

Lowell Mellett:

'Wide Open At the Top'

Gen. Carl Spaatz, army air forces chief, told the Veterans of Foreign Wars the obvious truth last week in Boston when he said the United States is "wide open at the top." By that he meant that it is possible for some unnamed country, meaning Russia, to attack us by air across the bleak wastes of the Arctic regions.

The general was perfectly fair in his statement, since he said at the same time that, over the same route, every other industrialized country is within reach of our own strategic air forces. In other words we are in no worse fix than the unnamed country named above.

So, what to do? If we were at war with Russia, as so many of our well meaning citizens seem to think we should be, we'd know what to do. The best defense being the offense, we'd be sending our strategic air force over "the top." If we are merely on the verge of war with Russia—well, as the general also said, "Any plan or buildup for national defense which ignores the new air frontier in the far north is a sheer waste of American time and money." The general did not spell out the plans he has in mind, but he clearly is thinking of something other than digging defenses in the ice, for the rest of his talk was devoted to the necessity of developing our air forces and giving them equal status with the land and sea forces.


It is reasonable to suppose that Russia's military minds have the same picture of the scene of the next great clash, if there is to be one, and that they are urging the same sort of preparations on the part of their own country. As they advance their plans for offensive defense we will advance ours. As we advance ours they will advance theirs.

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Actually, we have no knowledge of what Russia is thinking and planning in connection with the polar frontier. We have suspicions, as many doubtless as Russia has concerning our purposes. Both countries are keeping the air filled with those suspicions. Both sides are working themselves into a state calculated to bring on the war that neither can really want. We cannot control the aggressive voice in Russia, but we can ask some of our own to pipe down for a while.

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It may not matter much whether the next war is launched across the top of the world or somewhere else. The only thing that matters is whether it is launched at all. How to fight that next war is infinitely less important than how to prevent it. Which is only to say it is much better to prevent world suicide than to figure out more modern ways of committing same.



Mellett

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jamespcarrion
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