

Background: Goebbels began a weekly newspaper called *Das Reich* in 1940. He generally wrote the lead article each week, in which he took special pride. This essay is dated 14 June 1942. Goebbels discusses the Allied bombing of Germany. For a good discussion of Goebbels' wartime essays, see Bramsted's book [*Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*](#).

The source: "Der Luft- und Nervenkrieg," *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1943), pp. 344-350.

The Air War and the War of Nerves

by Joseph Goebbels

The war has reached a stage at which the enemy seems willing to use any means to change the currently unfavorable, even desperate, situation, and to bring about at least an acceptable conclusion. Seldom in the history of human warfare has there been a struggle for existence between peoples that was so unbalanced as this one. The Axis powers can look back on a long, almost unbroken, even breathtaking series, of proud victories, while the enemy can look back on misfortune after misfortune and defeat after defeat. Future historians will wonder how it was possible for their peoples to believe in a good outcome and a coming victory, despite eternal defeats along the way. The only explanation for their peculiar thinking is that their powers of judgment have been blinded by unscrupulous and lying propaganda.

The military possibilities remaining for the plutocratic-Bolshevist coalition seem extraordinarily limited at the moment. Those in London, Washington, and Moscow seek to cover themselves with clouds of mystery and respond to probing questions from large parts of their public with dark and threatening hints, but any knowledgeable observer knows that nothing is behind their words. They are caught in their own trap. The war they so carefully prepared is beginning to turn against them. They are able to do damage to their hated enemy, to attack his possessions or the working districts of his cities and villages, but that no longer is able to alter the war situation. Things are following their own laws.

Someone other than Mr. Churchill will have to rule England if London is not to seek to accomplish through blind and destructive terror that which it cannot achieve by fair and decent warfare. British newspapers are currently writing about the bombing attacks with unsurpassed cynicism. These discussions give us good insight into the

English national character, as well as an extraordinarily educational picture of that which would befall us were we to fall into the hands of the British-plutocratic ruling class. Thank God, what we see with brutal clarity is not a sign of strength, but rather of weakness and impotent rage. He who insults and threatens is always in the wrong. We have never thought it necessary to predict a dark and infernal end for England. We do know that its historical mistakes can lead to historical catastrophes. We also never threatened random bombing warfare against the civilian population for reasons of revenge or dark hatred. We will defend ourselves with the means that the enemy forces on us.

It is different with Mr. Churchill. He is apparently raging mad over his previous military defeats, and despite all the shouting is unable to open a second front in Europe to take the pressure off the Soviets. Were there even the least chance of that, his adventurous nature would surely make him seize the opportunity. Aside from everything else, he lacks the shipping tonnage. He knows as well as we that an attempted landing anywhere in Europe would quickly provide England with a second, and far worse, Dunkirk. He cannot risk such a defeat without causing a fatal crisis for the Empire. Given the increasing demands by the Bolshevists, he has no choice but to make dark threats and find less dangerous ways to satisfy the Soviets. His solution is to send the Royal Air Force on night attacks on the German civilian population.

We have never doubted that this type of warfare could do us serious damage. The question is whether it is able to significantly change the military situation, and if the results that Mr. Churchill promises can be achieved to any significant degree. I do not need to say that the German civilian population is suffering grievously under British terror. They know that they have the sympathy and warm support of the entire German people, who greatly admire their brave struggle. But London is mistaken if it believes it can by terror break German morale. We have said it a hundred times before and will say it a hundred times again: today's German people has nothing in common with the German people of 1918. Our morale breakdown then was a one-time exception, not the rule.

