

Churchill's plan for Third World War against Stalin

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Abstract

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The resulting battle plan included the use of up to 100,000 German troops to back up half a million British and American soldiers attacking through northern Germany. It assumed that Stalin would invade Turkey, Greece, Norway and the oilfields of Iraq and Iran in retaliation and launch extensive sabotage operations in France and the Low Countries.

The War Cabinet plan ruled out "total war" against the Red Army, which outnumbered the Allies by more than two to one, adding that there was no reason why an Anglo-American invasion of Russia would fare any better than Hitler's Operation Barbarossa.

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WITHIN days of the defeat of Germany, Churchill ordered his War Cabinet to draw up contingency plans for an offensive against Stalin that would lead to "the elimination of Russia", according to Top Secret documents seen by The Telegraph.

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A 29-page report, codenamed Operation Unthinkable, was presented to the Prime Minister on May 22, 1945, 14 days after the end of the war in Europe.

It assumed that the Third World War would start on July 1, 1945, probably with a surprise attack by 47 British and American divisions between Dresden and the Baltic.

The War Cabinet plan ruled out "total war" against the Red Army, which outnumbered the Allies by more than two to one, adding that there was no reason why an Anglo-American invasion of Russia would fare any better than Hitler's Operation Barbarossa.

Historians had long believed that the tense period immediately after the meeting of the armies of West and East led to plans of this sort, but today's publication is the first proof of their existence. Prof D C Watt, the eminent historian who has written the official history of the Cabinet Office in wartime, said it was the first time the papers had been read by anyone other than the principals.

"Nobody has ever seen this kind of thing before," he said, "but we have had strong suspicions that they must have been written. I had always assumed that the records of this had been lost."

The documents were described yesterday as "very important and very illuminating" by Prof John Ericson of Edinburgh University, an expert on the Soviet Union.

"On June 29, 1945, the Red Army suddenly executed a complete redeployment of its order of battle, for no apparent reason," he said. "I have always wondered why they did it. I have asked Soviet staff officers about it and never been able to understand their thinking. Perhaps we have just discovered the explanation."

The documents, discovered in the Public Record Office in Kew, show that planning was carried out at the very highest level of the British Government and military, being discussed by the Chiefs of Staff. But the scheme was drawn up with extraordinary insouciance about the political realities of the time, when the populations of Britain and America regarded the Red Army as liberators and allies.

Churchill described the plan as "a purely hypothetical contingency", but regarded it as necessary enough to have his planning staff working on it amid the euphoria of victory.

Prof Watt said: "The point is to emphasise the word contingency. The fact that the plan was made is significant, but it was to guard against an unlikely event."

The Unthinkable plan was eventually rejected by Churchill on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff and replaced with a defensive scheme to guard against invasion by the Red Army.