

5.5 Hitler's Reichstag speech, 19 July 1940

... When Marshal Pétain offered to lay down French arms, he did not lay down arms that he still held, but ended a situation that every soldier could recognize as untenable. Only the blood-drenched dilettantism of a Mr. Churchill could fail to understand this or try to deny this in spite of better knowledge.

[Hitler then recounted in detail Germany's military successes up to that point.]

As I now come to the end of this purely military summation of events, truth compels me to state the historic fact that none of this would have been possible without the staunch attitude of the home front – or without, most importantly, the founding, the work, and the activities of the National Socialist Party.

In the year 1919, at the time of our greatest decline, the Party already proclaimed as its goal the reconstruction of a German people's army and has advocated this goal with fanatical determination for decades. Without the Party's work all the preconditions for the resurrection of the German Reich and thus the creation of a German Wehrmacht would have been lacking. Above all, the Party also gave the struggle its ideological (weltanschaulich) foundation. To our democratic opponents' senseless sacrifice of life for the interests of their plutocracies we juxtapose the defense of a socially-minded people's community (Volksgemeinschaft). The work of the Party has therefore resulted in the unity between front and home front that unfortunately was lacking in the World War.

[Hitler then announced honors and promotions for leading Party officials and Wehrmacht officers before proceeding to his "peace offer."]

Ever since there has been a National Socialist regime, its foreign policy program has contained two goals:

- 1 The achievement of a true understanding and friendship with Italy and,
- 2 the achievement of the same relationship with England.

You, my Party comrades, know that these objectives already motivated me 20 years ago just as much as they did later. I have dealt with and defended these ideas innumerable times in publications and in talks, as long as I myself was still in the opposition in the democratic Republic. As soon as the German people entrusted me with their leadership, I immediately tried to realize this oldest goal of National Socialist foreign policy in practice. Even today I am still saddened that despite all my efforts I did not succeed in bringing about the friendship with England that, I believe, would have been a blessing for both peoples. And especially as I did not succeed despite my persistent and sincere efforts.

[Hitler then described Germany's good relations with Italy.]
Men of the German Reichstag, if I now speak about the future, then I do not do so to boast or to brag. I can safely leave that to others who probably need to do so more, as for example Mr. Churchill. I would like, without any exaggeration, to give a picture of the situation as it is and as I see it.

The course of this war for the past six months has proved my conception to be right and the views of our opponents to be wrong.
When so-called English statesmen assure us that their country emerges stronger from every defeat and failure, then it is certainly not arrogance on my part when I hereby inform you that we have emerged strengthened from our successes.

[Hitler then discussed German advantages in weaponry, ammunition, raw materials, popular morale, and strategic situation, especially the friendship with Russia.]

Hitler's peace offer, July 1940

On 19 July 1940, three days after issuing a top secret directive to prepare a landing operation against England, Hitler once again offered to make peace, just as he had after the successful completion of the Polish campaign on 6 October 1939. Hitler's terms had not changed: British acceptance of Germany's continental domination and the return of Germany's pre-war colonies. In return Hitler promised to respect the integrity of the British Empire.

Peace with Britain would allow Hitler to accomplish his primary goal, the conquest of Lebensraum in the east. At the time of Hitler's first peace offer in October 1939, Churchill, a member of the cabinet but not yet prime minister, made the acid but accurate comment that Germany had been free to choose the time for the beginning of the war, but Hitler was not free to choose the time for its end. In July 1940, despite the threat of a German invasion, the British were even less inclined to accept a settlement that would leave Hitler's Germany in complete control of Europe. It was not just the desire to avoid humiliation that stiffened British resolve, but the long-term danger to democracy all over the world from any settlement that left Hitler the master of Europe. Although Britain could not have defeated Nazi Germany without the United States and the Soviet Union, Churchill's refusal to negotiate a settlement on Hitler's terms in the spring or summer of 1940 prevented Hitler from winning the war and dramatically improving his prospects of achieving his expansionist goals.

Hitler himself seemed to be aware that the terms he was offering had virtually no prospects of being accepted. His speech was primarily intended for domestic consumption. Hitler took full advantage of the celebratory mood that had gripped the country since the fall of France. He began his speech by reviewing the injustices of Versailles, blaming the English and the French for the start of the war, and exultantly recounting the course of German military successes. He announced the promotion of no fewer than twelve generals to the rank of field marshal. Goering, the only active field marshal up to then, received the newly created rank of Reich Marshal. Hitler's seemingly generous offer of peace to Britain was delivered in his usual aggressive, sarcastic tone. His real intention was to prepare the German people for the coming Battle of Britain. To maintain German morale for what promised to be a longer war than most Germans had anticipated, Hitler had to make what at least to loyal Germans seemed like a good-faith effort at peace.

England's hope, however, to alleviate its own situation by bringing about some new European crisis is a fallacy, insofar as Germany's relationship with Russia is concerned. Although the British statesmen see everything more slowly, they will yet come to understand this in the course of time.

