

Matter U. Fact . WASH . By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

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The Test of Wilson

THE REAL question about the Administration's controversial defense program is not whether earlier defense planning was practical or impractical, wasteful or economical. The question is whether Secretary of Defense Wilson is going on the rule that adequate and reasonable American defenses have first priority.

There is a lot of evidence, by now, that first priority may have been given to other aims, such as balancing the budget, reducing taxes, and bringing the wild chaos of the Pentagon under effective managerial control. But the evidence is not as yet final and decisive, because Secretary Wilson might well have done everything that he has done in order to clear the decks for a more efficient effort.

The test of whether Secretary Wilson is primarily concerned with his primary job, which is defending this country, is occurring at this moment. The so-called Kelly report, recommending an American air defense program, is now in the hands of Secretary Wilson and Undersecretary Roger Kyes.

One of the Kelly report's major recommendations is that the people of this country be acquainted with the hard facts of their situation. A draft summary of the air defense problem, suitable for publication, has been given to Wilson and Kyes. Will they publish, or will they suppress this document? Will they act on the Kelly report, or will they shove the whole painful problem back under the rug? There would be no more final and decisive trial of the purposes and character of the new defense leadership.

THIS IS true for three reasons. First of all, there is the nature of the problem itself. As has been emphasized before in this space, the growth of Soviet air-atomic power will expose this country to actual destruction, at the will of the Kremlin, within the short space of two to four years. Our existing air defenses are worthless. And the future danger, surely, is one that cannot be ignored by reasoning men.

Second, there is the character of the Kelly report. The warning signal concerning the air defense problem was originally raised by Project Lincoln, a massive research task force of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Lincoln warnings have been fully confirmed, but the Lincoln program for warding off the future danger has been much criticized as overambitious, excessively theoretical and overexperimental.

The men who prepared the Kelly report were chosen by former Secretary of Defense Robert A. Lovett for the precise purpose of a hard-headed,

practical assessment of the problem, instead of a purely scientific and theoretical assessment.

Their leader was the most eminent scientist-industrialist in this country, Dr. Marvin J. Kelly of the Bell Telephone Laboratories. Robert Wilson of Standard Oil of Indiana, President Frederick L. Howde of Purdue, and Prof. Charles C. Lauritsen were other members. These men, so conspicuously hard-headed as well as so expertly qualified to judge, have spent five months weighing every relevant fact. Even if the Lincoln program is condemned, the recommendations of this Kelly committee cannot be brushed aside as "impractical."

Third and finally, the compromise program put forward by the Kelly committee is known to be moderate and careful. It does not urge the immediate expenditure of huge sums on equipment that has not been adequately proven. But it does urge making a start now, to build an effective air defense system around the equipment that has been fully proven.

A GREAT deal of equipment has in fact successfully passed through the long stage of research and development. Early warning nets can now be built. Warning on the sea flanks can now be organized. A proper air defense communications system, that will not break down under saturating attacks, can now be put together. Good all-weather fighters can now be produced. These are the essen-

tial components of an improved American air defense system, that will eventually guard us against the appalling danger that is known to lie ahead.

Three things are now needed, if this danger is to be guarded against. The Pentagon, with its complex channels and interservice disputes, is not the place where a whole new weapons system can be designed and constructed. Something like a new Manhattan District Project is required to build up and perfect the air defenses that this country needs.

Then resources are required to finance the effort. If Secretary Wilson and Undersecretary Kyes are not to ignore the Kelly report, they will have to ask for between one and two billion dollars additional to finance the improvement of the air warning and communications systems that the Kelly report specifically covers. Finally, a much greater effort is also needed to build up the force of fighter-interceptors, without which the best warning system is useless. Here again, large appropriations, over and above those in the budget, will have to be requested.

If Secretary Wilson and his colleagues have only been clearing the decks for a more efficient effort, they will do all these things. If they are following in the footsteps of the unlamented Louis A. Johnson, they will go on pretending that this problem, which literally involves national survival, can be solved with mirrors.

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