effective American air defense system, exploiting certain "technological break-throughs" pointed out by the Lincoln scientists.

Despite the immense weight of scientific authority behind them, such findings as these could hardly be accepted without careful review. Hence former Secretary of Defense Lovett named the Kelly Committee, including the eminent physicist, Prof. Charles Lauritsen, President Hovde of Purdue, representing education, and several top flight business men. President Eisenhower asked the committee to finish its task. Whether or not the committee has now reported, a good deal is known about its tendency.

Most important of all, it is known that the Lincoln scientists' dark estimate of the danger ahead has been broadly sustained. There may be, and there are, arguments about whether the time of utmost danger will begin in 1954-'55, or in 1955-'56, or in 1956-'57. But the Kelly Committee has agreed with the Lincoln findings that the Kremlin is now gaining the capability of destroying the country by air-atomic attack.

THIS estimate of future danger is also understood to have been accepted by President Eisenhower himself, when certain eminent scientists recently presented the problem to him. Nor is the existence of the danger denied by the air staff, despite the empty attacks by some of the air generals on "air Maginot lines." In short the danger must now be treated as a hard fact.

The question remains, what must now be done in order to ward off this future danger? The Lincoln program, which was admittedly highly experimental, had three main features—first, a novel air warning net extended outward to the most distant continental approaches, providing six or seven hours warning; second, a fully automatic or "cybernetic" air defense communications system; and third,

an ambitious effort to beef up our interceptor force and to extend its bases, so that any attacker would be exposed to wave after wave of interception.

Unless the best authorities are misleading, the Kelly Committee has recommended or will shortly recommend a compromise program. This program is understood to have only two main features—first, a fully automatic air defense communications system; and second, experimental extension of the air warning net to provide three hours warning, including extension of the net along the now neglected sea flanks.

EVEN this truncated program will be expensive, although it will certainly cost far less than the estimated Lincoln total of perhaps five billion dollars for the first year. Moreover, the Kelly Committee is understood to pass rather lightly over the problem of our interceptor force, but the Defense Department is in no position to do so.

Our air defense command now comprises about 1800 aircraft, mostly inadequate or flagrantly obsolete, including at least one squadron of World War II P-51s. First class all-weather fighters, which are the real need, are coming in appallingly slowly. There is no proper chain of forward bases. Better point defenses will be provided by the Army's "nike" guided missile; but "nike" is not absolutely dependable, and point defenses bear about the same relation to a full air defense system as one molar bears to a full set of teeth.

In short, the most modest measures to safeguard this country from air-atomic attack will require a rather complete reversal of the present defense policy of cut-back and slow-down. This is the big test that Secretary of Defense Wilson has shortly got to meet.

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