

Matter Of Fact By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

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On The President's Desk

WHEN HE RETURNS to Washington from his vacation, President Eisenhower will find on his desk an official report proposing that the Nation spend between six and seven billion dollars for air defense alone each year until 1960.

President Eisenhower has had a number of similar reports on his desk before this. The difference this time is that this report was written by the President's own men. The President's old friend and wartime G-3, Maj. Gen. Harold Bull, headed the committee which wrote the report. The other officials were for the most part Eisenhower-appointed officials in the Government. Indeed, as previously reported in this space, when the National Security Council appointed the committee, the stated purpose was to "get a report from our own people."

The Bull committee report has already been vetted from a scientific point of view by still another committee, headed by Dr. Lee Dubridge, the President's scientific adviser, and including such distinguished scientists as Charles Lauritsen of the California Institute of Technology. The scientists have fully indorsed the Bull committee's proposals. So has the Air Force, whose letter of indorsement the President will no doubt also find on his desk.

THE NEXT STEP is the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The position of Chief of Staff of the Air Force Nathan Twining is obvious, from the Air Force letter of indorsement. As for the other members of the Joint Chiefs, the air defense effort proposed in the Bull report demands the kind of reshuffling of defense priorities which the services constitutionally tend to resist.

Yet the new chiefs are now engaged, on orders from the

President, on a complete "new look" at American defense planning. If this new look is to mean anything at all, it must involve just this sort of reshuffling of priorities. Moreover, the new chiefs now have available a great mass of evidence, in the shape of at least a half dozen reports dealing in one way or another with the air defense problem. From different angles of vision all these reports embody the same basic conclusion—that a great air defense effort is urgently required in the face of the constantly growing Soviet air-atomic capabilities.

The Joint Chiefs, whether they indorse the Bull report in detail, can hardly disregard the air defense problem, in the face of this evidence. After the Joint Chiefs have taken their position, the final decision will rest, of course, with the National Security Council and the President himself.

It is at this highest level that the final issue is most in doubt.

The six to seven billion dollar annual investment in air defense proposed by the Bull report (very much the same sums as were first proposed in the Lincoln project report) does not represent a net increase in spending, since these sums include the currently projected allotment for air defense. But the net increase (proposed) is nevertheless on the order of three to four billion dollars.

A POWERFUL FACTION in the Administration, represented on the National Security Council by Budget Bureau Director Joseph Dodge, is trying to persuade the President to reduce the level of the defense budget to well below 30 billion dollars. Quite apart from the air defense problem, this kind of reduction would mean a sharp reduction in

force levels in all the services. Short of completely gutting the strategic air force and the other two services, a budget below 30 billion dollars would absolutely rule out an added three to four billion dollars for air defense.

Just because this is so, the economy-at-any-price faction in the Administration has caused to be appointed yet another committee to consider the air defense problem. This committee is composed of economy-minded industrialists. It is obviously hoped that this packed jury will enter a minority report on the air defense issue, thus making it possible to shove the whole expensive and unpleasant problem under the rug.

Yet there are signs that the economy-at-any-price faction will not in the end win the day. Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson has stubbornly resisted any arbitrary reduction in the defense budget, at least until the new chiefs have had their new look. Perhaps more significant was a little-noted statement by Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey, the ablest man in the Cabinet, and no friend of loose spending. Humphrey predicted that the Administration will reluctantly ask for new taxes, if it decides that the Soviet hydrogen bomb demands an increased defense effort.

As for the President, he is genuinely concerned by the burden which defense spending places on the national economy. He does not seem likely to pretend that the Soviet hydrogen bomb does not exist, as President Truman at first did in the case of the Soviet atomic bomb. This seems especially unlikely, now that the President has a report from his "own people" on the desperate need to build our air defenses.

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