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**Author(s):** George Lindsey

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WORLD WAR THREE

Talk to United Services Institute

23 October, 1979

by

Dr. G.R. Lindsey

Chief

Operational Research and  
Analysis Establishment

Department of National Defence

Ottawa

## WORLD WAR THREE

(Talk to United Services Institute)

Ottawa - 23 October 1979

### 1. Introduction

- Common accusation that Armed Forces plan to refight the last war, instead of preparing for the next
- Truth today is that the Armed Forces of NATO are planning to prevent the outbreak of a Third World War, by a strategy of deterrence
  - however, to be effective, a strategy of deterrence must convince a potential aggressor that, if he did attack, he would suffer more punishment than would be warranted by whatever gains he could expect
  - must expect potential aggressor to use imagination, war games, computers, and every form of analysis to consider many plans for attack
    - if every one results in his losing more than he gains, then presumably he will decide not to attack
      - in this case, deterrence has succeeded
    - those whose objective is to deter aggression need to go through the same exercises
  - NATO has concluded that deterrence must be applied in three forms, representing three levels of potential conflict, but linked so that deterrence is continuous
    - strategic nuclear deterrence
      - applied by the intercontinental nuclear weapons of the USA, ICBMs, SLBMs, heavy bombers
      - similar forces in Soviet Union, possibly strong enough to threaten annihilation of US land-based missiles and bombers
      - could be used against military targets. The ultimate case would be against population.

- the subject of the SALT

- nuclear deterrence in the European theatre (only to be used if NATO losing the conventional battle or if WP initiates use of TNW) applied by nuclear weapons on IRBM rockets, on aircraft of medium and short range, and in artillery shells and short range rockets intended for use in battlefield nuclear weapons

  - Soviets exceed NATO in longer range TNF, NATO is stronger in battlefield nuclear weapons

  - NATO working on plans to modernize its LRTNF

- conventional deterrence

  - NATO committed to forward defence on the borders of Germany

  - WP has advantage of greater numbers, faster ability to reinforce, and possibility of surprise

- process of increasing level of violence from minor clash of small conventional military units all the way up to strategic nuclear war is known as escalation

- Process of working out possible scenarios and campaigns goes on in military planning staffs where this primary objective is not to fight and win WW III, but to prevent it

- Also, has been conducted in three books available to the general public, prepared by very well-qualified authors

- The scenarios of the three books have war breaking out in 1978, 1983, and 1985. The first two assume a state of preparedness of the NATO forces about what it is today, the third assumes a substantial strengthening between 1979 and 1985. The plots leading up to outbreak of hostilities are different, providing degrees of warning to NATO that attack is coming. The outcomes are different. But in my opinion all three are very plausible and worthy of serious consideration.

## 2. L'EUROPE SANS DEFENSE

by MGen Robert Close, Belgian Army  
written in 1976

outlines some of NATO's problems

- exponential growth of costs e.g.

1940's	P-51 cost	\$50,000	Churchill tank	\$50,000
1950's	F-100 cost	\$800,000	Centurion	\$100,000
1960's	F-111 cost	\$10,000,000	Chieftain	\$300,000

- Rigidity of defence budgets

- average annual increase (corrected for inflation) 1960-74

FGR	4.2%
USA	0.8
UK	0.9
Canada	0

- defence expenditures as fraction of government expenditures

FGR	1960	35.3%	1973	31.8%
USA		41.4		31.9
UK		26.3		20.5
Canada		24.2		11.5

- reduction in defence manpower

FGR	1960	260,000	1976	495,000
USA		2,489,000		2,130,000
UK		593,000		345,100
Canada		170,000		77,000

- Strategy of Forward Defences

- Most NATO units require time to be alerted and moved to their forward positions

- 10 to 30 hours delay, depending on location, speed of appreciation, and state of roads, effectiveness

of heliborne assault on key position to paralyze reaction

- Policy of weekend leave
- Concludes that best strategy for WP would be a surprise attack, using speed to gain the decisive advantage before either side has time to mobilize massive additional forces (26 dws)
  - start operation at 0200 (on a Saturday morning or holiday preferably in July or August - leave, turnouts)
  - cross frontier at 0400 1977 or 1978---
  - after 0500 advance at 30 km/hr
  - helicopter and parachute attacks in rear
    - seize aerodromer by 0515 Frankfurt, Wiesbader, Cologne-Bonn, Düsseldorf
    - receive aircraft by 0615
  - achieve all objectives up to Rhine by 48 hours
  - help from Fifth Column, sabotage of communism, assassination
- If NATO "front" pierced and broken in a few hours, doubtful if TNW would restore situation forecast, disability to react

### 3. WORLD WAR 3

General Editor: Brigadier Shelford Bidwell & 11 other well-qualified contributors

Scenario is Summer of 1983

- great concern over growth of a neo-Nazi movement in FGR
- US President obsessed by problems of energy and inflation
- FGR felt isolated and unsupported
  - felt need of its own nuclear weapons
  - secret program to produce German nuclear weapons revealed
  - USSR and some NATO allies demanded dismantlement of program.

