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Lowell Mellett:

A Need for Better Intelligence

Since We Base All Policies on What We Think Enemy Can And Will Do, We Might Improve Information Channels

You don't have to be so awfully old to remember when this was a cocky, relatively young country, prepared, emotionally at least, to take on all comers—with a standing army numbering 25,000 men. (No women, to speak of.) Our cockiness, under all the circumstances, doubtless wasn't quite justified, but it is a pleasant state of mind to remember in contrast to that of today.

Today our defense establishment is somewhat larger. We have ground forces totaling 1.5 million; air forces, 1 million; naval and Marine forces, 500,000. (Lots of women included.) If the figures are not precisely correct, they don't err by more than a few hundred thousand. In any case our armed strength, just in men and women, is not merely ten times what it was in those brave days of not so long ago; it is not merely one hundred times; it is almost incalculably greater.

And yet we live in a state of uncontrollable jitters.

Much has happened, of course, to bring our big defense forces into being on the one hand and to produce our nervous tension, on the other. There have been two wars of a magnitude unprecedented in world history, with ourselves involved in both, and there has developed an aggressive force hostile to our way of life and apparently prepared to challenge

our very existence, if and when it should seem possible to do so successfully.

So we are obsessed with the subject of defense—defense against a military power and a militant political philosophy. To defend ourselves against the one we strain our economic resources to the limit, only to be told by some of the experts that we are still virtually defenseless. To defend ourselves against the idea—called communism—we strain our credulity to the limit, only to be told by the experts in that field that we still don't half appreciate the danger it represents. If, communism, is going to get us if we don't watch out—or allow these experts to do our watching out for us, giving them a free hand with which to do it. Since these experts would fasten on us a totalitarianism of their own as a protection against totalitarianism from abroad, some of us, at least, have been reluctant to give them a free hand. We continue to consider our native democratic idea its own best defense.

As for our military strength in relation to any that may threaten us, that is something few of us pretend to know much about. And we admit to even less knowledge concerning the actual and reserve strength of our potential enemy and what that enemy has in mind to do with it. We are disposed to leave those ques-

tions to the experts in that field.

But these experts provide us with something less than complete comfort. Some say, for one example, that we are wide open to destruction from the air as long as we have less than 143 air groups of our own; others that we can take care of ourselves with 110 air groups. Not knowing a group from a wing—and maybe they are the same—we have to leave the decision to somebody else and prepare to pay the larger or smaller bill, whichever it may be. The great threat, we are told, is the atomic bomb. But, while some experts, presumably in position to know, say our enemy has the bomb, some who should be as well informed say only we have it. These same differences of opinion occur as to all parts of the enemy's preparedness and purpose.

What it boils down to is that we are basing most of our foreign policy and much of our domestic policy on what we think somebody else is up to. It seems to be a woefully negative approach toward such matters, but perhaps it's the best we can achieve. This being so it would seem desirable to improve our channels of information. How to go about that? I don't know, but we could start with a congressional inquiry into those we now rely on.