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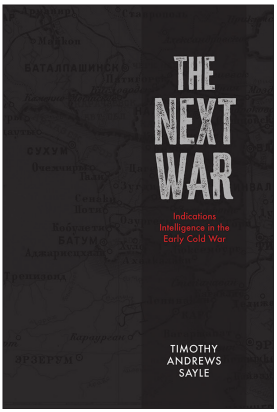

THE NEXT WAR: INDICATIONS INTELLIGENCE IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

Timothy Andrews Sayle

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3

The Most Important Question

On June 26, 1950, North Korean tanks rolled across the 38th parallel, touching off the Korean War.[1] Months earlier, American, British, and Canadian intelligence assessments had speculated as to when a war would begin, and how. These assessments had been referring to general war with the Soviet Union. In June and into July 1950, the fundamental question was whether or not these two things were the same: was the Korean War the first stage of a general war? Had the Soviets decided the West was weak and thus been tempted into attacking in hopes of an easy victory? Or, had the opposite occurred: had Stalin worried about the growing unity and defence program in Western Europe and launched a war in a bid to break the encirclement? Next to no attention was given to the possibility that this was largely an inter-Korean struggle. All strategic intelligence efforts were focused on judging whether general war was imminent.

At a meeting of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) on July 5, 1950, Group Captain Bean, now the director of air intelligence (DAI), read aloud a draft paper suggesting that the JIC should advise the Chiefs of Staff "of their opinion on the likelihood of war in the near future, as a guide to the preparations that should be made for this eventuality."[2] The DAI paper Bean read was ominously titled "Imminence of War." It would serve as the basis for a JIC paper of the same name, the first of many.

The DAI assumed, like many others, that the North Korean attack had been coordinated in full with the Soviet Union, and indeed had probably been instigated by Stalin. In the DAI's assessment, the Soviets had likely assumed that South Korea would be overrun quickly, and that the Western powers would not intervene. It was also, perhaps, a deliberate test of the United States' reactions and capabilities. Now, with the war nearly two weeks old by the time

of the DAI's assessment, the North Koreans had suffered a "tactical reverse," South Korea had not collapsed, and the United States had joined the war.

"The most important question," according to the paper, was "whether the Soviet Union is likely to precipitate a major war in the near future."[3] In early July, there was no evidence that the Soviets were preparing for war, nor was there evidence the Soviets intended to intervene directly. They were "not likely to precipitate a full-scale war"[4] by supporting the North Koreans. But now that the Americans had committed forces to Korea, the DAI assumed that the USSR "can now be expected to exploit favourable situations elsewhere."[5] The paper suggested Moscow might foment unrest in any or all of Indochina, Siam, Malaya, Burma, Hong Kong, Yugoslavia, Iran, and Berlin. But exploiting favourable situations and precipitating general war were two different issues. DAI judged that the Soviet Union would only risk war once it had built enough atomic bombs to wage atomic war and re-equipped its fighter forces to blunt a US atomic attack.[6]

Korea, then, according to DAI, would not be the source of general war, but the American commitment to Korea might increase the possibility of more conflict elsewhere in the world. It was still unlikely the Soviet Union would risk a war before it had built up its atomic offensive capabilities and better prepared its defences for an atomic attack. As a result, "[t]he risk of war though not imminent is progressively becoming more serious."[7]

The JIC met again a few days later, discussed the DAI's draft, marked it up, and agreed that the JIC should take on a study "[t]o examine the imminence of a major war arising from: (a) the situation in Korea, (b) similar situations elsewhere, or (c) other causes."[8]

This study was completed on July 14, 1950. The director of Scientific Intelligence (DSI), A. J. Langley, thought it was "as good an appreciation of the situation as is possible,"[9] and DEA officials thought it was "quite a sound paper."[10] After a round of comments, the study, now bearing the title CSC(20)50, "The Imminence of War," was put forward for consideration at the Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting on July 17, less than a week after the study's objectives had been set in the JIC.[11]

Like the DAI paper, CSC (20)50 discounted the possibility of major war arising from the situation in Korea. The paper restated the DAI's assumptions about the Soviet role in instigating the conflict but pointed out the lack of a direct Soviet role in the invasion. The new paper maintained that "no evidence has come to light which would indicate that the Soviet Union had made

advance dispositions and preparations for a war as a result of developments in Korea."[12]

The CSC (20)50 paper, however, went further in suggesting that the invasion of Korea might require an adjustment in assumptions about the risk of war. The attack, the paper warned, might "indicate a new stage in Soviet strategy involving more aggressive action short of a major war whenever opportunity arises."[13] Nonetheless, after again listing a number of potential global hotspots — Formosa, Indochina, Siam, Malaya, Burma, Hong Kong, Yugoslavia, and Iran.— the paper concluded that it "does not seem likely that Soviet inspired activities in the above areas would lead to direct Soviet intervention and to a major war."[14]

CSC (20)50 did offer the possibility that "other causes" — that is, beyond a Soviet decision to start a war — might lead to war. General war might come, the paper argued, due to either Chinese action or perhaps an American strike against the USSR.

There were several scenarios by which the US and China might come to blows. A US-Chinese war might occur if the Soviets encouraged the Chinese to attack Formosa, the last stronghold of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime, in an effort to take the pressure off the North Koreans. The Canadians also noted that if United Nations forces tried to occupy and unite all of Korea, the Soviets might intervene. At the time, the Canadians thought such UN action unlikely. The Canadian paper also warned that the "extensive United States involvement in the Far East," if combined with a "multiplication and intensification of incidents elsewhere," might strengthen the argument of those in the United States "who feel that preventive war against the Soviet Union is desirable."[15]

In conclusion, the paper stated the "likelihood that the Soviet Union will precipitate a major war is considered not to be significantly changed by the Korean war."[16] The Soviets were still unlikely to launch a war until they could minimize allied strategic air offensives, mount effective atomic offensives, and seriously interrupt allied sea communications. Trying to understand just when the Kremlin believed they would achieve these capabilities was still next to impossible, but the war in Korea itself changed none of these factors. Clearly, however, the Canadians believed that the war in Korea, and especially the American commitment to the peninsula, created other possible avenues to war, either by calculation or by accident.

As the Chiefs of Staff Committee examined CSC (20)50, consideration of the paper led rapidly to a more general discussion "involving analysis of the overall situation in Korea and at large, and study of the possibilities and probabilities of courses which events could take in the next few months."[17]

One exchange recorded in the minutes of the Chiefs of Staff Committee is particularly instructive: Omond Solandt, the chair of the Defense Research Board, wondered if "the U.S.S.R. move in Korea" was an indication that Moscow "was abandoning its policy of Cold War in favour of an eventual hot war."[18] The invasion, he mused, might be "an early military gambit to pin down United Nations forces preparatory to inviting general war." Arnold Heeney, the under-secretary of state for External Affairs, disagreed, pointing out that "[t]here was no more evidence than six months earlier of U.S.S.R. intention to initiate a general war."[19] Heeney, supported by similar analysis from CSC (20)50, saw nothing in Korea that suggested a change in Soviet intentions.

