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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

# In the House of Rimmon: British Aid to the Soviet Union, June-September 1941

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 2012

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Abstract

British efforts to aid the Soviet Union in the early months of the war in the East are underexplored and simplified in the historiography of Allied supply to Russia during the Second World War. In fact, British leaders recognized within weeks of the German invasion that the Eastern Front was the most important front in the war against Nazi Germany and that the Soviets were likely to continue to resist for a long time. Britain then became increasingly committed to supplying the Soviets with material aid. Given the difficulties involved, and Soviet uncooperativeness, British aid prior to the Moscow Supply Conference was substantial and relatively swift. The expansion of aid into a large scale effort, later established on a lend-lease basis, had its origins in the evolution of British assessments and priorities over the summer of 1941.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who, in any way, helped me with the completion of this work. In particular, I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Alexander Hill and co-supervisor Dr. John Ferris. I would also like to thank my parents for supporting me during my lengthy years of schooling.

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## Introduction

On the evening of June 21, 1941, Winston Churchill strolled with his private secretary, John Colville, in his garden at Chequers. One thing had preoccupied his mind that evening more than any other, and Colville documented the conversation in his diary. A German attack on the Soviet Union, Churchill had said at dinner, was all but "certain" and Russia "will assuredly be defeated." Nevertheless, the Prime Minister indicated he would "go all out to help Russia." When the irony of the staunch anti-communist Churchill rushing to the defence of the Soviet Union became apparent, the Prime Minister famously remarked that he "had only one single purpose – the destruction of Hitler – and his life was much simplified thereby. If Hitler invaded Hell he would at least make a favourable reference to the Devil!"[1] At 7:30 AM the following morning, Anthony Eden, serving as Foreign Secretary once again, was awoken by the Prime Minister's valet, who announcing: "The Prime Minister's compliments and the German armies have invaded Russia," presented Eden with "a large cigar on a silver salver."[2] To use one of Churchill's idioms, one of the great "climacterics" of the Second World War had begun.

Until the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the advent of British aid to Russia, Anglo-Soviet relations had been a continual work in progress, climbing to one peak before falling into another valley. Britain had supported the White forces in the Russian Civil War while anti-communist politics and Soviet subversion of the British Empire had

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[1] Quoted from Colville's diary, June 21, 1941 in Martin Gilbert, Ed. *The Churchill War Papers Volume III: The Ever Widening War 1941* (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.). 832.
[2] Anthony Eden. *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd. 1965.). 270.

damaged relations in the 1920's. During this period there was no greater opponent of the Communist state than Winston Churchill who, in a speech of September 1924, declared that "judged by every standard which history has applied to governments, the Soviet Government of Russia is one of the worst tyrannies that has ever existed in the world."[3] He said this before the publication of the Zinoviev letter in October of that year, which led to a conservative victory in the British election and further inflamed passions. Relations remained stagnant and took another fall with the ARCOS affair of 1927. In July of that year, Joseph Stalin authored an article on the threat of war, writing: "The fact that the initiative in this matter of creating a united imperialist front against the USSR has been assumed by the British bourgeoisie and its general staff, the Conservative Party, should not come as any surprise to us." Stalin pointed out several "blows" that Great Britain had landed against the Soviet Union (including the raid on the ARCOS offices), and stressed the need to increase "defensive capacity" in response.[4] By 1933 the Foreign Office had labelled the Soviet Union as "the great enigma" in British foreign policy debates.[5]

When trade relations were re-established between the two countries in the early 1930's (a Labour government had come to power in Britain in 1929), the Metro-Vickers crisis of 1933 set them back. Even more, conservative politicians were highly concerned about left wing extremism in their own countries, and the role of the Soviet Union in supporting it. The rise of Fascism was often seen as a logical, perhaps even necessary,

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[3] Quoted in P.M.H. Bell, *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union 1941-1945* (NY: Chapman and Hall. 1990). 29.
[4] Quoted in Alexander Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-45: A Documentary Reader* (Routledge, 2009). 7.
[5] Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939.* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 5-6.