- FRG set conditions: a substantial increase in the defence effort of her allies
- NATO in disarray
- USSR decided to occupy FRG up to the Rhine, dismantle the nuclear weapons establishment, and withdraw
  - requested Germany's NATO allies to acquiesce
  - France agreed
  - British not to oppose Russian operation
- USSR elected a surprise attack
  - counted on short operation
  - did not pre-deploy the navy (although some SSBN were on station as usual)
- Soviet airborne assault on area around German nuclear weapons establishment (near Hamburg), British troops ordered to return to barracks, but became engaged by advancing Russians, US, then French became engaged
- air and AA units soon ran out of missiles
- Soviets mined Mozambique Channel and English Channel
- NATO patrolled GIUK gap
- NATO prepared to send a very large convoy from America, with military stores
- By D + 3 NATO was on the verge of defeat
- British civil in desparate circumstances used TNW
- US President authorized use of TNW
- Soviets attacked airfields in Britain with nuclear weapons
- Conflict escalated to exchange of strategic nuclear weapons
- Book ends with technical account of effects of nuclear weapons (rather than completing the narrative).

#### 4. THE THIRD WORLD WAR: A FUTURE HISTORY

"The Third World War: A Future History" has seven eminent British authors, led by General Sir John Hackett<sup>1</sup>. Army, navy, air force, diplomacy, and economics are represented by Brigadier Kenneth Hunt, Major General John Strawson, Vice Admiral Sir Ian McGeoch, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough, Sir Bernard Burrows, and Mr. Norman Macrae, and contributions have been made by top-ranking American and German generals.

The book, recently presented in excerpts in the Toronto Star, deals with the armed forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, making no more than passing reference to Canada. Nevertheless, it presents an interesting exercise in prediction (or futures studies) and can be used as a base from which inferences can be drawn regarding Canadian defence planning.

A key feature is the assumption that between 1979 and 1985 great steps are taken to strengthen NATO's defences, not by the addition of nuclear weapons, but by having the best modern conventional weapons systems procured in substantial numbers and issued to redesigned formations particularly adapted for anti-air and anti-tank defence and well equipped for electronic warfare. The book states explicitly that if the Soviet attack of August 1985 had been delivered in 1977 or 1978, it would have been successful, an opinion also expressed by the recent "L'Europe sans defense", in which the Belgian Major General Close predicts that a surprise attack could overwhelm NATO's defences in forty-eight hours.<sup>2</sup>

The prelude to the outbreak of war in Europe involves complicated developments in several parts of the world,



beginning in 1984, and with the main foci of trouble in the Middle East and Africa. The Soviet Union sponsors the formation of a new United Arab Republic, incorporating Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait, which quarrels with Iran over control of the smaller Persian Gulf states. When hostilities erupt, the US Navy comes to the aid of Iran. Then the Red Army enters Yugoslavia, and US Marines land on its Adriatic coast. By August 1985, when the Warsaw Pact launches its attack on the European Central Front, NATO has mobilized. Because of NATO's buildup after 1978, and because of mobilization, the forces on the European Central Front are considerably larger than in 1978: 1,425,000 Warsaw Pact against 1,367,000 NATO (1978 figures<sup>3</sup> were 943,000 vs 626,000); 24,700 medium tanks against 7,925 (1979, 20,500 vs 11,000); 4,450 tactical fighters against 3,365 (1979, ~~5,795~~<sup>4,200</sup> vs ~~3,300~~<sup>3,350</sup>). A factor important in the book, and in these figures, is that France is assumed to play a full and very significant part in the fighting, whereas her forces are not listed with NATO for 1979.

The WPO attack makes rapid progress across the sector of NATO's Northern Army Group, and in four days overruns Denmark, most of the Netherlands, and a large part of Northern Germany, including a portion west of the Rhine. Defence in the central and southern regions keeps the front well east of the Rhine, SACEUR moves troops northwards, and as the WPO lines of communication lengthen their progress slows. WPO plans to move southwards up both banks of the Rhine are impeded by strong NATO resistance in the northern "hinge". As NATO units are weakened and forced back, their commanders plead for reinforcement from SACEUR's reserve, and for the release of theatre nuclear weapons.

Hostilities at sea begin with the despatch of seaborne

reinforcements to Norway, and the Warsaw Pact has considerable success in the North Sea after their land forces have secured the Baltic exits. Destruction of NATO's surveillance and communications satellites puts great pressure on reconnaissance by aircraft. However, the key operations are related to the reinforcement of Europe from America. The "air bridge" is vital for the rapid supply of men and light equipment, but suffers considerable losses (about 10%) from Soviet aircraft and cannot carry the necessary total tonnage of ammunition, vehicles, and other heavy stores. Because of the early mobilization it is possible to sail a group of four fast military convoys from Halifax four days (D + 4) after the attack in Europe, carrying the heavy equipment and remaining personnel of two army corps, 70,000 men of which had been already lifted by air. This is known by the WPO, which sends submarines and strike aircraft to oppose them.