But intentions are not the full measure of possibilities: the war in Korea had created, or would create, changes in military deployments that could create new avenues for war. General Foulkes, chief of the general staff, laid this out grimly in his analysis of the "future progress" of the Korean War. To evict the North Koreans from South Korea, he predicted, the United Nations would require six divisions of combat troops in Korea.[20] Shortages of equipped and trained troops in UN member countries, and the need to maintain existing formations in "trouble and danger spots" like Germany, Japan, and Malaya, meant the combat forces for Korea would have to come from the continental United States. When the US sent these troops, it would "practically denude the country [the United States]" of ground forces.[21]

The results, whether or not the Soviets had anticipated them, would be dire from Washington's perspective. Starting about September 1950, when the US forces left the continental United States for Korea, there would be a period of "maximum vulnerability, and thus of danger," for several months. The war in Korea would weaken the Western position everywhere else in the world, and the Soviets would recognize this and "undoubtedly exploit" other areas.[22]

The chiefs approved CSC (20)50, with an addendum summarizing Foulkes' concerns, and the "Imminence of War" paper made its way up the chain to the Cabinet Defence Committee and the Cabinet. On July 19, Brooke Claxton, the minister of National Defence, described the paper to his colleagues, explaining that the risk of major war as a result of the Korean situation was "slight,"

that war might come between the US and China, and that the Soviets would try to exploit "favourable situations elsewhere." Claxton concluded by noting that the "Korean incident" suggested an "increased willingness on both sides to take risks involving the possibility of war and that the risk of a major war was correspondingly greater,"[23] especially because, as Foulkes had pointed out the day before, the war called into action the only available reserve forces from the US.

This early assessment of the effects of the Korean War on the likelihood of general war are especially important: Officials in Ottawa clearly discounted the notion that the Soviet Union was seeking general war — and yet the Korean War, by its very nature and location, led to new fears. Pearson, the secretary of state for External Affairs, noted the gap between the initial assessment that the risk of war was slight, and the Foulkes addendum that the US response to the war in Korea created new risks. Pearson warned that "the risk of a major war as a direct result of the Korean situation was somewhat greater than slight."[24] The imminence of war needed to be reexamined.

The Greatest Danger

While the later years of the Korean War were stuck in stalemate, its first weeks and months saw rapid shifts in the fortunes on both sides. On July 28, the United States government, via its ambassador in Ottawa, requested that Canada contribute ground troops to the war effort. This led the Chiefs of Staff Committee to urgently seek a review by the JIC of "the chances of a world war rising out of events marching along with the situation on a world-wide basis since the outbreak of war in Korea."[25] They wanted the JIC to "re-examine the imminence of war" so that the minister could use the assessment in an upcoming Cabinet meeting on August 4.

The chiefs asked for a review of how other UN states reacted to the war, a reassessment of the Soviet satellites and their military capabilities, and comments on the imminence of war. The paper was also to comment on the role "proposed by the U.S. of fighting communism wherever it breaks out,"[26] a reference to a sweeping change to American containment strategy that called for the US to meet Communist aggression anywhere in the world.

The scope of what the CSC asked for was, as had become routine in the postwar world, more than an intelligence assessment. It was neither an appreciation nor a planning document, but a mixture of the two. The resulting paper was the product of a joint JIC and Joint Planning Committee (JPC)

effort. The JIC's section of the paper had to be completed before the JPC could finish their parts.[27]

CSC 22(50), "The Imminence of War," was marked "TOP SECRET Canadian eyes only."[28] The "object" of the paper was to "determine the imminence of war, and the effect of it and of other world-wide events arising out of hostilities in Korea on Canadian rearmament."[29] This was an enormously broad remit, but even the specific task of determining Soviet intentions proved frustratingly difficult for the JIC.

As the director of military intelligence, Colonel Knight, explained to the CGS, it was "impossible to be more specific concerning the imminence of war in the face of the existing evidence." Canadian officers in London had canvassed their colleagues in the British DMI, and officers in Washington had done the same with the G-2 intelligence staff in Washington. The Canadian DMI was confident the JIC had "incorporate[d] all material available" to the allies in the Canadian assessment, but the material itself was thin. There were rumours and unconfirmed reports regarding the movement of Soviet troops and their allies in Europe, but nothing reliable. "In the absence of 'inside' information in the capitals behind the iron curtain," Knight said, "Western intelligence cannot be confident of predicting the intentions of the USSR; we can only point out the military capabilities of our enemies."[30]

Given these extreme limitations, the JIC proceeded by essentially establishing a ledger sheet — a list of factors suggesting war was imminent, and a list of factors suggesting it was not. The notable factors that suggested war was imminent included long-standing observations about the size of the Soviet military force and attention to recent Soviet actions around the world.

Since 1945, the USSR had maintained the "largest armed forces in the world" and there "is every indication that they are being prepared for major war." Despite the debates in the preceding year over Soviet intentions, the new assessment concluded that Soviet efforts to build up particular forces, like armour, long-range submarines, and strategic bombers were "too extensive to be merely defensive in purpose," and instead were designed to "ensure that it possess[es] overwhelming military power." The Soviet government had reorganized and rearmed satellite forces with Soviet arms and, in some cases, officers.[31]

The Soviets seemed to be taking greater risk, too: the paper listed the attack on Korea, but also attacks on a US Navy plane in the Baltic, sabotage against the Royal Navy, and the appearance of Soviet submarines in Canadian

territorial waters. The war itself had started poorly for the Americans in Korea, with US troops suffering early defeats. The "weakness of American ground forces in Korea, and the inability of the American air forces effectively to influence the fighting" might cause the Soviets estimate of American and Western forces to diminish. [32]

By one reading, then, the Soviets were strong and getting stronger, and this posed a threat. At the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, the paper went on to suggest that Soviet concerns about the weakness of their own position was also a factor for war. The Soviet Union might have realized that its "preponderance in conventional weapons"[33] was being threatened by the mobilization of Western powers, and the "comparative failure" of Russian aims in influencing Western Europe may push the Soviets to embark on war.[34]

On the opposite side of the ledger were factors that suggested war was not imminent. The appreciation pointed out that the reorganization and equipment of Soviet forces might not yet be finished; that the call-up and release of troops was following normal routine; and there was no evidence of a larger mobilization of reservists. Soviet Army forces were being kept at a peacetime establishment of 70 percent. There was no stockpiling in Eastern Europe, and no preparations for mobilization were underway. The balance of forces in Eastern Europe, which included a higher proportion of armoured units as against infantry, did not suggest "a balanced force which would normally be expected to be necessary for operations."[35]

The conclusion to this section was underwhelming. It pointed out the Soviets had the "capability to wage a major war at any time," and while there was "no evidence of Soviet intentions to precipitate a major war immediately," the strength of Soviet forces and their dispositions meant that "advance indications of intention to precipitate a major war may not be discernible."[36]

In the end, CSC 22(50) sidestepped any deep discussion of the American policy of "fighting communism wherever it breaks out." The authors observed that it would be "difficult to see how the United States, in its position as leader of the anti-communist nations, could, without disastrous consequences, have avoided stating the policy and attempting to implement it." Nonetheless, the implications of the US approach were worrying. There remained a risk the policy "may lead to dangerous dispersion of United States forces while Soviet forces remain uninvolved."[37] Whether because it was too difficult to assess US policy, or simply impolitic, the Canadians left the US role in the imminence of war unexamined.