response. When Nancy Astor addressed the House of Commons in 1937, she argued "when we talk about rearming it is absurd only to talk about the menace of Germany...Russia has an army far greater than Germany's, and she has an air force far greater than Germany's and furthermore Russia has a policy of an international war. An international world war is what she wants."[6] Michael Carley posits that "interwar anti-communism was an important cause of the Second World War" and that this was the "root failure of Anglo-Franco-Soviet cooperation against Nazism."[7] While his case may be overstated, it has much truth. Consecutive Foreign Office Permanent Under Secretaries did seek to contain Soviet Russia.[8]

When the threat from Nazi Germany began to eclipse that of Soviet Russia, a new attempt at rapprochement between London and Moscow was made. However, the Munich crisis of 1938 demonstrated that Britain and other status quo powers would not enlist the Soviet Union in collective security schemes. The very states that once had served to quarantine the Soviet Union now limited its value against Germany by preventing any direct Soviet intervention. Western leaders doubted Soviet military power anyway, and saw little reason to take negotiations with it particularly seriously. As war loomed, the Soviet Union, disillusioned with collective security and wishing to buy time for its military rearmament and reorganization programs, drifted into a temporary pact with Nazi Germany. When war started, the importance of Soviet raw materials (or at least the

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[6] Quoted in N.J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators 1935-1940* (NY: Routledge, 1997). 37.
[7] Michael Jabara Carley, *1939: The Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 1999). 256.
[8] Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia...,* 27.

perception of their significance) led to the Soviet Union being seen as a leak in the blockade against Germany by Britain and France. The Soviet invasion of Finland during the winter of 1939/40 did not help matters as the British nearly intervened to aid Finland. The situation changed again after the fall of France in June 1940, which left Britain without an ally on the continent to complement its command of the seas and therefore little choice but to court the Kremlin once again. As Gabriel Gorodetsky argues, Stalin thought the British position poor and peace between Britain and Germany a real possibility, and so the more Churchill and others raised the alarm over Hitler's intentions in the East, the more suspicious of British motives Stalin became.[9] Hitler's attack on the USSR in June 1941 decided that issue, but raised the question of how far to aid the Soviets, who had been an uncooperative element in previous diplomatic efforts and whose ability to resist German military might was widely questioned. The issue was complicated by British dislike and mistrust of the USSR. Whether Britain perceived Soviet resistance as a temporary respite or a long term commitment, depended on whether Russia would survive the year.

Ultimately, Germany failed to destroy the Soviet Union in 1941 and it became the recipient of aid from the Western Allies. Eventually this was officially recognized as on a lend-lease basis. The subject of Lend-lease in the Second World War has received much attention. For a long time the significance of Western Allied supply to the war fighting capacity of the Soviet Union has been debated. For many years, the consensus followed the Soviet history of the war, which admitted that western aid provided some crucial materials but emphasized the Soviet origin of most weapon systems (anywhere from 88-98%

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[9] Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 1999). 169-170.

depending on the category).[10] It has, however, become popular in recent years, even amongst Russian historians, to rehabilitate the contribution of the Western Allies to the Soviet war effort in certain areas, particularly motor transport and other logistical aspects.[11] Such works, however, focus on the period of lend-lease following the Moscow supply conference of September/October 1941, or on the diplomacy and politics of the Anglo-American relationship with the Soviet Union. The literature becomes denser for the period when the United States became the chief source of supply for Russia following the first protocol period (October 1941 – June 1942), and in the later years of the war. The earlier period remains neglected. In 1979, Leon Martel wrote that "While the Russians fought back from the walls of Moscow during the most perilous days of the eastern front they were virtually unaided by the West."[12] Recently, Alexander Hill has argued that the British contribution of material to the Soviets in the late months of 1941, specifically during the battle for Moscow, was a significant factor at the front, particularly in the form of tanks.[13] Joan Beaumont remarks that with such troubled relations between the two countries, "the wholeheartedness with which Britain supported the Soviet Union straight after the German attack is remarkable."[14] Additionally, sometimes it is noted that this aid strained already

