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Eisenhower's Military Prestige Cuts Political Mileage of Missile Gap Issue

THE CURRENT flap over the missile gap began a month ago and apparently is going to continue until November. But when all the politics is squeezed out of the debate over the missile gap and the deterrent gap, critics of the Administration's defense policies still can make an excellent case for their contention that a reduced budget has been given priority over an adequate defense program.

Indeed, it is unfortunate that the missile gap has become a political issue closely identified with the Presidential aspirations of two Democrats—hopeful—Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri and Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas. There is probably little political mileage in the attack that the Democrats have mounted against President Eisenhower's military judgment. However wrong the President may be about missiles and deterrents—and there are many qualified military experts in the capital who believe that he is grievously mistaken—the Democrats are going to find it extremely difficult to convince voters that the General in the White House doesn't know beans about either armaments or Russian intentions.

The issues that have been raised by Symington, Johnson and indeed some of the Administration's own generals are questions that have disturbed many thoughtful persons on Capitol Hill as well as across the Potomac in the Pentagon and down to Foggy Bottom in the State Department. The basic question that has not been answered to the satisfaction of the Administration's critics

is whether the United States has the power to deter a Soviet attack. The Administration and its critics are in general agreement that there is a missile gap and that there will be one for at least two more years. But once Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates has conceded that the Soviet Union does have a greater missile capability than the United States has for the present, he does not go on to admit a deterrent gap. The Administration argues that it has enough B-52 bombers in the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to carry out a massive and atomic retaliation should the Russians attack America or one of its allies.

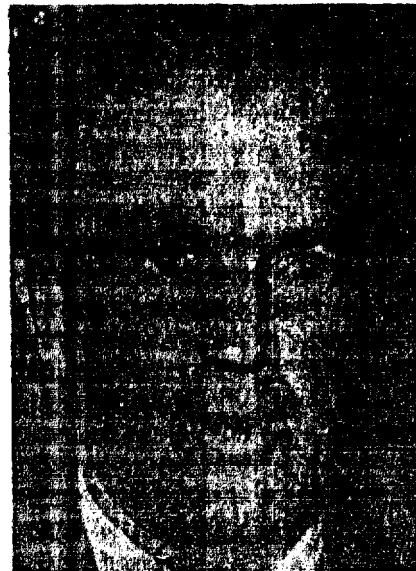
General Thomas S. Power, the chief of SAC, thinks that his command can do the job if it is given more money so it can keep some of its planes constantly in the air during emergencies. Most of the Administration's critics would like to see SAC

would like to see SAC total more money, but they are still not convinced that even a reinforced SAC would close the deterrent gap. The difficulty with the whole debate over missile and deterrent gaps is that the facts of Soviet military might are not precisely known and that in the last analysis much depends on the evaluation of intentions as well as capabilities. Information about Soviet productive capacities is gathered from a variety of sources including Russian newspapers, books and scientific publications. The American radar installations which surround the Soviet Union can detect the launching of missiles and air maneuvers.

But it is not enough for American intelligence experts to know what the Soviet Union can do. Despite all of the hooting from the Democrats and other Administration critics at Secretary Gates' discussion of Soviet intentions, this is obviously a matter which must enter into any realistic intelligence estimate. Soviet defense capabilities must be measured against such other demands on the Russian economy as consumer goods and farm machinery.

The staff of the Central Intelligence Agency could be doubled and the Government still would not have precise knowledge of Soviet military capabilities. We will probably never know exactly what the Russians will do, and we must hope that they will never know our capabilities down to the last bomber or missile either.

What we are striving for in our own intelligence estimates is a reasonably accurate determination of



SYMINGTON: CAN HE FILL THE GAP?