When the CSC met to discuss CSC 22(50), the CGS noted that from a "short-term point of view," the world had entered a period "of intense danger." In the long term, the Korean invasion had so galvanized the United States that the upshot of the war would be an increase in US forces and a "distinct improvement in the overall picture."[38] This "period [of] intense danger" would last over the next twelve months because, as Foulkes had explained in July, the Western world would be "vulnerable to attack because of the lack of forces available to withstand aggression."[39] The only solution was the rapid development on military power in Western Europe and North America.

There remained a "lack of positive evidence of USSR intentions" available to Canadian intelligence. But the chiefs concluded the likelihood of war with the USSR in "the next twelve months was greater than at any time in the past and probably greater than in the succeeding period."[40]

Although the DEA chair of the JIC would have had to approve the document that became CSC 22(50), it reflected the views of the military members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee better than the views of the DEA. In mid-September, one DEA official noted that the continuing "primary question which faces the government is the likelihood of another world war or of another war such as that in Korea."[41] The Government of Canada lacked any agreed idea of whether such a war was likely.

No doubt all the senior leaders had their own assessment of war: "the Prime Minister must have one, the Secretary of State for External Affairs must have one, and the Minister of National Defence must have one; each of the service Chiefs of Staff undoubtedly has his views, and so on." There was "no guarantee," however, that these views were "all alike."[42] This was a curious statement, and an important one, for it reveals the place of the JIC appreciations — even those that were approved as CSC papers. They could not be said to stand in for an agreed governmental view.

In early October, the JIC asked the JIS to review the imminence of war once again, and revise CSC 20(50) in what would become a new paper, CSC 31(50). The revised paper was discussed in the JIC on October 19 and printed as CSC 31(50) on October 24, 1950, in time to inform an upcoming NATO Military Committee meeting.[43] But events would once again leave the appreciation trailing behind changing circumstances. In October, Chinese forces crossed the border into North Korea. The previous appreciation of the imminence of war was out of date, and new factors needed to be considered.[44]

In a meeting of the CSC on November 21 to discuss the implications of the Chinese intervention, the USSEA argued that the Chinese had had two objectives. In the first place, it was a defensive move: the Chinese suffered from "a real apprehension of United States territorial acquisition," and the US drives toward China had worried the People's Republic of China (PRC). In addition, the invasion was a "deliberate move, probably at the instigation of the USSR, to contain in Korea large United Nations and United States forces."[45] The chief of the general staff noted that "military views" were similar: the Chinese intervention was a "purely defensive action" to protect its port and water facilities, was designed to gain time for the North Korean forces to regroup, and was part of a Soviet plan to contain the maximum UN forces in the Far East.[46]

The paradoxical result of the meeting, then, was agreement that the Chinese intervention was defensive in nature but also part of a broader Soviet plan to tie down Western forces in Asia (and thus away from Europe). This suggested to some a more dangerous period: "Time," said the deputy minister of National Defence, "was running out on the military advantages which the USSR had held until recently." They worried that Soviet appreciation of this fact might affect Soviet decisions "as to their military actions in the immediately following months."[47]

The period of greatest danger had been coming closer and closer, and now the Canadians believed it had arrived. It had come not because of a Soviet effort to initiate general war, but a more complicated pattern in which the Soviets seemed to have encouraged a local war, leading to the United States committing resources to the fight that exposed Western Europe to Soviet response. As a result, the course of the fighting had introduced two factors: the possibility of a war with China, and the possibility of the Soviets deciding that they must take broader military action immediately.

In such a dangerous situation, it was prudent to watch closely and regularly for indications that war was about to break out. In early December, a subcommittee of the JIC met to discuss how to find "some means of systematically reviewing the world situation at regular and frequent intervals."[48] They proposed two methods. The first was the production of short "imminence of war"-style papers every two weeks, improving the "imminence of war" papers that had been sent to and approved by the CSC. The second idea was for each service intelligence directorate to forward "any items of information which might indicate new trends or developments having significance in relation to

the imminence of war."[49] The JIS could prepare periodic, consolidated lists of these items. In this second idea lay a version of "indications intelligence" that the Americans and British practised to some extent, and which will be the focus of the next chapter. The JIC directed the JISC to proceed with its first idea: a newly reviewed paper every two weeks, and then to develop an ad hoc system to keep track of indications.

Canada's allies were watching the situation closely, too, and the British were focused on estimating the probability of war. Foulkes visited London and learned that the British were worried about Indochina and Berlin, especially after the "increase in Bereitschaften [East German paramilitary police units] and closing off of secondary roads to Berlin."[50] The risks in Germany would increase as NATO built up its integrated force, which was to include a Canadian brigade. If the Soviets waited too long, and the NATO forces were in place, they could only attack by concentrating troops, and these concentrations would "provide suitable targets for tactical use of atom bomb[s]."[51] But if the Soviets struck before the NATO build-up was complete, they could avoid large concentrations and succeed. Military logic suggested to Foulkes that if the Soviets were going to launch a war, they should do it sooner than later.

In Washington, there occurred a pronounced shift in American analysis of Soviet intentions since the beginning of the war. In June and July, there had been a firm and sustained CIA analysis that the Soviets were "unwilling to undertake a global conflict with the West at this time."[52] By September, US intelligence officials seemed convinced that Moscow might be seeking general war.[53] A series of US National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) judged that the Soviet Union might launch a war, and even that it was possible, Moscow had "already made a decision for general war."[54] The Canadians were aware of the hardening American position, but there is no indication they agreed.[55]

At the very end of December 1950, Pearson and Claxton submitted a joint memorandum to the Cabinet assessing the international situation and the JIC's views. The paper, which served as a spur for an acceleration of the Canadian defence program, pointed out that earlier assumptions about the possibility of general war, before Korea, had estimated the period of greatest danger lay in the future, well into the 1950s. Now, they argued, "the only safe assumption is that the period of greatest danger has already begun."[56]

The Meaning of Korea

It is striking that even by late 1950, the JIC kept being pulled back into discussions of what objects the Soviet Union would seek in a general war, rather than whether or not such a war was likely, or sought by Moscow.[57] Canadian diplomats, especially those with experience in the Soviet Union, would not shake their conviction that the Soviet Union was not seeking war. In January 1951, Robert Ford, head of DEA's European Division, weighed in again on the JIC's "Imminence of War" papers. Such appreciations, he wrote, must place more emphasis on the fact that "a new holocaust would seriously endanger the citadel of Communism." Even if the Soviets were to win a war, which was far from assured, they "must know perfectly well" it "would leave their country in ruins and all the countries which they might over-run."[58] The Soviets, he seemed to be indicating, would not choose war. He worried that the papers the DEA was preparing were being used for military planning talks in which the DEA itself was not playing any real role.