It now is clear that in my speech on 6 October 1939 I correctly foretold the further development of this war. I assured you, my Deputies, that I could not for a moment doubt our victory. Unless one happens to see in defeats the signs and guarantees of final victory, I believe that developments up to now have proven me right. In spite of the fact that I was quite sure about these developments, I offered France and England my hand for an understanding at the time. You will still recall the answer I received. All my arguments on the nonsense of continuing this war, on the certainty that even in the most favorable case they would reap not victory, but casualties, were dismissed with mockery and disdain or simply ignored.

At that time I assured you that I feared, because of my peace offer, to be decried as a yellow-belly who did not want to fight any longer because he was not able to fight any longer. Exactly this happened. I do believe, however, that France — less the guilty statesmen than the people, of course — thinks differently about this October 6 today. What unspeakable misery has befallen this great country and people since then ...

From London I now only hear cries — not the cries of the masses, but of the politicians — to continue the war now all the more.

I do not know whether these politicians already have the right notion of what a continuation of this war will bring. They do declare that they will continue this war, and, if England goes to ruin as a result, they will continue it from Canada. I hardly believe that this means the people will be going to Canada; rather it will probably be the war profiteers who will retreat to Canada. The people, I believe, will have to remain in England. And they will surely view the war with different eyes than their so-called leaders in Canada.

Believe me, members of the Reichstag, I feel an inner disgust at this sort of unconscionable parliamentary destroyer of peoples and states. It almost hurts me that fate has chosen me to give a shove to what these people have brought to the point of falling. For my intention was not to wage war but to construct a new socially-minded state of the highest culture.

Every year of this war robs me of my work. And the ones who cause me to be robbed are ridiculous ciphers whom one can only call assembly-line products of nature, insofar as they do not derive some special distinction from their venal corruption.

Mr. Churchill has just declared again that he wants the war. About six weeks ago he began war in an arena in which he apparently believes he is particularly strong, the air war against the civilian population, albeit under the pretext of hitting so-called war-related objectives. Ever since Freiburg,⁵ these objectives have been open cities, market places, peasant villages, residences, hospitals, schools, kindergartens and whatever else gets hit.

Up to now I have hardly responded. But this does not mean that this is our only possible response or will remain the only one.

I am quite aware of the fact that from our response, which will come at some time, nameless suffering and misfortune will descend upon people. Not on Mr. Churchill, of course, for he will surely be sitting in Canada, where the property and children of the leading war profiteers have already been brought. But for millions of other people great suffering will result. And Mr. Churchill should perhaps believe me just this once when I now make the following prophecy:

A great world empire will be destroyed, a world empire which it was never my intention to destroy or damage. But I am fully aware that the continuation of this war will only end with the complete destruction of one of the two warring parties. Mr. Churchill may believe that this will be Germany. I know it will be England.

At this hour I feel obligated by conscience to direct one more appeal of reason to England. I believe I am entitled to do this, because I am not asking for something as the vanquished but am speaking for reason as the victor. I see no reason that should compel us to continue this war. I know that millions of German men and youths are aglow at the prospect of finally being able to fight the enemy, who for the second time has declared war on us without any reason ... Mr. Churchill might again dismiss my declaration with the yowl that this is just the offspring of my fear and my doubt about final victory. At any rate I will have relieved my conscience about the things to come ...

Source: Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro, 19 July 1940.
Translated by Rod Stackelberg

The failure of Operation Sea Lion, Summer 1940

The fall of France marked the high point of German fortunes and Hitler's career. Germany appeared to have won the war. But Britain remained defiant. Winston Churchill (1874-1965), who had replaced Chamberlain as prime minister on 10 May, persuaded his war cabinet, including Chamberlain and the appeasement-minded Lord Halifax, not to accept Hitler's terms. With a peace settlement unattainable on German terms and a successful invasion of England dependent on control of the air, Hitler turned to another option: a surprise attack on the Soviet Union even before the end of the war against Britain. On 31 July 1940 he discussed this option with his leading generals, as recorded by General Halder below. Although Hitler had his doubts about the feasibility of an invasion of the British Isles, at this point he still hoped to end the war with Britain before launching the attack on Russia.

Throughout the summer of 1940 the air war known as the "Battle of Britain" raged. Failure of the German Air Force to establish air supremacy forced a suspension of plans to invade Britain, code-named "Operation Sea Lion," in early September. Halder's diary shows that army and navy leaders disagreed on the site, extent and feasibility of the landing. The army was unwilling to risk a landing attempt without full control of the air or the sea. Halder was also critical of the passive role of the High Command (OKW) in planning the operation.

5.6 The Halder War Diary, 1940

Führer:

31 JULY 1940

5 The southwestern city of Freiburg near the French border was bombed on 10 May 1940, possibly by German planes.

(a) Stresses his skepticism regarding technical feasibility [of Operation Sea Lion]; however, satisfied with results produced by Navy.