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[10] Roger Munting, "Lend-Lease and the Soviet War Effort," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Jul., 1984). 495.
[11] See V.F. Vorsin, "Motor Vehicle Transport Deliveries Through 'Lend-Lease,' *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1997). 153-175.
[12] Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans, and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. 1979). 38.
[13] Alexander Hill, "British Lend Lease Aid and the Soviet War Effort, June 1941 June 1942," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Jul., 2007). 777.
[14] Joan Beaumont, *Comrades in Arms: British Aid to Russia 1941-1945* (London: Davis-Poynter Limited, 1980). 10

overtaxed British resources. As Churchill later claimed, "we were compelled to make very large diversions of our weapons and vital supplies of all kinds, including rubber and oil."[15]

None the less, the difficulty in the provision of supply, and the lack of British operations to relieve the Red Army, caused contention after Barbarossa. The Soviets demanded material and a second front in Western Europe. The British pondered the former and decided the latter was impossible, and this is how the literature on Lend-Lease or Anglo-Soviet relations defines the early dynamic. John Charmley concludes that "adopting the attitude that the 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' allowed the British to stall whilst the war in the east brought the Nazis into western Russia."[16] Brian Farrell declares that "the Soviets were unable to stem the advance and unprepared to forge effective co-operation with their new ally. The British were equally unable or unready to establish effective co-operation."[17] Recrimination from these difficult circumstances dominates the early literature. Churchill too had harsh words for the Soviet leadership: "Their first impulse and lasting policy was to demand all possible succour from Great Britain and her Empire."[18]

Greater arguments occur over how far British decision makers genuinely wished to aid the Soviet Union. David Carleton argues that Churchill's thinking was "based on his initial twin assumptions: that the Soviets would soon leave the War and the Americans would soon join it." He "showed no serious interest" in involving British troops and moved seriously towards working with the Soviets only because the Americans were not entering

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[15] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Bantam/Houghton Mifflin, 1950). 333.
[16] John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940-57* ( NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995). 26.
[17] Brian P. Farrell, *The Basis and Making of British Grand Strategy, 1940-1943*. (NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998). 161.
[18] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. 320.

the war.[19] Martin Kitchen emphasizes that the War Cabinet thought the Soviets were unfriendly and likely to be swiftly defeated. British decision makers viewed the German invasion of Russia as a "temporary breathing space," their opinion changing only once it became clear that the Soviets were resisting effectively.[20]

Farrell, on the other hand, sees British strategy as active, denying that it consisted of little more than trying to lure the Americans into the war. Instead, he emphasizes the centrality of the "wear down" strategy, even if Russian entry into the war threw it into some chaos.[21] Eliot Cohen sees Churchill as believing that the Soviets would be more "resilient" than many expected, and prepared to supply Russia at great cost, despite rejecting Soviet demands for a second front.[22] Like Charmley, Abe Roof argues that British decision makers remained indecisive until September, when, alarmed by the accusations of Soviet officials and the possibility of a Soviet collapse or a separate peace with Germany, they took firm action. Until then, they "gave no appreciable assistance" to the Soviets.[23] John Langer sees military officers, civil servants and politicians as divided over aid to the Soviet Union, with the civilians (whose business was "bargaining") generous while soldiers remained concerned with the strength of their own forces.[24]

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[19] David Carleton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (NY: Manchester University Press, 2000). 85-86.
[20] Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War* (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1986). 65-69.
[21] Brian P. Farrell, "Yes, Prime Minister: Barbarossa, Whipcord, and the Basis of British Grand Strategy, Autumn 1941," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Oct., 1993). 600-601.
[22] Eliot A. Cohen, *Churchill and Coalition Strategy in World War II*, in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). 54.
[23] Abraham M. Roof, *Waltzing Matildas: British Strategy and Lend-Lease Aid to the Soviet Union 1941-42* (MA thesis, University of Calgary, Canada, 2007). 7, 10.
[24] John Daniel Langer, "The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission and the Debate over Unconditional Aid for the Soviet Union," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jul., 1979). 465.

