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Merry-Go-Round

Defense or Economy: Up to Ike

By Drew Pearson

Secretary of Defense Charlie Wilson was fidgety all last week because the Joint Chiefs of Staff passed their September 15 dead-



line without submitting figures on the military budget for next year. The military chiefs were supposed to submit their budget estimates 10 days ago, but let the September 15

deadline slip by without sending Wilson a single piece of paper or even a single figure.

There is, however, an excellent reason for the delay. It can be summarized in exactly six words, plus a corollary explanation.

The six words are: Russia's possession of the hydrogen bomb.

The corollary explanation boils down to this: the Joint Chiefs of Staff cannot make any estimates on military needs until they get an over-all decision from the White House on the following all-important problems:

1. Will the United States erect adequate civil and military defense protection against the H-bomb?
2. If so, does this defense money come out of the military budget?
3. Does the President intend to stick to his budget-balancing program? Or will he sacrifice the budget for the sake of stronger defense?

Ike's Awesome Decision

These are civilian questions the military chiefs cannot answer. They are not in their province. They are the problem of their own civilian boss, Secretary Wilson, and the President himself. They also constitute the most difficult problem facing General Eisenhower—a problem on which he has postponed decision but which cannot be postponed much longer.

He must either: A. Let the budget stay out of balance again, B. Increase taxes, C. Or sacrifice the safety of the Nation.

The first two alternatives will be dealt with in future columns. Regarding the third—the safety of the Nation—here is some little-known background.

It was in the spring of 1952 that the inner-Government debate over protection from the atom bomb really became intensive. At that time a group of scientists, working under the supervision of top Eastern universities, prepared a confidential report known as "Project East River," warning that the United States was totally, woefully unprepared to meet an A-bomb attack.

This report roused great consternation, argument and disagreement—especially among the military. And there followed a second report under the auspices of Massachusetts Institute of Technology called the "Lincoln Summer Study," which in the end came out with almost the same conclusion.

The military, however, were hard to convince. And at first the National Security Council pooh-pooed the findings. It was not until President Truman put a burr under the council that its members began to realize that the United States was blithely and complacently going about its business with little realization that it could be put out of commission almost overnight.

Soldiers vs. Electronics

At this point, Secretary of Defense Lovett, despite all the other reports on the subject, ordered a third report, this one in charge of M. J. Kelly, head of the Bell Telephone Laboratories. Later, on January 19, one day before the Eisenhower Administration came in, another committee was appointed under Gen. Idwal Edwards.

Both committees came back with equally alarming reports, warning that the United States was in definite danger. All this, of course, was well before there was any intimation that Russia had the hydrogen bomb.

Despite all these reports, General Eisenhower decided that another report was needed and appointed one of his most trusted officers in the European invasion, Gen. Harold Bull, to study the problem of enemy invasion.

The Bull report is now complete and is equally alarming. General Bull has recommended less money than the Kelly committee, but even so, about 10 billion would have to be added to the national budget over a five-year period—possibly more.

This is why the Joint Chiefs of Staff have been in a predicament regarding their budget figures for next year. They cannot make any estimates until they know what the over-all policy is going to be; and they are not at all sure that electronics can be substituted for foot soldiers.

Thus goes the biggest and most important debate now going on inside the Administration. Upon its outcome will depend whether the budget is balanced and/or we have higher taxes. Even more important, upon its outcome will depend the future safety of the Nation.

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