

# War that could have been

**F**ew of us will ever see contingency plans for a nuclear war. Those of the U.S., for example the Single Integrated Operating Plan (SIOP), are among America's most guarded secrets. Yet, by an incredible oversight, just such plans were released in 1977.

Responding to demands under the Freedom of Information Act, the U.S. somehow declassified Plan Dropshot. Prepared in 1949 for the joint chiefs of staff, Dropshot was the full strategic plan for a nuclear war between the U.S. and USSR, postulated to begin on Jan. 1, 1957. Some of the key points in this fascinating document:

- The Soviets would launch a 220-division surprise attack on the Western Alliance. The following areas would fall almost immediately: All of West Germany up to the Rhine; Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden; Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido.

- Dropshot estimated that Soviet tank armies would roll across Austria and surge down the Italian peninsula, reaching its southern point in 10 weeks. To the north, Soviet troops would occupy France and reach the Pyrenees mountains in 12 weeks; occupying Spain would have taken another seven months. U.S. forces would make a last-ditch stand on the Normandy Peninsula.

## Britain under siege

- Britain would have stood alone, subjected to savage, incessant air attack, submarine blockade and widespread internal sabotage by communist fifth columnists, spies and left-wing unions.

- Soviet troops would attack Turkey, seizing the Dardanelles and pushing into the Middle East. Iranian and Arab oil fields, vital to the Western war effort, would be a prime Soviet target.

Shortly after the opening of hostilities, both sides would go nuclear. It should be noted that in the 1949-1957 period, the U.S. had no more than 500 strategic nuclear weapons and the Soviets less than 200 — and a limited number of long-range, heavy bombers with which to deliver these weapons.

- Soviet aircraft would attack Washington D.C., Strategic Air Command bases, harbors and key military industrial targets. Many of these industrial targets were clustered around Detroit, Niagara Falls, Minneapolis and Seattle — right next to Canada.

- "Attacks against Canada and the United States would include air attack, with . . . employment of atomic bombs and biological and chemical agents . . . and possible Soviet employment of cargo vessels as atomic bomb carriers."

- Casualties in North America were estimated at four million dead (today's estimates are 25 to 60 million deaths). The U.S. would then attack the USSR's key command, military and industrial targets, including electrical power grids, oil wells, ball bearing and automotive plants. Coal fields and steel mills were also on the target list.

- Dropshot assumed that the USSR would immediately attack Alaska, Greenland, Iceland, Bear Island and, if possible, the Azores. Interestingly, the plan clearly stated the areas deemed "critical" to the defence of the U.S. These forward "bastions," that had to be safeguarded at once by U.S.

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forces, included Iceland, Greenland, Trinidad, Cuba, Bermuda, the Azores, northern Brazil and — please note — Canada. In the event of war, U.S. nuclear and conventional forces would operate out of Canadian bases. No provision was made in Dropshot for "consultations" between Ottawa and Washington.

- Another interesting historical revelation: In 1949 the U.S. did not consider itself sufficiently strong — even with nuclear weapons — to quickly disable the Soviet war machine. In reality, U.S. planners feared, in 1949, that the Soviets would win any prolonged war. Only improvements then due to be made by 1957 would change the balance.

- Dropshot throws light on the paramount importance of strategic materials in any war such as oil, non-ferrous metals, rare earths and rubber. Neither side could sustain a major war without these resources. As a result, the U.S., mineral-poor compared to the USSR, had to safeguard producing areas in South America (22% of U.S. supply); Africa (8.8%); Canada (4.7%) and, of course, the Middle East oil fields. These strategic realities are equally valid today.

Dropshot saw the Soviets being finally held on the continent, a shattered, atomic-devastated Britain left in ruins, and a major counter-offensive mounted against occupied Europe that made D-Day look small by comparison. Allied armies would then drive relentlessly east while Soviet allies quickly collapsed.

## Invade Soviet Union

- U.S. and European troops would then actually invade the Soviet Union and occupy its principal cities and lines of communications. The marines would land in Minsk. The mighty USSR would be reduced to a pacified, neutered nation, much like post-World War II Germany.

Dropshot was no megalomaniacal plan of Pentagon militarists. All nations have contingency plans for just about everything. Canada even had plans, as late as the 1930s, to invade the U.S.! But Dropshot, no matter how hypothetical, does contain much that is still pertinent.

Canada would be involved in any conventional or nuclear war between East and West — there is absolutely no way that this can be avoided. Military geography dictates Canadian participation. The U.S. would also move nuclear or biological weapons into Canada at will in wartime.

The plan also shows that even 35 years ago, when the U.S. was much stronger militarily than the USSR, American defence planners knew that any war would be a very close-run thing. This is Dropshot's only hopeful message.