Ford took his concerns to the under-secretary. He noted that he and his division had been asked to contribute to several papers prepared by the Department of National Defence (DND) "on the subject of planning — for a war in 1951, 1954, 1957, long-term and so on." He was not sure what these papers were used for, he said (although they were probably ACAI papers). He assumed they were taken to Washington and discussed with the Americans. What he was sure of was that this was an encroachment by DND on DEA's "field of international political affairs."[59]

The planning papers he had read all began, he said, "with assumptions of a political nature, which seem to me in many cases to be largely false. As military planning is based on these assumptions, it becomes a serious matter for Canada." It was time, he wrote, to "take the task of political star-gazing out of the hands of National Defence, and assign it definitively to External Affairs." Only once the Canadian diplomats, perhaps along with their American and British colleagues, agreed on "what we think the course of the next five years are likely to be," then the militaries could start planning on that basis.[60]

There was recognition by some DEA officials that "[t]he military must plan on the basis of 'if war comes'" and that planners "are some times disposed to transpose 'if' with 'when' and thus to give a misleading impression."[61]

But for Ford, the implications of leaving the assumptions in the hands of "National Defence and the Pentagon," rather than with External Affairs and

the State Department, was planning based on the assumption "that there is bound to be a war within a fairly short time, which means that we build up defences against a military threat from the Soviet Union."[62] While a threat "certainly exists," it was "not primarily military, but ideological and economic." If the West put the greatest proportion of resources "preparing for war at the expense of social and economic aid, we may find the Soviet Union has gained its objectives in Western Europe, the Middle East and Asia, without firing a shot."[63] Only by properly assessing the likelihood of war could Canada and its allies determine how to allocate its resources in the broader Cold War.

Now or Later

The Canadian government would ultimately come to its own conclusions on Soviet intentions by triangulating their views with assessments they received from London and Washington.

Throughout 1951, both the US and British JICs prepared estimates of Soviet intentions and capabilities. In October, the two JICs ultimately produced a joint paper to inform discussions of the US and UK Chiefs of Staff in Washington. The Canadians received both the American paper, JIC 531/10, and the British paper, JIC 2533(50), as well as the final joint paper "Soviet Intentions and Capabilities, 1950–1954," which was over 100 pages long.[64]

The US-UK paper was similar to ABCI 15, the document produced by the three powers in 1949. It covered both the likelihood of war and then operations the Soviet Union would conduct in case of war. It concluded that "if the Soviet leaders think war inevitable they may initiate a major war while their strength vis-a-vis the Western Powers is at its maxim[um]."[65] This danger would persist until about 1954, when NATO forces were built up to withstand any surprise attack.

But the Anglo-American paper also revealed continuing transatlantic disagreement on several important matters: The likelihood the Soviet Union would initiate war, the date by which the Soviets would consider war feasible, and the probable Soviet stockpile of atomic bombs. The British did not think the Soviets would be willing to embark on a war until 1955, when their economy might be capable of withstanding the strains of a long war and air defence was more adequate. The US continued to argue that "in output and stockpiles of war material the Soviet Union will be superior to the West until 1953 and in relative air strength the Soviet superiority will increase until 1952 and then decline."[66] The US analysts assumed the Soviet leaders were willing

to take significant risks, and that as a result "the danger of a deliberate war is much closer."[67] For the British, the issue was the absolute strength of the Soviet Union: they would be stronger later. For the Americans, it was relational: the Soviets "may well consider themselves in a better relative position for war now than they will be in 1953 or later."[68]

To External Affairs officials who compared the US and UK estimates, it was "plain" that the Soviets "are increasingly willing to conduct or instigate operations which contain the risk of war."[69] Both London and Washington agreed that the "risk of general war exists from now on." But, curiously, the "main risk" of war would "arise from Soviet or Soviet inspired operations which are not intended to lead to general war."[70]

A Canadian review of the British and American assessments concluded that the prospect of war "may be now or later, since to some extent Soviet policy must be opportunistic and dependent on a number of factors now incalculable."[71] The Canadians thought the present situation carried great danger and warned not to count on the diminution of that danger after 1952.

The Politics of Danger

The war in Korea dragged on. By mid-April 1951, Pearson and Claxton decided that it was necessary to update their Cabinet colleagues on the world situation that had seemed so precarious the previous December. The JIC was once again directed to "record particularly their views on the imminence of war." The driving questions should be: "Has the danger of general war changed materially since the end of 1950? In what degree? With what implications?"[72]

The resulting paper, which was prepared for Cabinet ministers, was not titled "Imminence of War" but instead bore the blander title of "The International Situation." It concluded that "the risk of a deliberate resort to war by the Soviet Union in pursuit of its long-term objectives is unchanged since December 1950." There were no indications that Soviet leaders were seeking general war, but their military build-up continued and the global situation was slightly more worrying than in 1950. "Danger of war," according to the appreciation, "will persist over a very long time, failing some radical and unforeseen diplomatic rapprochement."[73]

The drafting process for "The International Situation" is enormously instructive for what it reveals about the preparation of intelligence appreciations for Cabinet consumption. Some officials in the DEA thought the overall tone too pessimistic. John Hadwen of Defence Liaison (1) Division, or DL(1),

thought it incorrect to leave the impression that the prospects of war were increasing, especially as there was no evidence of Soviet preparations for an attack. His colleague Thomas L. Carter of Defence Liaison (2), or DL(2), wrote in the margin: "[n]o evidence necessary." When Hadwen wrote that "war is not necessarily inevitable and yet this Memorandum as a whole seems based on a premise that war is coming either before 1952 or afterwards." Carter penned in the margins: "risks persist even if war doesn't come."[74] The exchange indicates the challenges that had been present in drafting these appreciations for months, that the risks of war had seemed to increase even though it was difficult to find any state that wanted war.

But the April memorandum was the result not only of an intelligence puzzle but a political one: officials in the Department of Finance warned that Douglas Abbott, the minister of Finance, was preparing the annual, high-profile budget speech that "might contain an appraisal of the international situation which was . . . too optimistic."[75]

To ensure this did not happen, the Finance officials suggested External Affairs prepare a submission "emphasizing that the basic situation and the basic danger today is substantially as great as it was three or six months ago."[76] Pearson was apprised of this warning, and by the time the draft memorandum reached him, the report's "general conclusion is that the likelihood of war is just as great as it was in December and in some respects there has been a change for the worse."[77]

In the short term, then, the tone of the April assessment was calculated to impress on Cabinet the continuing international dangers. But this calculation, in turn raised more questions. Intelligence appreciations had now, for months, been warning of danger, and, as one official put it, a danger "that in all likelihood will be with us for many years to come." If Pearson and Claxton were not careful, their consistent invocations of danger might "build up a resistance in the minds of the [other] Cabinet Ministers to our repeated warnings."[78]