Certainly Churchill, his keen interest in far flung schemes re-awoken, desired to provide real assistance to the Soviet Union, despite initial doubts over the longevity of resistance. As Martin Folly notes, Churchill shifted to a belief in aid even while the Foreign Office and the service departments still were reserved.[25] Yet even he recognized the limits of what could be done. As he wrote after the war, "I was well aware that in the early days of our alliance there was little we could do, and I tried to fill the void by civilities."[26] All told, the place of the Soviet Union in British strategic decision making during the early months after Barbarossa remains enigmatic. As the official British strategic history of the war states "It cannot be said that the impending extension of the war influenced British strategy. Alike its outbreak and its outcome were too uncertain."[27] The question of Soviet survival certainly influenced British decision making, although to what extent is a matter of debate. Victor Rothwell argues that "Scepticism about the Soviet Union's survival prospects had curiously little impact on British relations with Russia" and that aid got underway relatively quickly and smoothly.[28] In fact, this was a key question for the British in June/July 1941, as it was a necessary precondition for aid. When, in late July, Soviet survival seemed likely, aid began to be promised at an increasing tempo. The official history of British foreign policy during the war couches things in political terms, making British policy sound far simpler than it was:

> The political history of Anglo-Russian relations in the first year of the German attack is thus largely a history of increasing friction; the

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[25] Martin H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union, 1940-45* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000). 24-25.
[26] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. 327.
[27] J.R.M. Butler, *Grand Strategy: Volume II September 1939 – June 1941* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Officer, 1957). 544.
[28] Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War 1941-1947* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1982). 80-82.

> Russian claims upon their allies came more and more into the foreground; the claims were increasingly embarrassing because they could not be met either in the field of military action or by promises to accept the Russian views about a post-war settlement in eastern and central Europe. British policy aimed at doing everything possible, within the available resources, to maintain Russian resistance, and to satisfy Russian suspicions about the post-war settlement. Even so, the Russians were not satisfied.[29]

There certainly was political friction, it began long before Barbarossa and never ended. However, this was not the dominant narrative during 1941. Instead, it was the growing quantity of aid that was being given to the Soviet Union by Britain and the United States, and the decreasing conditions attached to it. The post war settlement was a source of irritation, but it was peripheral to the waging of the war itself and not directly tied to supply. Additionally, the British decision to do everything possible to aid the Soviets was not made immediately, but evolved during the summer of 1941.

Within the historiography, British assistance to Russia has been overshadowed by later American aid, while the early months of the war have been underexplored, usually treated from a diplomatic and political perspective. When British material aid to the Soviet Union is mentioned, usually it is derided as little more than a gesture, without a sophisticated explanation for its extent and timing. British decision makers are sometimes seen as having been unserious in aiding the Soviets until much later in 1941. The aid that was given, or considered, in the early months of the war, both lethal and non lethal, rarely is enumerated. Indeed, British decision making frequently is presented as indecisive during the summer, until the Moscow Supply Conference forced Great Britain into making real commitments. The literature focuses on politics and strategic decision making, but only

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[29] Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume II* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971). 5.

addresses the question of material aid after the supply conference, thus providing a flawed understanding of British policy by omitting its evolution over the summer of 1941.