- (b) Emphasizes weather factor.
- (c) Discusses enemy resources for counteraction. Our small Navy is only 15% of enemy's; 8% of enemy's destroyers; 10–12% of his motor torpedo boats. So we have nothing to bring into action against enemy surface attacks. That leaves mines (not 100% reliable), coastal artillery (good!) and Air Force.

In any decision we must bear in mind that we do not take risks for nothing.
 (d) In the event that invasion does not take place, our action must be directed to eliminate all factors that let England hope for a change in the situation. To all intents and purposes, the war is won. France has stepped out of the set-up protecting British convoys. Italy is pinning down British forces.
 Submarine and air warfare may bring about a final decision, but this may be one or two years off.

Britain's hope lies in Russia and the United States. If Russia drops out of the picture, America, too, is lost for Britain, because elimination of Russia would tremendously increase Japan's power in the Far East.

Russia is the Far Eastern sword of Britain and the United States pointed at Japan. Here, an evil wind is blowing for Britain. Japan, like Russia, has her program which she wants to carry through before the end of the war.

[Marginal note:] The Russian victory film on the Russo-Finnish War!

Russia is the factor on which Britain is relying the most. Something must have happened in London! The British were completely down; now they have perked up again. Intercepted telephone conversations. Russia is painfully shaken by the swift development of the Western European situation.

All that Russia has to do is to hint that it does not care to have a strong Germany, and the British will take hope, like one about to go under, that the situation will undergo a radical change within six or eight months.

With Russia smashed, Britain's last hope would be shattered. Germany then will be master of Europe and the Balkans.

Decision: Russia's destruction must therefore be made a part of this struggle. Spring 1941.

The sooner Russia is crushed, the better. Attack achieves its purpose only if Russian State can be shattered to its roots with one blow. Holding part of the country alone will not do. Standing still in the winter would be perilous. So it is better to wait a little longer, but with the resolute determination to eliminate Russia. This is necessary also because of situation on the Baltic Sea. It is awkward to have another major power there. If we start in May 1941, we would have five months to finish the job in. Tackling it this year would have been best, but unified action would be impossible at this time.

*Objective is destruction of Russian manpower. Operation will be divided into three actions:
 First thrust: Kiev and securing flank protection on Dnieper. Air Force will destroy river crossings. Odessa.
 Second thrust: Baltic states and drive on Moscow.
 Finally: Link-up of northern and southern prongs.
 Later: Limited drive on Baku oil fields.*

*It will be seen later to what extent Finland and Turkey should be brought in.
 Later: Ukraine, White Russia, Baltic states to us. Finland extended to the White Sea.*

6 AUGUST 1940

[General] v. Greiffenberg – [Colonel] v. Witzleben: Discussion of points which have to be cleared up with Navy.

Information brought by von Witzleben shows that Navy insists on landing to be made on narrowest frontage.

Plans of this sort are undebatable because success of landing operation cannot be assured on so narrow a frontage.

Moreover, Navy asserts that inasmuch as weather conditions and postponement of large-scale Air Force operations have delayed start of mine sweeping, 15 Sep date for jump-off has already been jeopardized.

We have the paradoxical situation where the Navy is full of misgivings, the Air Force is very reluctant to tackle a mission which at the outset is exclusively its own, and OKW [Wehrmacht High Command], which for once has a real combined forces operation to direct, just plays dead. The only driving force in the whole situation comes from us, but alone we would not be able to swing it, either.

7 AUGUST 1940

Conference with OKM [Naval High Command]; [Admiral] Schniewind, [Admiral] Fricke, [General] Reinhardt.

Conference results merely in confirming the existence of irreconcilable differences between us. Navy maintains that landing is possible only on narrowest frontage, between Folkestone and Beachy Head, and feels confident of being able to assure a continuous shuttle service to the beach-head. However, this front would be too narrow for us, all the more so as it leads into a terrain that offers backbreaking obstacles to any swift advance. A landing between Folkestone and Ramsgate is held practicable by Navy only after coastal defenses have been rolled up from the landside. Navy opposes any westward extension of the assault front out of fear of Portsmouth and the British High Seas Fleet. There could be no adequate air defense against these threats.

In view of the limited transport resources, completion of the cross-Channel operation on a broader frontage would take 42 days, which is utterly prohibitive for us. Our views are diametrically opposed on that point. The issue must therefore be settled on higher level.

Source: Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes, *The Halder Diaries: The Private War Journals of General Franz Halder (Nuremberg: Office of Military Government [US], 1948).*
 German version: Generaloberst Halder, *Kriegstagebuch: Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres 1939–1942*, ed. by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen with Alfred Philippi, Vol. I, Vom Polenfeldzug bis zum Ende der Westoffensive (14. 8. 1939–30. 6. 1940)

(Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962), pp. 318–19, 336–7, 366–7; Vol. 2, *Von der geplanten Landung in England bis zum Beginn des Ostfeldzuges (1. 7. 1940–21. 6. 1941)* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963), pp. 48–50, 57–8

