

Background: In this article, dated 22 August 1943, Goebbels argues that Germany is doing well. He makes vague promises of coming offensives and weapons, without having much to say. It is not one of his better articles.

The source: “Die Realitäten des Krieges,” *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1944), pp. 422-430.

The Realities of War

by Joseph Goebbels

Mature political judgment requires not only understanding, but also imagination. That is what generally is missing in those who shout their opinions the loudest. They take pleasure in balancing the war's accounts, which on close examination rarely holds up. That is particularly true at critical points in this struggle for existence. As Clausewitz said, there is a false wisdom that only wants to escape danger. In ordinary times one can easily talk of heroism, since it requires no burdens or dangers. Only real danger reveals a person's true character. Previously hidden traits, whether good or bad, reveal themselves. One must prove whether he is a hero or a coward by deeds, not words. It is well known that those who make the most noise in good times do the same in bad times. In good times they are filled with illusions, in bad times with hopelessness and pessimism. One can only hold them in contempt; they deserve nothing else, certainly nothing better. Thankfully, such people are a tiny minority by us, and they have no influence.

Many otherwise sensible people make the mistake of judging the overall state of a war by the difficulties that they personally face. That is all they see. They overlook the fact that most of the problems are the result of the war, and affect the enemy just as much. There are of course difficulties that affect only us, but they are mostly balanced by problems that only affect the enemy. On the whole, things balance each other out, and the crucial factor is which side devotes the most energy and confidence toward winning superiority over the other side. Faith plays a role in every great matter, for the individual as well as for the entire nation.

Since the beginning of the war, our enemy has been hard at work attempting to persuade us of things that do not correspond to the facts, but do exploit our national characteristics. We Germans have had much misfortune over our history, and are suspicious of a series of successes. When an occasional misfortune occurs, we incline toward a type of self accusation that only harms our activity and our self confidence. The National Socialist leadership is free of this German weakness. Our rise from a tiny party to power is clear proof that such weakness is not to be found in us. The German government's determination is clear in this great struggle for existence. The government sees things realistically and sensibly, as they are, but depends less on understanding than on imagination. Past history shows that it is always able to deal with the situation, and will do so in the future as well. No difficulty is unmasterable if a great people wishes to master it.

Our evaluation of the war is affected by the great victories of the past. They have given an impression of things that is often false. Many of us believed that one could survive such a great world struggle without having to master any crises. But that would be unnatural, not natural. We had to assume at the beginning that enormous problems would come, and view it as good fortune that we did so well during its first half. That is what happened. We broke the enemy's stranglehold on us at the war's beginning. If one wants to talk about the weakness of our position, it was then. We were compressed into our limited

territory, and had to begin by gaining breathing room. It was a miracle that we succeeded. There was real reason to fear when our enemies attacked us. The worst danger was removed by the victories of the war's first three years.

The correctness of this description is clear from the behavior of our soldiers. Every German's heart must beat proudly when he hears English or American reports that our troops in the East and the South are fighting like tigers, and are defending ground over a thousand kilometers from our borders. That is proof of the fact that the German soldier acts politically rather than chatters about politics like some folk back home. He knows what is going on. He knows that he owes it to his comrades, who have sacrificed their lives, to defend the ground they gained with every means possible. That is the guarantee of our eventual triumph. When someone doubtfully asks how we will gain victory in such a way, our answer is that that question is better asked of the enemy, for we have the prerequisites for victory in our hands, not they.

It is clear that the enemy camp is watching tensely to see how the German people react to recent developments. The morale of the warring nations is more important in this war than it was in any of its predecessors. The English and American newspapers carry long accounts every day about the internal situation in the Reich, full of speculations and vague hopes. One would have to be very stupid not to see that enemy air terror is aimed at destroying our morale, and at making the German people an ally of its enemies. It is disgraceful when here and there citizens becomes a tool of enemy propaganda, even if it is mostly unintentional. They do our cause great damage by encouraging the enemy to continue his blind terror against the German homeland, or even to increase it. We know that this happens only occasionally, but the enemy generalizes and uses it to support further actions against our civilian population. The best way to serve the fatherland is to do one's duty, believing loyally and unshakably in our great cause, and to allow no one to diminish his confidence in final victory.