This dissertation looks at the British decision to aid the Soviet Union in the summer and autumn of 1941, focusing on the period before the Moscow Supply Conference, when the survival of the Soviet Union was in question and British resources scant. I begin by exploring British perceptions of the Red Army and diplomatic experience with the Soviets prior to the war in order to better understand British decisions in the opening weeks of the conflict, and to establish that British aid to the Soviet Union had its origins even before the beginning of the Soviet-German war. British aid can be divided into several periods and chapters two through four will follow this outline. In June and July, British decision makers appreciated that the Soviets would not collapse, but were resisting stubbornly and would continue to do so. This, together with the recognition of the significance of the Eastern Front, meant that preconditions for aid were met. August saw aid evolve into a full out effort to re-equip Russian armies by Great Britain and, increasingly, the United States. This occurred despite uncooperativeness from the Soviets who failed to provide information that the British wanted in order to create a working relationship. The quantity of aid was limited by practical considerations, most significantly the inadequacies of British resources and shipping. While British efforts during the summer, both in terms of aid and direct military action, did not yield substantial results on the battlefield, they were significant given the material available to Great Britain and British need in other regions and on other fronts. Indeed, by sending equipment to Russia, Britain was sacrificing her position elsewhere. September saw new Soviet requests and an expansion of existing British commitments

rather than any sort of paradigm shift. The Moscow Conference simply codified policy that had evolved over the summer.

## Chapter One:

## The Lion and the Bear: Britain and the Soviet Union, 1938-1941

During attempts to negotiate with the Soviet Union from 1938-41, Anglo-Soviet relations suffered several swings and complications arising from diplomatic pragmatism, popular opinion, ideology, perceptions of Soviet power and circumstance. After the great purge, the Red Army was seen as an impotent mass with significant defensive capability, but unable to intervene meaningfully in Central Europe because of hostile neighbours in Eastern Europe. British politicians were sceptical about cooperating with the Soviets. Perceiving that western overtures were unserious and wanting to avoid being caught in entangling agreements, Stalin opted for an alliance of convenience with Nazi Germany. The following chapters will chart the course and nature of British perceptions of Soviet military power, British strategy and Anglo-Soviet relations in the period leading to Barbarossa, and the earliest steps to aid the Soviet Union.

In 1938, with the great purge in full swing, General von Bock described the Red Army as an "inert military machine."[30] This was a startling pronouncement, since only a few years earlier the Red Army had led military innovation, being the first to introduce mass armoured formations and parachute infantry. Under the command of Chief of Staff Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Red Army reacted to the legacy of the First World War by developing the concept of "Deep Battle." This developed into the operational theory of "Deep Operations" which conceived of using mass armoured formations to operate

[30] David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: the Red Army on the Eve of World War* (University Press of Kansas, 1998). 31-32.

independently, penetrating breaches in the front and devastating the opponents' rear areas (it should not be confused with the German concept of operations that became known as "Blitzkrieg," as the Soviets generally perceived war in attritional, socio-political terms."Deep operations" had mostly limited operational aims). With Soviet heavy industry increasing in scope, the USSR amassed a vast arsenal of equipment to provision its enormous military establishment.

In 1933 a Japanese training manual entitled "How to fight the Soviets" described Russian soldiers as brittle, lacking in initiative and dangerous only in defence, because of their inability to coordinate effective offensive operations.[31] The Japanese Army would suffer as a result of this overconfidence in August 1939. The comments of observers illustrate the subsequent transformation of the Red Army from a foot and hoof force to a modern military machine. The rise of Nazi Germany encouraged the British to begin re-evaluating Soviet military capabilities, seen in the early 1930's as still being marred by traditional Russian inefficiency.[32] General Ismay, the British officer responsible for collecting intelligence on Russia from 1933-36, viewed the Red Army as rapidly modernising and improving, before being undone by the purges.[33] General Wavell, who observed the 1936 manoeuvres, found the Red Army to be well-equipped, particularly with tanks, practitioners of modern concepts of mechanized warfare and the tactical use of aircraft and parachutists, if unsophisticated in its command and control and tactical

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[31] Edward J. Drea, *Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat 1939, Leavenworth Papers; no 2*. (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981). 30-31, 87.
[32] Keith Neilson, "Pursued by a Bear: British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1922-1939," *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 28, no. 2. (August 1993). 208.
[33] Hastings Lionel Ismay, *The Memoirs of General the Lord Ismay* (London: Heinemann, 1960). 224.