As nonsensical is the British presumption that one can seriously damage our armaments or foodstuffs production through such terroristic air attacks. The damage done is not sufficient to impair our war effort. If the British knew what they actually destroyed during their night attacks but rather than what they think they have destroyed, they would not place so high a value on the air war. They suffer enormous losses during their night missions. The losses are greater than they can sustain, even if Mr. Churchill fudges the figures by exaggerating the number of planes involved to reduce the percentage of planes lost. He can score some political points at home by doing this, but he cannot fool us. The enemy is not that choosy when it comes to numbers. A total of 305 people died in the big British night attack on Cologne on 30-

31 May. **[Goebbels's figure wasn't too far off. The actual death total was a little under 500 — although 5,000 were injured and over 12,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. Those figures Goebbels was not interested in revealing.]** This is certainly high, and the affected families feel deep pain because of Britain's random bombing. When, however, American and afterwards English newspapers speak of 20,000, one can see both what the enemy had hoped for, and how far their wishes were from the facts.

From the start of the war until 1 June 1942, a total of 7,430 people died during enemy bombing raids. We certainly do not want to downplay the pain these deaths caused. They also died for the freedom of the Reich. They stand in accusation before the English leadership, which has always been characterized by cynical brutality and certainly is living up to its reputation. However, the true scale of this number becomes clear when one realizes that in the last two and half years of peace, 15,039 Germans died in traffic accidents. We do not intend in any way to compare the significance of the deaths, only to put British boasting in the proper context.

Reports from all the cities bombed by the English are that civilian morale is holding firm. One hardly takes the pain caused by the terror attacks lightly — how could one! — but one feels in the front lines of our civil defense. People know precisely what Mr. Churchill is trying to do, and have no desire to do him a favor by being weak. The British strategy is too transparent to be successful, and besides that, the English have been all too open about their goal. One cannot hope to break civilian morale when one is cynical enough to announce that that is what one is doing, particularly when people know exactly what the consequences of weakness would be. Normally, the attacks England makes on us are returned promptly and proportionately. We do not like to do so, but Mr. Churchill leaves us no choice. The Führer warned him clearly in his last speech to the Reichstag, but Mr. Churchill still chose random bombing, and he will be paid back in the same coin. That is an unfortunate and painful method of warfare for both sides, but he who began it bears the responsibility.

Terror can be broken only by terror. Weakness only encourages and strengthens it. Terror and counter-terror cost lives, but in numbers far lower than would be the case if one gave in. Only force defeats force. As painful as it is to people who appreciate culture — and we consider ourselves a part of this slowly disappearing group — to see damage to such ancient historical and artistic monuments not only in Lübeck, Rostock and Cologne, but also in Bath, York, and Canterbury, it is not our fault, but that of the ruthless criminal who currently heads the British Empire. We know well enough that he lacks any sense for appreciating such things. He is one of those hardened and crude plutocratic types whose sole ambitions are money, the good life, and best of all, alcohol. It is England's misfortune to have him as its leader. Not only

the British Empire, but the whole of decent humanity must pay a dear price. Were it not for us, the world of culture would vanish.

We must therefore defend ourselves against his methods of warfare. Since we are determined to use the same brutal methods he is using to terrorize our civilian population, he will fail. His air war is above all a war of nerves. He is trying to shatter the morale of the civilian population in the areas subject to bombing. He does not care if it costs him more than it costs us. He is making an attempt that will fail in the same way as his other attempts. The sacrifices we must make will one day be rewarded. We have no choice but to accept them, and to repay them in kind as our world-wide war effort permits. The victims in England can complain to the source of their troubles very easily: Mr. Churchill.

It would do the Jewish press in New York and London too much honor to give any attention to their bloodthirsty commentaries on the air war and the war of nerves. They will have to pay for it with the extermination of their race in Europe, and perhaps far beyond. They are not to be taken seriously, for they represent their own interests, not those of England or America. We are waging war against enemies who threaten our very existence. We are fighting for everything dear to us. The war's victims will one day stand in worthy comparison to the size of the victory we will achieve. That can no longer be altered. Our enemies are in a position to postpone our victory for a period of time. But that will make the end even more inevitable.

Here, too, the old proverb is true: That which does not destroy us makes us stronger.

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