NATO's buildup in land and air forces between 1979 and 1985 is matched in the maritime area with new escort carriers, frigates, patrol ships, helicopters, and maritime aircraft, with the emphasis being on sea control. It is possible to give land-based air cover from Newfoundland for the first two days of the convoy's passage, and from Britain for the last two days. NATO patrols in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap destroy some submarines, and the NATO strike fleet conducts an air bombardment of the Soviet air bases in the Kola Peninsula. Nevertheless, the convoys suffer heavy losses from cruise missile-firing submarines and from Backfire maritime strike aircraft using air-to-surface missiles, although a number of submarines are sunk and many of the missiles are destroyed in flight by the escorts' air defence system.

The key decision by SACEUR occurs on (D + 9). He has withheld his two last cards - theatre nuclear weapons and the commitment of his theatre reserves - in the face of almost irresistible pressure. Now, facing a decisive thrust against the vital northern "hinge", everything depends on the arrival of the sea-borne reinforcements from America. With 75% of the convoys still surviving, and now inside European-based air cover, SACEUR commits his Central Reserve, and directs the arriving troops into the vital battle. The aircraft reserved for nuclear strike are released for conventional operations, and once the convoys docked, some of the maritime strike aircraft are transferred to a role of interdiction of WP land supply. The NATO counter-attack does not succeed in driving the invaders back, but it is sufficient to bring the offensive to a halt, and to reveal to the world that the WP is not invincible. The plan to bring about the military collapse of NATO's central region before the West's superior resources could be mobilized has failed. And NATO has withstood the crisis without having to resort to the use of nuclear weapons.

The last chapters of "The Third World War" trace a sequel, in which a desperate Soviet leadership does destroy Birmingham with a single thermonuclear weapon, and loses Minsk in a prompt retaliation. However the conflict soon comes to an end with internal breakup of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR itself.

#### LESSONS FOR CANADA IN 1979

Specific reference to Canada in "The Third World War" includes the expansion of our Brigade Group in Germany to a strength of 3,500 armoured infantry, a regiment of 60 tanks, an artillery regiment of 155 mm self-propelled howitzers, anti-

tank and anti-air missiles, support troops, and a tactical helicopter squadron, "giving the equivalent almost of a small division", held in Central Army Group reserve. Including the air component with 70 tactical fighters, there are 12,000 uniformed Canadians in Central Europe in 1985. Canada has sixty land-based maritime patrol aircraft, and deploys twenty-five to the Pacific Coast, together with ten major surface ships and one diesel submarine.

"The Third World War" raises many questions of very direct application to Canada's defence planning. The book assumes a very substantial strengthening of NATO, on land, sea, and in the air. This will require a whole-hearted effort by all partners, on a scale beyond anything evident in 1979, and including the re-entry of French forces into the NATO order of battle. The Canadian forces, representing about 1% of the manpower and 2% of the airpower, can hardly make the difference between defeat and victory, but with a role in the Central Reserve and if equipped and trained to fight on a battlefield dominated by aircraft, tanks, and electronic warfare, they could play a significant part. The need to strengthen our land-based air defence, for airfields and field formations, is very evident today. Tank and anti-tank warfare has become a complicated operation of combined arms. Although the new Anti-Tank Guided Weapons are devastating once fired at a visible target, they must be protected against enemy air, artillery, and infantry, and mobile defence followed by counter-attack needs tanks.

In the maritime area, however, Canada could be cast in a crucial role. General Hackett's book demonstrates the critical importance of seaborne reinforcement, and his very believable scenario of a long crises followed by a rapidly developing war in

Europe causes transatlantic supply to play the vital part, even though the war is comparatively short. It is true that 25% loss in the military convoys would be hard to bear. But without the patrolling of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, the attacks on the Soviet air bases, and the anti-submarine and anti-air protection in the North Atlantic, the losses could have exceeded 75%, in which case SACEUR would not have felt able to commit his last reserves, and the Central Front would not have held. It is true that NATO still retained the power to introduce nuclear weapons, but under the circumstances it is by no means obvious that this would have been to their net advantage, and it would carry the risk of escalation to a strategic exchange.

Geographically Canada is a much bigger factor in the North Atlantic than she ever can be in Western Europe. And when vital convoys sail from Halifax or New York for European ports, the shortest routes pass close to the Canadian coast for at least a thousand miles. The westernmost part of the route may be out of range of air attack, but the chief threat comes from submarines. There are three ways to combat the submarines: to attack their bases, (in the Kola Peninsula), to impede their transit (through the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap) to the North Atlantic sea lanes, and to provide antisubmarine support in the vicinity of the troopships. Geography suggests that the third role is the one appropriate for Canada. And it is for this that we need the Aurora long range maritime patrol aircraft and the new frigates.

All these rather expensive systems are needed, not to fight the last war, but to make it evident that an attack on NATO will be opposed by effective and successful resistance, even without the need to resort to nuclear weapons. If all

parties agree on the study of the future history, there will be no Third World War, a happy outcome for all of us.

- 1 Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1978
- 2 Collections Inedits, Editions Arts et Voyages, Brussels, 1976
- 3 The Military Balance 1978-1979, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1978.  
Figures are for Northern and Central Europe and do not include French Forces.