doctrine.[34] The following year the American military attaché in Moscow, Lieutenant Colonel Faymonville, reported that foreign observers of these manoeuvres "were much impressed" by the mass use of tanks and parachutists.[35]

In 1937, however, the great purge quickly spread throughout the Red Army. Along with most senior officers, 91% of regimental commanders and most members of military district staffs and the chiefs of training schools all were purged. This turnover caused an early graduation of training schools, only for these graduates to become victims themselves. 60 of 138 early graduates of the Voroshilov general staff academy class of 1937 were themselves subsequently shot.[36] Unsurprisingly, on the eve of war the Red Army was led by hopelessly unqualified officers at all levels, promoted primarily for political reliability, but unlikely to show initiative in the field. Meanwhile, the declining quality of the officer corps was exacerbated by the dramatic expansion of the Red Army in the threatening international atmosphere of the late thirties.

The consequences of gutting the officer corps was hardly lost on foreign observers, nor was shoddy Soviet performance in the field. On June 18, 1937, the British embassy in Moscow reported on the trial and execution of Tukhachesvky and other officers. Quoting Stalin on the need for "political orthodoxy," they noted that "the cost of re-establishing orthodoxy in the army, as far as its technical efficiency and the competence of the higher leadership are concerned, may prove to be a heavy one, but it will be paid." The British

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[34] James S. Herndon, *British Perceptions of Soviet Military Capability, 1935-9*, in *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983). 302-303.
[35]Cited in David M. Glantz, "Observing the Soviets: U.S. Army Attaches in Eastern Europe During the 1930's" *The Journal of Military History*. Vol. 55. No. 2. (April 1991). 165.
[36] Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*...29-30.

military attaché, Colonel Firebrace, wrote that in "recent years the Red Army, under the leadership of such commanders as Tukhachevski and others, had made great strides towards efficiency." Their removal meant that "initiative and originality of thought, essential qualities in a high commander, are likely to be conspicuously absent, being qualities too dangerous to be considered desirable in a Red Army Commander." To Firebrace, the charges against the accused were "too staggering, too fantastic, to be believed" while the promotion of Marshal Budenny and others indicated that "political reliability is now the highest qualification for high command."[37] In June 1937 Faymonville wrote: "morale has received a serious blow...if the allegations against the accused were correct, an appalling amount of treasonable activity must be honeycombing the army; if the allegations were not correct, the government must have been and must now be badly misguided in its relationship with the Red Army."[38]

The reintroduction of the dual command system, putting commissars into the field to complement military officers, reinforced the perception of the Red Army as being either riddled with traitors or, too independent for its own good. In either case, observers held that the Red Army had declined in quality. One British Foreign Office observer described shambolic Soviet operations along the Manchukuo border in 1938 as "a very poor show."[39] In March 1939 Lieutenant Colonel E. Villaret, the U.S. military attaché in Belgrade, wrote that "prior to the events of September 1938, the world was convinced that the Red Army was a potent argument in support of Soviet politics," but combat against the Japanese at

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[37] Moscow to Foreign Office, June 18, 1937. FO 371/21104/N3177
[38] Cited in Glantz, "Observing the Soviets..." 178.
[39] Herndon, *British Perceptions*...306-307.

Tchang-Feng exposed Soviet performance as "unsatisfactory" in almost every category.[40] Faymonville concluded that "the serious weakening of the effectiveness of the Red Army will not be lost upon Germany and Japan."[41] Nor was it, particularly given experience with Imperial Russian armies between 1904 and 1918. In September 1940, General Franz Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, noted the degeneration in the Red Army: "Improving, but will take four years to reach its former level." On December 5, with Soviet armies becoming bogged down in Finland, he wrote that "the Russian is inferior...when the Russian army is battered once, the final disaster is unavoidable."[42]