Pearson decided not to send "The International Situation" paper to Cabinet, but only to the Prime Minister, Abbott, and Claxton, perhaps hoping this limited distribution would influence Abbott's speech without the possible negative implications of another frightening but inconclusive report for Cabinet.[79]

The Canadian View from Abroad

Pearson did send "The International Situation" to the Prime Minister and some Cabinet colleagues, but he also had drafts of the paper sent to Canadian diplomats around the world, in hopes of gaining some reactions and to keep the answers regarding the "imminence of war" up to date.[80]

One response, a paper prepared in the Canadian embassy in Washington, pointed out the obvious: the imminence of war paper that was distributed did "not answer the question as to the 'imminence of war.'"[81] It did not lay out the conditions in which the Soviet leadership might go to war, whether these conditions existed or not, or when they might in the future. The assessment did lay out just what action the Soviet Union could "conceivably" take, but the paper would be more useful if it assessed what Moscow was "likely to do."[82]

Hume Wrong, the ambassador in Washington, wrote a letter emphasizing this point: any assessment of the imminence of war should "concern itself more fully with the probable intentions of the Soviet leaders."[83] Incidentally, Canadian diplomats in Washington also learned that the Soviet desk at the State Department was of the "private opinion" that the Soviet Union was "unlikely to embark on a world war now," and that the Soviets had made a "tremendous mistake" in Korea.[84]

Arthur Menzies, writing from Tokyo, agreed with this assessment. He was confident that the United Nations' determination and success in Korea, "once more on a shoe string, as in Berlin and Greece," had sobered the Soviet leadership.[85]

Menzies pointed out that US Secretary of Defence George Marshall's recent senate testimony, in which he explained that the US could not support Douglas MacArthur's aggressive policy in Korea because the United States was too weak, implied that if the United States was stronger, it would, in fact, force a showdown with Moscow. This was another example of US policy raising the chances of war.[86] Maurice Pope, now ambassador in Brussels, took this point further, insisting that he did "not believe in the imminence of war, save perhaps that rash action on our part might well prompt the Russians to march against us."[87]

Pope was by far the most critical of the paper, which he said "smacks more of the work of a Ministry of War than that of a Ministry of Foreign or External Affairs." He may have been the most outspoken respondent, but he was hardly the only one who complained the paper spent too much time

counting divisions and tanks of the Soviet Army rather than "the attitude of mind of these who direct its destinies."[88]

Pope assumed this emphasis on capabilities, rather than intentions, was the mark of an American influence on Canadian intelligence, and that there was no good reason to think Moscow wanted war: "I have never once heard of a single shred of good evidence pointing to the conclusion that the Soviets mean to make offensive war."[89]

In Washington, Hume Wrong continued to be skeptical that the USSR could want war. In the aftermath of two world wars, it was obvious that in modern war "victor and vanquished alike undergo terrible destruction." Surely, he thought, the Soviet leadership would have "grave doubts" about their ability to control their country in case of war — and that war might break apart the Soviet state.[90] R. M. Macdonnell, writing from Paris, agreed. The Soviet leadership was "intelligent and well-enough informed," he wrote, to realize that any war would be "long and immensely destructive."[91]

The fundamental question surrounding these debates revolved around the Korean War. Bill Crean argued that the analyses of the Soviet policy had been too ready to assume that Korea proved "the spread of Communism was henceforth to be conducted principally on the points of Soviet bayonets."[92] He did not accept the notion that "the Russians thought they were risking a major war when the campaign began."[93]

Macdonnell, supporting Crean's point from Paris, thought the Soviets had shown a "healthy prudence" and been willing to accept "local setbacks," for instance in Greece or Berlin, rather than risk general war. In fact, Soviet action in the Korean War, and in particular the limitations on assistance from the USSR to the North Korea or Chinese "suggests forcibly that the Kremlin has had just as many fears and hesitations as we have." Any suggestion that Korea showed a willingness of the Soviet Union to pursue objectives, even at the risk of major war, should be called into question.[94]

If war was imminent — and the Canadian diplomatic corps did not think it was — it was not because Moscow wanted it. These observations would come to play a significant part in future assessments of the imminence of war.

The End of Imminence

In June 1951, a year after the outbreak of the Korean War, the Chiefs of Staff Committee directed the JIC to once again review the standing "Imminence of War" paper. The first draft was the collaborative work of External Affairs and

the directorate of air intelligence. It maintained the fundamental assumption that Soviet leaders held two goals: the long-term aim of establishing "world Communism under Russian domination," and the short-term aim of establishing the USSR "in an impregnable position."[95] The second was an essential ingredient for completing the former goal. But crucially, in this assessment, war was not considered to be an essential stepping stone to either aim. In fact, the External Affairs/DAI draft established war as a possible impediment to Soviet goals.

The draft assessment drew on and reflected, to a significant extent, some of the letters that Canadian missions had written in response to the request for comment on the last "Imminence of War" paper. In particular, it included the point, made by several diplomats, that given the obvious costs of modern war, the Soviets would far prefer to seek their objectives short of war.[96]

The draft appreciation suggested that the Soviet leaders did "genuinely fear an attack"[97] by the Western powers, and might conclude that the Western Powers had decided to destroy Soviet power. It warned that "[c]ertainly the unprecedented preparations for war now being urgently pressed forward by the democratic countries in NATO could be construed as supporting such a theory."[98] Again, building on thinking within the DEA and from missions abroad, the Canadian assessment acknowledged that Western rearmament was a factor driving Soviet preparations for war.

In keeping with previous Canadian assessments, the drafters punted on the question of whether Soviet leaders might decide to initiate a war: "[i]t is not possible to appreciate at what point such a decision would be made."[99] But the argument made elsewhere in the paper about the costs of war provided important context for this non-appreciation.

Also in keeping with previous assessment, this paper noted that the Soviet Union's military strength suggested it was capable of war. But the assessment also made clear that Moscow would still have to make "some 'last minute' preparation" before launching operations. None of these preparations had started, and this was evidence "Soviet leaders have not decided to start a general war in the next few months."[100]

The world was still a dangerous place, and war might develop "from some local operation,"[101] but this draft paper reflected the view, long building in the Department of External Affairs, that war was not imminent.