As far as that great cause goes, it has firm foundations. We are not waging a war divorced from reality, nor do we seek to lead our nation from one illusion to another. We see the situation realistically, complete with its problems, but also with its opportunities. The German leadership recognizes not only today's opportunities, but also those of the near and more distant future. If we spoke openly of everything that we are preparing, or have in reserve, the doubters would likely be silenced. But our national interest keeps us from speaking of the future, or even of our current resources. There is already more chatter than is useful. At times when events become critical and one crisis follows another, it is more important than ever that the entire nation looks with assurance to the Führer, in whose hand its fate rests.

The German government always has a reason for its silence. It has never been silent because of uncertainty. More could be said than the layman can know. However, not only the German people, but also the enemy leadership thirsts for such knowledge. There is good reason why we withhold information that might alleviate people's concerns. We have to accept the unfortunate fact that the result is sometimes to leave the field free for rumors. But given the facts discussed here, such rumor-mongers may see how contemptible they are. They are cowardly and stupid at the same time. They could not do their job better if they were on the enemy's payroll. Note their lazy chatter, and box their ears at the appropriate moment.

Their chatter does lead the enemy to believe that our morale must be bad if we have to speak about it in this way. That is nonsense, but unfortunately those in London, Washington and Moscow believe it. It does not change the war situation, but does give the enemy camp hopes and illusions that do us no good, and that is something. The enemy's fantasies about our domestic situation are simply outrageous. Notice the difference: When 600,000 American miners go on strike for a week, the German press carries a five-line story about it. We do not believe the war will be determined by such events. But when five criminals here receive the just penalty for listening to enemy radio stations, the enemy press

concludes that a revolution is in progress. We happen to think that 600,000 striking miners are a greater threat to the U.S.A. than five criminal radio listeners are to us. Where are the illusions, and where the realities?

Understanding that is crucial. Only one capable of seeing things rightly can form a proper evaluation of the war situation, for he sees things as they are, not how the enemy wishes him to. It is better to hold a thousand kilometers of enemy territory than to hold a half dozen conferences between Churchill and Roosevelt. One is a fact, the other an expression of intentions and wishful thinking. What happens depends on us. One side never determines a war's outcome, unless it lays down its weapons. That is not only out of the question for us, but we are working day and night to ensure that we do not lack those weapons. And no one, thank God, doubts that the German people are ready to bear those weapons. What can happen to us if our hearts remain courageous? The enemy may bring misery to our cities, but that too will end. Ruined houses can be rebuilt, but not ruined hearts.

Was there ever a nation that had so favorable a position after five years of war as we do today? The front is unbroken. The homeland is morally and materially able to withstand the bombing terror. A river of war material flows from our factories. A new weapon against the enemy air attacks is being prepared. Countless able hands are working at it day and night. We have a hard test of patience before us, but the reward will come one day. The German farmer is bringing in a good harvest. There will be enough to guarantee our food supply. At the moment we are not showing the usual level of activity in a variety of military arenas, but we will be doing so in the foreseeable future. We have more than enough challenges, but each can be overcome. We must recall our great and good cause, to which the goddess of history cannot deny final victory. Our task is to do all we can every day, to show courage and bravery, a firm attitude, and deep German faithfulness.

This is the reality of the war. If we do our duty, that will prove stronger in the end than the illusions of our enemies. War is a matter of strength and will. He who is determined to fight in this spirit is assured of victory. He need only keep going. He must press onward through the thorns and thickets. There may be times when he cannot see the goal, but that is no proof that it is not there.

Tomorrow or the next day he may take the step that brings him again to shining clarity.