Despite this, foreign opinion of the Red Army's war fighting capability was mixed. Western observers could best view the Red Army in action during the war in Finland in 1939/40. Thanks to Stalin's meddling, the invasion was launched on a broad front, with inadequate forces (the formations of the Leningrad Military District and some reserve units), at the beginning of winter. Progress was glacial, casualties heavy, Finnish defences strong and their resistance determined. The Finns rated half of Soviet troops as poor in quality, while others "conduct themselves very well in action, attacking bravely and skilfully and showing considerable tactical ability."[43] In February, however, Marshal Timoshenko oversaw a reinforcement and reorganisation of Soviet forces, as well as changes in tactics and operational goals. An American correspondent in Helsinki admired the Red Army's ability to learn from its mistakes, and launch a new offensive on the heels

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[40] Cited in Glantz, "Observing the Soviets..." 181.
[41] Cited in Glantz, "Observing the Soviets..." 179.
[42] Franz Halder, *The Private War Journal of Generaloberst Franz Halder, Chief of the General Staff of the Supreme Command of the German Army (OKH): 14 August 1939 to 24 September 1942 Volume V*, (Microfilm) University Publications of America, 117, 182.
[43] Cited in Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*...34.

of futile bloodletting along the Mannerheim line and the forests and frozen marshes of the north.[44] Whatever the quality of their leadership and tactics, Soviet soldiers demonstrated cohesion and staying power (and possibly fear of political superiors). During the entire war, from November to March, the Finns took only 5, 486 prisoners,[45] representing only about 1.65% of the 333,000 Soviet casualties during the war (over half of these were frostbite cases), an astonishingly low figure.[46] British analysis repeated the focus on the staying power of Soviet troops, their ability in defence and to endure hardship.

In November 1939, British Military Intelligence collected reports on the Red Army's efficiency from its invasion of Eastern Poland and the Baltic States. Though admitting the limitations of its sources, the paper painted a mixed picture of the Red Army. In terms of leadership, observers noted the "low standard of intelligence and slovenly appearance of the officers, though some individual officers of armoured units made a satisfactory impression." In Lvov, Soviet officers impressed the Poles by their speedy consumption of "vast quantities of food," although the Poles were themselves "no mean trenchermen." According to one Estonian traffic control official, a Russian officer who came to him for directions "was so bad at map reading that he could easily have sent him back to Russia."

Conversely, "on the whole observers appear to have been favourably impressed by the armament of the regular troops and especially by the number of medium tanks."

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[44] Carl van Dyke, "The Timoshenko Reforms: March – July 1940." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 9. No. 1. 78.
[45] Roger R. Reese, "Lessons of the Winter War: A Study in the Military Effectiveness of the Red Army, 1939-1940." *The Journal of Military History* Vol. 72, No. 3 (July 2008). 832.
[46] G.F. Krivosheev, Ed. *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997). 65.

Transport and logistics were weak although "one is left with the impression that the Russian genius for piecemeal improvisation will always carry them through to a strictly limited extent." The offensive value of the Red Army was "low" against European troops, although "it would be foolish to belittle the defensive value of the Red Army." Noting the success of Soviet mechanized forces against the Japanese, though not the planning and operational capabilities that made it possible, the paper reported that "the strength of the army lies in its numbers and in a considerable quantity of good equipment." The army's weaknesses were in leadership and administration which rendered it "a somewhat amorphous mass" which "may be capable of taking hard blows" but less capable in "delivering them."[47]

A manual produced by the War Office in March 1940 further illustrated the damage done to the Red Army in the eyes of British observers. Echoing Firebrace, the manual argued that political reliability was being put ahead of efficiency. The purge resulted in "eight of the most efficient and best known senior commanders being executed and a great number of others being removed from their appointments...the truth of the matter was, possibly, a fear by Stalin that the army had become so independent of political control as to make it potentially dangerous to him." This fear was contextualized by pointing out the poor conditions that existed in the country and the danger of the army sympathizing with the people. The manual explained specific failures in Red Army performance during the war in Finland. Despite attempts to encourage initiative, dogmatic fidelity to training material was continued as "the natural tendency of the Slav, when faced with a complex