The External Affairs/DAI draft was altered, somewhat, before it was sent to the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The changes resulted in a more polished

but less sanguine paper, presented to the CSC in July 1951 as JIC 20(51), "The Imminence of War." [102] The new version had been made somewhat starker. The suggestion that Western rearmament might reasonably be understood by Moscow as a prelude to an attack was excised. And while JIC 20(51) pointed out "certain weaknesses" in the Soviet position, it maintained the argument that the Soviet Union could embark on a massive war by waging simultaneous campaigns around the world. The draft's suggestion that the Soviet leadership understood the costs of modern warfare had been deleted, although the new draft did include the observation that "Soviet leaders will prefer . . . all other means short of war" to achieve its goals.[103] The JIC paper concluded that "the long-term danger of war remains the same, but that there is no evidence that either deliberate resort to war, or war arising from local operations, is likely in 1951."[104]

Still, the CSC thought JIC 20(51) painted far too rosy a picture. The chief of the general staff sensed an unacceptable "air of optimism." Charles "Bud" Drury, the deputy minister of National Defence, was also troubled by the paper. From "various other papers [he] had read," Drury said, "[he] had gained the impression that the period of greatest danger to the free world was at present." And yet the paper suggested "war was not imminent during 1951."[105] The deputy minister's observations are striking in that they indicate an obverse relationship to how the JIC was supposed to work: instead of the JIC sending an intelligence appreciation up to the CSC, the CSC seemed to be telegraphing an intelligence appreciation down to the JIC, and asking them to write it up formally. Foulkes himself demonstrated some of the futility of the exercise at hand when he pointed out that while "we had no available information suggesting that the Soviet Union intended to precipitate a war during 1951, it was equally true that we had no information which suggested that Russia did not intend to suddenly open hostilities during the period in question."[106]

To the chiefs, it seemed that the dangers of war as assessed months earlier remained the same. Those earlier assessments had helped reinforce the Cabinet's decisions to accelerate the rearmament of Canadian forces. They likely, and reasonably, wondered whether an assessment of lesser risk would slow Canada's defence build-up. And yet, from the view of External Affairs officers, the fact remained that war — either launched deliberately by the Soviets, or the result of an accident — "does not appear likely in 1951, where six months ago we probably could not have made such a positive statement."[107]

JIC 20(51) was not approved by the CSC but instead sent back to the JIC for redrafting.[108]

From "Imminence" to "Risks"

A redrafted "Imminence of War" paper would come before the Chiefs of Staff Committee in September 1951, but it would bear a new name. On the advice of the DEA members of the JIC, the "Imminence of War" title had been changed to "The Current Risks of War." This was done purposefully, the USSEA told the committee, because the very word imminence "tended to prejudge international developments."[109]

During the August revision, Charles Ritchie had directed George Glazebrook to ensure the new draft accounted for the reports made by Canadian missions abroad, as well as "the impressions gained by the Minister to the general effect that the danger of war this year was less."[110] After all, as the secretary of Cabinet reminded the CSC, the Cabinet had received a paper in late 1950 indicating that the next year would be the "most critical." Now, with a year having passed, it was time to present the government with "a clear picture of the risks of hostilities."[111]

External Affairs officials continued to worry about the effects of seeming to cry wolf. If "too black a picture were painted," Heeney told the CSC, "and nothing serious transpired the effectiveness of these preparations would be considerably lessened."[112] Simply changing the title was important for the reasons the External Affairs officials indicated.

Beyond the title change, the updated draft did contain a new and important feature. It made a distinction between a "deliberate Soviet resort to war and a war arising from miscalculations by either side or the acceptance of risks in a local operation."[113] But ultimately, the drafters of the "Current Risks" paper reflected the views of the CSC and deleted one of the lines from JIC 20(51) that had so bothered the chiefs: the seemingly benign statement that "no available information suggests that the Soviet Union intends to precipitate a war during 1951."[114]

External Affairs officials still grumbled about the "Risks of War" paper. The appreciation's drafters had been looking for evidence of war — evidence that war was imminent. This had always struck External Affairs officials as the wrong way to go about the problem. An appreciation, they thought, should consider whether war was likely or not, and not just look for evidence of imminence.

External Affairs officials continued to see nuance in Soviet policy. Max Wershof pointed out that general war would only cut against Soviet goals of achieving Communism.[115] Similarly, J. A. McCordick thought the document did not go far enough to describe limits on the Soviet Union and that the Soviet satellites provided a source of weakness, not strength. Problems within the Soviet Union — especially the unpopularity of collectivization and the opposition of the churches to Communism, were problems that existed now but "would be more acute in wartime."[116] Fundamentally, the appreciation ignored the reasons the Soviet Union would not wish to go to war.

The Likelihood of War

In 1952, DEA officials sought to re-write the "Current Risks of War" paper with the deliberate goal of offering an assessment of the likelihood, rather than imminence, of war. They were inspired, perhaps, by a similar British assessment. The previous November, the UK JIC had sent the Canadians a copy of their JIC (451)103 (Final), entitled "Likelihood of Total War with the Soviet Union up to the End of 1954."[117]The paper matched very closely with DEA views. It noted that there was a danger that the Soviet Union might start a war, and that it had the military power to do so. The Soviet leaders might view Western actions, especially the growth of NATO to include West Germany, as evidence of an upcoming Western attack that Moscow might choose to preempt with war. But, overall, the UK JIC believed that the "Soviet Government will wish to avoid a total war in the period under review."[118]

Glazebrook read and largely concurred with the British paper and, in January 1952, determined it was time for a new study of the risks of war.[119] Dana Wilgress, the former Canadian ambassador to Moscow, led the drafting process in DEA's DL(2). He read both the UK JIC paper and a contemporaneous US National Intelligence Estimate.[120]

The Wilgress paper would end up being discussed at length in the Joint Intelligence Committee, and re-drafted multiple times. However, it kept its main argument from Wilgress' first draft: the Soviet Union could undertake a war by launching simultaneous campaigns, but the growth in Western strength would result now in a war of attrition — "a war in which the weaknesses of the Soviet position would be evident."[121] General war, then, would not be a likely choice for Moscow.

Wilgress could imagine two scenarios in which the Soviets might "resort to general war and launch without warning an attack on the West as the

Germans did against the Soviet Union in 1941." First, Moscow might "feel" it had "reached the limit of expansion by methods short of general war" in Europe.[122] But, he pointed out, these limits would not be felt in Asia, where the Soviets could continue to try and expand their influence short of war. It would seem that "[t]here appear[s], therefore to be various alternatives open to the Soviet leaders for expansionist moves other than general war."[123]

The second scenario would be the result of a "conviction that the United States would lead the Western coalition in an assault on the USSR when the coalition is strong enough." The Soviets may well think this, especially given "the bellicose statements of various service chiefs and politicians" in the US, which mixed potently with "communist dogma about eventual clashes between capitalism and communism." The UK and Western European countries, however, clearly had no such aggressive intentions; any such war of the West against the USSR would require the United States to "force her reluctant partners to agree to such an attack or . . . drag them in without agreement."[124] Fundamentally, despite the atomic power of the United States, the Western powers did not have the conventional forces to hold Europe, much less to advance east against the Red Army. Such a scenario, even in the minds of paranoid Soviet leaders, was unlikely. Using both possible cases for why the Soviet Union might launch a general war, Wilgress had effectively explained why they would not make this choice.

But war could still come about because of miscalculation. Wilgress was convinced that the Soviets had not expected the Greek Rebellion (or Greek Civil War, 1946–49) or the Berlin Blockade (1948–49) to lead to general war, and had no doubt hoped that the North Korean invasion of South Korea would be limited to fighting between Korean forces. None of these actions had gone according to plan.

