

**Background:** By summer 1943, Goebbels had trouble finding German victories to use in making propaganda. He had to find other ways to persuade Germans that the war was still winnable. Here, he suggests that morale can be of more importance than weapons. The essay is dated 7 August 1943.

**The source:** "Die Moral als kriegsentscheidender Faktor," *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1944), pp. 406-413.

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## Morale as a Decisive Factor in War

by Joseph Goebbels

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We are in the midst of a decisive period in the war. Using an unprecedented mass of weapons and psychological warfare, the enemy is attempting to capture positions that we won during the first half of this vast world struggle, and which are the foundation of our coming victory. That is the reason for the enormous material battles in the East, the renewed and pitiless attacks of the English and Americans in Sicily, and the brutal air attacks that the enemy is unleashing on the German homeland. The other side hopes to achieve decisive breakthroughs on the front and also to shatter the morale of the German people, which they think is not able to bear such strains. Such an interpretation of the military situation is no mere theory; the enemy admits it openly and unashamedly. They hope to force us to our knees by massive attacks from all directions and win final victory in a way that will spare protracted, difficult and bloody military operations. The war against our nerves naturally has a critical role. The enemy seems to have realized that agitation is having no success in this area, so it has turned to action.

These actions are consistent with the nature of Anglo-American plutocrats. During the First World War, they attempted to demoralize the German people by a ruthless starvation campaign against defenseless women and children. Today they are attempting the same thing by air terror against the German homeland. I do not deny that enemy air attacks have cost us much property and blood and cause difficulties of every manner. The enemy knows that as well as we do, since they went through something similar in the summer and fall of 1940, though the German Luftwaffe then attacked only military and industrial targets, but the enemy's attacks today are directed almost exclusively against the civilian population, and thereby our morale. The English hardly bother to deny that any longer. In fact, they claim that it will shorten the war and spare British blood. This simple and typical English way of thinking proves the brutal cynicism of the gentlemen on the other side of the Channel.

It is up to us to answer in the same way. Since at the moment we are not able to do that by massive counter attacks, which would be the most effective method, we must do it through defensive measures. There are two aspects: the military and the civilian. Everything militarily possible is being done, and will be intensified. Our military defenses have increased significantly, and are growing from day to day. The enemy experiences enormous losses during its attacks on the Reich which they might be able to withstand materially, but not from the personnel standpoint. We expect that these losses will not decrease, but rather increase as our defensive means improve. That can happen very quickly.

What we are experiencing in the air war is a test of nerves. The English withstood a test of nerves under much less favorable political and military conditions in 1940; we must withstand it in 1943. Just as the English government decided then to win the air war by radical means, including new weapons, we have made a similar decision. Naturally we cannot speak of their nature or the presumed date when they will be introduced, but that does not change the fact that they are slowly but surely being developed.

With regards to civil defense against enemy air terror, methods are either preventative or reparative. Sending children, the aged and nonworking women out of Berlin because we expect it to be the target of enemy air terror is an example of a preventative measure. That does not mean that Berlin is certain to be attacked, only that we think taking precautions to be wise. We are not conducting a complete evacuation. It is a planned partial evacuation that is being carried out in an orderly manner and is no cause for alarm.

The areas receiving and caring for citizens that have been evacuated are doing an important and difficult job. But we have already managed other difficulties. Those receiving the evacuees must have sympathy for them, and vice versa. The English press is claiming that these and similar measures are causing panic in Germany. Their public will have to pay for their error. We made a similar mistake in 1940, when the English government sent children to the countryside. Our hopes proved in vain. We therefore see no reason to avoid speaking openly about the matter. Things would be much worse if we did nothing. The war will not be won by wishing or illusions, but only through hard facts.

Our measures of civil defense reflect the rhythm of the enemy's methods of air terror. We announce them regularly to the public, and it is in everyone's interest to pay heed. The government is doing everything it can. These methods would be inadequate if the public did not do its part. Much can be done by staying calm, being courageous, and thinking clearly. We should never forget that we are dealing with temporary difficulties here, and that the enemy's attacks against us will pass, just as they have on the fronts in the East and South. Everyone needs to stay at his post and do his duty. One may be involved in active defense, the other in caring for the victims of enemy air terror. The more resolutely the people in the Homeland get to work, the more certain is success. The main burden of the war sometimes falls here, other times there, and each must prove himself when it is his turn.

That is also true for soldiers. At the front, periods of relative quiet alternate with ones of enormous, almost superhuman exertion and danger. At such times, the troops must keep their nerve, fight bravely, and stubbornly defend their position that loyal hands gave them. The enemy does not plan his actions for our comfort, but rather to wear us down. He tries in every possible way to attack, even to break through; that above all must be stopped.

The enemy cooks with water, too. The Soviets attack our front with gigantic masses of men and material, hoping to break into the Ukraine. They need it, since otherwise they cannot meet their need for food. The English and Americans storm against our front in Sicily, and accept serious losses in their air attacks, in order to break our morale. An American correspondent in London recently reported that the British people are weary of war, and are calling for victory to put an end to it. We must stop England from gaining such a victory, and that is our duty on all fronts, both abroad and at home. England has never won a war through a genuine military victory. It either sent other peoples to fight for it, or it broke the nerve of its enemies even when there was no prospect of military success. It is trying it again with us. Our task is to frustrate the attempt.

During such a phase of war, public morale is a decisive factor. During the Seven Years War, there were times when only the strength of its king rescued Prussia. Our present crisis is in no way as severe as Prussia's. We would have no right to claim the greatness of our age if we did not believe we could master the difficulties. Overcoming the dangers will be remembered, not the dangers themselves. No one will be forgiven by posterity for failing under particularly difficult circumstances. We will forget the difficulties we have from all sides the more time passes. We will remember only the ways in which we overcame them.

We consider it obvious that the soldier at the front keeps his cool in critical situations, and when the order comes leaves his protecting trench to storm the enemy's position. If he does not, we call him a coward. Still, every attack demands courage, bravery, cold-bloodedness, and a strong heart. We need

these same virtues in the homeland with regards to morale, and if it comes to that, physically as well. Our enemies are human. They can be beaten, even if it here or there seems difficult. London newspapers reported recently that our troops in Sicily were fighting like the Devil, and that the attacker had to pay for every meter of ground with streams of blood. German sons stand at their distant posts, and they prove through their unshakable heroism not only their physical, but also their moral courage. If our whole nation is filled with their spirit, the enemy can never defeat us.

None of us wants to minimize the severity of the air war against the German homeland. It is a severe trial. But we must pass the trial. The attacks of the enemy on our morale will fail in the face of our firm resolve, just as the storm of his weapons fails against the bravery of our front. We have become citizens of the world, and must behave accordingly. Friend and foe alike look our way each day and ask: Will they pass the test?

Our answer cannot be in doubt. The English no longer boast that their people can take more than we can. They face a nation that is determined to defend its life and freedom by all means, and which will end the great battle only when it has the victory. In the long run, such determination must be rewarded with victory. There will be hard times, but in them above all the nation has to prove its mettle. Everyone gives such proof. Our war morale is a matter of the individual, but also of the community. It is attacked by the enemy today, and we must all defend it.

Our nation has learned much from the past. Above all, it has learned never to trust a treacherous foe. This lesson is deep in our bones. Without wavering we know that a nation of brave men and sacrificing women, with an obedient and devoted youth, a nation that is risking its very existence in fighting for freedom, will gain it.