Stalin backed down on Berlin. The Soviets did not officially join the war in Korea. And when the situation in Korea became "very explosive," they proposed an armistice. All of this seemed "to indicate that the Soviet leaders would not persist in local operations which became too risky." But the Soviets could make miscalculations, assuming, for instance, that operations in Yugoslavia, or Chinese intervention in Indochina, could remain localized, when in fact both might lead to Western reactions that could "set in train a series of developments leading to general war." [125]

Wilgress' draft would be rewritten by the Joint Intelligence Staff. The JIS pushed back against efforts, likely led by the DEA member of the JIC, to

include a paragraph "dealing with 'war mongering' by leaders of the Western Powers"[126] — surely the Americans. But in the end, the fundamental point, one consistently raised by members of the DEA, was ensconced in the conclusions of JIC 42/2(51): while the Soviet Union had the capability to "embark on a major war at any time," the JIC "do not consider that it will do so deliberately during 1952."[127]

Senior DEA officials were pleased with the document, describing it as "a very cool headed and realistic assessment of the current dangers of a war." They hoped that the Chiefs of Staff would "not try to 'hot it up.'" They remained on the lookout for the chiefs' efforts to "over-emphasize the risk of war."[128]

The DEA's concern was not, or not only, about the impropriety of "hotting up" an assessment. They had bigger worries: that if the risks of war were emphasized too greatly, and there was no Soviet aggression in the next two or three years, "[p]ublic opinion may then swing dangerously in the opposite direction of under-estimating the risks." The DEA was worried that exaggerated "public statements about the risk of war" made in 1951 already had this effect.[129]

Comparison with the US & UK

Throughout 1952, the Canadians continued to assess their appreciation of the likelihood of war with similar assessments made in London and Washington. The Canadian JIS and JIC members reviewed the British Chiefs of Staff paper COS (52)285, "The Likelihood of Total War up to the End of 1954," and the US National Intelligence Estimate 48, "Likelihood of the Deliberate Initiation of Full-Scale War by the USSR against the US and Its Western Allies Prior to the End of 1952."[130]

The British paper was striking for its forthright statement that there had been "no new aggressive action of the part of the Communists" nor "any intelligence which would suggest that action of an unambiguously aggressive character is imminent."[131] It outlined Soviet efforts to relax tensions, noting that the goal of these "conciliatory words" (if not deeds) was to "embarrass the Western Governments, to weaken their resolution to rearm, and to delay their defence preparations," while the Soviets continued their own defence preparation at a high rate.

The result, in British eyes, was "a difficult and dangerous" period: in Europe, the Soviets might react strongly to changes in West Germany; in Korea, the Communist forces might start a major offensive. Ultimately, however, the

UK JIC (with approval by the UK Chiefs of Staff) concluded that the "Soviet Government will not wish to start a total war in the period under review."

The American NIE marked a change from the alarmist tone of similar US documents since the last quarter of 1950. In the first sentence of NIE 48, the report noted that "[o]n balance we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will deliberately initiate general war during 1952."[132] Instead, the NIE suggested that the Kremlin preferred "to pursue its objectives through methods short of deliberate resort to war."

As a result of actions by the US and its allies, the NIE concluded, the Kremlin was "deterred from a deliberate resort to war," and by "certainty of extensive destruction in the USSR as well as by the risk that the Soviet system might be destroyed."[133] There was also a belief that the Soviets might attack if they felt the balance of power shifting against them, but in 1952, the Soviet leadership had thought such a shift had occurred and war had not come.[134] The Canadians noted that the US NIE was different from the Canadian one, but the parts that were comparable "are identical."

It was intriguing that Americans and Canadians reached the same conclusion but by different means, especially when they both considered circumstances in which the Soviet Union might choose war. In the NIE, the US intelligence machinery identified conditions that might induce the Soviets to war, and compared these against those conditions deterring the Soviet Union. They decided, on balance, the deterrent to be stronger. The Canadian paper, in contrast, attempted "to show that the necessary sets of circumstances are unlikely to exist during 1952."[135] Through different routes, the Canadian and American assessments agreed that the Soviets would not seek general war in 1952.

While likely unbeknownst to the Canadians at the time, the CIA conducted an internal critique of previous NIEs. The results offer an explanation for why American and Canadian assessments had differed at the beginning of the Korean War. One cause of the CIA's alarm had been due to an emphasis on Soviet military strength, rather than its political and economic weakness. The CIA report also suggested that previous American documents had led readers to "assume that the Soviet leaders are trigger-happy militarists anxious to lunge their empire into general war." Canadian assessments in both the pre-Korean War era and during the war itself had avoided each of these errors, often emphasizing the Soviet caution that the CIA reviewers faulted earlier CIA analysts for having ignored.[136]

Evidence

By June, a final revision of the Canadian "Current Risks" paper, now JIC 42/3(52), was prepared for a Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting in early July.[137] DEA officials were prepared for some of the chiefs to disagree with the paper because it was "somewhat more optimistic than its predecessor."[138] But by now the Korean War was two years old and had been mired in stalemate for a year. The CSC approved the paper, and also approved its distribution to the UK JIC, the US JIC, and CIA.

In discussion, the CSC members acknowledged that "a great deal of the information" used to develop the Canadian appreciation had come to Canada from the United States or the United Kingdom. And yet the CSC thought it important to send the paper to Washington and London to "keep up the reciprocal exchange of intelligence information." The CIA had suggested they wished to receive Canadian appreciations to test their own estimates, calling the Canadian input a "useful means of assessing their own work." But they had also made it "quite obvious that the U.S. placed great importance on the quantitative supply of intelligence information from Canada."[139]

Before the paper could be distributed to allies, however, revisions had to be made: the sentence "provocative statements by certain service chiefs and politicians" had to be changed to read "service personnel" rather than chiefs — no doubt in a bid to avoid identifying US officials too narrowly.[140] Intriguingly, then, while the Canadian assessments had identified American policy as contributing to the risk of war, this was never put neatly to the Americans.

Only months after the final draft of the "Current Risks" paper was approved by the CSC, it was time for a new revision. The Chiefs of Staff requested the JIC review the last paper "and determine whether or not any decrease in the likelihood of war can be foreseen."[141] Even this phrasing suggests a more balanced and less leading question for the drafters.

The result of this review was JIC 58(52), "A Review of the Risks of War." It upheld the conclusions of the previous risks of war papers: that the Soviet Union was unlikely to go to war in 1953, but there remained a danger of war through miscalculation or local operations.[142] Discussion of the paper in the CSC revealed that the broader question (and the chiefs' worry) of the relationship between intelligence appreciations and the Canadian rearmament program was still alive.

Foulkes started off the CSC meeting making plain his frustration with DEA's approach to judging the risk of war. He argued that from the information available, the Chiefs of Staff could find no evidence to show that Moscow had given up the quest for world domination. As long as the Western powers continued to oppose Soviet expansion, the risk of war would continue undiminished.[143]

Privately, External Affairs officials thought Foulkes was coming close to a "deliberate misrepresentation."[144] DEA's view, quite simply, was that the "risk of war had diminished." The rearmament of Western Europe and especially the growth of the US atomic arsenal, "provided a strong deterrent and Stalin, unlike Hitler, was unlikely to commit the Soviet Union to a full-scale war when there was any doubt as to its outcome."[145]

Heeney, representing External Affairs in the CSC, told Foulkes that "nations appeared to assess the risk of war to suit their particular circumstances, and it was, therefore, hard to come to a firm conclusion."[146] Heeney's comment was a general one, but it had relevance for the Canadian position, too. The chiefs seemed to worry that any assessment of a declining risk of war would not suit the particular circumstances of National Defence and its goals of increased defence spending. Despite the JIC assessment that the risk of war was not as high as it had been, the general views of the Chiefs of Staff were that "insofar as it affects military requirements the Canadian military opinion is that the risk of aggression has not diminished."[147]

This unsatisfying stalemate led to renewed effort in the JIC to make an accurate appreciation of the risks of war. As Ivor Bowen, director of Canada's Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB), told the committee, there existed in Ottawa "a great many opinions on the likelihood of war." Some were based on the logic of risk, or, perhaps, the needs of departments. The "very strength" of a JIC appreciation, however, "is that it derives from an examination of evidence." What followed was an effort to assess the risk of war with a longer paper that gave "considerable treatment of the evidence which is examined in arriving at the conclusions."[148]

A new paper was drafted in late October 1952. It came in for major criticism from DEA officials because it did not take account of possible American actions that could risk war. One official complained that the assessment "ignores completely the implications of a Republican victory which might occur in the United States on November 4th."[149] There was real concern in Washington that if Eisenhower won the 1952 election, "the 'Neanderthal'

wing of the Party will dominate Congress"[150] and the president might give in to those advocating preventive war. DEA officials worried that the Soviets would share these fears, and that a Republican victory might "encourage the Soviet Union to resort to direct aggression," touching off a "a general war resulting through miscalculation on either side." A JIC assessment of the current risks of war that focused only on potential Soviet actions, and did not include potential American actions, or, to take it one step further, Soviet reactions to American reactions, was "unrealistic."[151]

By February 1953, the JIC had put together a new full draft of "The Current Risks of General War," JIC 64/1(53). This draft marked a significant change, and one made in response to the frustrations of 1952. JIC papers were to have a new format, with the conclusion placed at the beginning of the paper, rather than at the end.

As a result, one of the first things readers saw was the conclusion "that it is unlikely that the Soviet Union will deliberately precipitate a general war by attacking the West during 1953," with a caveat that this possibility of conflict could not be excluded. The "main risk" of general war in 1953 were Soviet actions "known to entail risks of general war; or from genuine miscalculations or errors of conduct on either side, or from accidental occurrences."[152]

While war could still be brought about in a number of ways, JIC 64(53) and its later revisions were explicitly concerned with the "likelihood of war resulting from action by the Soviet bloc." The paper stated unequivocally that "Western actions may involve risks of war," but it was assumed the "West will proceed with caution." DEA officials concerns about US decision-making, a point so often raised in correspondence and in committee, did not appear in JIC papers going forward.

The new "Current Risks" paper also spent more ink than earlier iterations in describing why the calculation of risk was so complex. In noted the "difficulties of obtaining intelligence on the Soviet bloc," a challenge enhanced by the difficulty in estimating how Soviet leaders themselves might "weigh a situation and choose between alternatives." The JIC considered Communist doctrine, Soviet statements, and intelligence and published statistics on Soviet capabilities. But all three sources of information, they determined, were ultimately "unsatisfactory."[153]

Going forward, this appreciation and those that followed gave much more consideration to External Affairs' position that the Soviets would not make a deliberate choice for war. The paper clearly stated that "on the basis of

capabilities alone, general war in 1953 would thus very probably appear to the Soviet Union as an uncertain gamble, with very serious risks that the Soviet Union would suffer extensive damage, and the possibility that the Soviet system itself might be destroyed."[154]

The real threat, the paper stressed, was not a deliberate Soviet resort to war but a mistake. The Soviets had miscalculated, badly, in Berlin and in Korea. And it was possible that they might make a miscalculation again. The document's strong statement of the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding was considered an achievement in DEA, for it "gives the reader a clearer idea of where the risk of war lies."[155]

The "Current Risks" paper was expected to "to remove the impression" given to readers of earlier estimates "that the Soviet Union had a great deal to gain and little to lose in a general war." But in place of the caricature of a bloodthirsty Soviet Union champing at the bit for global military operations was the "obvious but not unimportant concept of human fallibility" and the idea that leaders who did not want general war could bring one on by accident.[156]

The World Turns

A month after the "Current Risks" paper was completed, the world changed again. In March 1953, Joseph Stalin died. Five months later, the Soviets exploded their own hydrogen bomb, demonstrating that they were capable of waging not only nuclear but thermonuclear war. The Canadians began their revision of their appreciation of the risks of war, as did their allies.[157]

Canadian thinking in mid-1953 mirrored the conclusions of the British JIC's "Likelihood of General War with the Soviet Union up to the End of 1955" (JIC (53)79 (Final))[158] While acknowledging Stalin's death and the thermonuclear explosion, the UK JIC downgraded the likelihood of war, writing that the Soviet Government "will be more cautious in the conduct of their cold-war struggle against the West."[159] The "Soviet Government still wish to avoid starting a general war."[160]

The Canadians agreed, if for slightly different reasons. The new Canadian "Current Risks" paper concluded that it might appear to the Soviets that "time is on their side, in the sense that their capabilities (especially in the nuclear field) will increase, while Western military development and unity will continue to be impeded by political and economic strains." This was "an added reason why the likelihood of deliberate war during at least the coming year seems remote."[161]

With the Soviets keeping up with atomic developments, Moscow might estimate that the "balance of power in the long term must be favourable to themselves." The Soviet leadership would work to break the unity of the West and increase its influence around the world, but not with recourse to war. The "likelihood of a general conflict in the immediate future," the Canadians judged, "is remote."[162] In February 1954, the British and Canadian assessments were echoed by a US Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE11-54) that concluded "Communist rulers will continue to consider general war a hazardous gamble" that would result in widespread destruction in the USSR and perhaps the collapse of the whole Soviet system.

The world, in the eyes of the American, British, and Canadian intelligence communities, had settled into a Cold War. Intelligence appreciations in all three countries had supplemented their studies of what the Soviet Union would do in a general war to assessing whether the Soviet Union would launch such a war. As the UK JIC put it in 1953, NATO and the Soviet Union were reaching "the point when either side could destroy the other and when war might well result in the annihilation of both," and that "neither will risk a deliberate war and neither will allow itself to be drawn into war by a process of 'chain reaction' in a time of crisis."[163]

General nuclear war would serve no state's goals. And yet, the British paper continued, the very elements that had made war so undesirable had significant consequences: "As the atomic power of both sides grows, so will the temptation to strike the first blow, and that this will increase the dangers inherent in any such crisis."[164] Nuclear armament and improving delivery capabilities made war unwanted, perhaps even unlikely, but it raised the stakes of a war to an existential level. The potential for such a general war — general war that the Canadians believed would only come by miscalculation and mistake — meant Canadian intelligence officials had a new task: to identify, and if possible prevent, any such miscalculation.