[47] "The Red Army." Military Intelligence memorandum, November 22, 1939. WO 193/642

situation, is to do nothing." As a result, "lack of initiative has been very marked and commanders in all grades have generally displayed serious inability to deal with unexpected situations, and a tendency to adhere rigidly to the teaching laid down in the manuals, irrespective of the particular circumstances obtaining at the moment." Despite this, Soviet infantry had value in defence, as "the speed with which the infantry dug themselves in as soon as they were checked was remarkable, and it was evident that Soviet commanders would never abandon any ground they had won even if it entailed holding a most unsuitable defensive position." The Red Army also had a large park of armoured fighting vehicles, estimated at 10,000 in 1939, in which it "has a child-like faith" and used "in very large numbers in support of every major attack quite irrespective of whether the terrain is suitable for the action of such weapons."[48]

By spring 1941, when a showdown between Russia and Germany was seen as imminent, these assessments remained relatively unaltered. On May 31, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIC) generated an appraisal of Soviet military strength for the War Cabinet with similarly mixed views. It reasserted that the Red Army's "value for war is low" because of old equipment, bad maintenance, lack of initiative, poor coordination and poor leadership. Yet, "they are, however, at their best in defence, and, on land, have vast territories on which to fall back." Morale within the army was decent. "The only recent experience was in Finland where, in the first months, the Soviet forces showed little sign of a break in morale in spite of failure and appalling discomfort," while early failures

[48] "Notes on the Red Army 1940." War Office, March 1940. WO 287/135

"were, in some measure at least, due to the weather and the difficulties of the country."[49] On June 9, the JIC held: "A decisive factor in Germany's choice of policy may be the opinion of the Soviet Army held by her General Staff. That opinion is believed to be an unfavourable one. The campaign in Finland showed that the Russian soldier is still a fine fighter, but the Germans will reckon that the combination of armoured divisions and air support in attack can overcome this traditional stubbornness." However, "there is no doubt that steps have been taken to remove many of the defects in the army and air force which the Finnish war revealed."[50] These comments challenge conventional views that poor performance in Finland dominated western observation of the Red Army. On June 16, the War Cabinet concluded that "it was impossible for any foreigner to estimate the military efficiency of the Russian armed forces. The Army was in good heart. It possessed a considerable quantity of armoured fighting vehicles, but their quality was unknown." Sir Stafford Cripps, the British ambassador in Moscow, did offer his own opinion, which was that the Russian military "might break down owing to failure of organisation and supply."[51]

British analysts also attempted to assess the size of the Red Army which, on May 31 they estimated at 228 divisions and 79 tank brigades, which "implies a total of some 3.5 million men and some 18,000 tanks. Behind this there is a vast reserve of trained man-power." These tanks were thought to be sound, though poorly maintained, and the figure of 18,000 suggested either an impressive production of some 8,000 tanks since the 1939 estimate of 10,000 or that the latter was a substantial underestimation. Together with the

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[49] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, May 31, 1941. WO 208/1761
[50] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, June 9, 1941. FO 371/29483/N2906
[51] War Cabinet Conclusions, June 16, 1941. CAB 65/22/26

Red Army Air Force, estimated to have 6,400 combat aircraft, the sheer quantity of equipment would be "embarrassing" if the Germans invaded.[52] These figures were not entirely accurate. In fact, the Russians had 303 divisions, (and many independent units), totalling 5.7 million regulars, by spring 1941 (though, for various reasons, no one was aware of the numerous divisions forming along the Dnepr and Dvina rivers nor the size of the Soviet mobilization in spring 1941) with some 14 million trained or semi-trained men available for call up.[53] The Red Army possessed 19,533 aircraft[54] and 23,700 tanks of which 2,000 were of the newest design (the T-34/KV series – the best tanks anywhere in 1941). The rest were older, though the bulk of them were still competitive with models employed by the Germans in 1941.[55] In comparison, German estimates put the Red Army at 203 ½ divisions, 46 armoured/motorized brigades and 8,000 aircraft.[56] As Halder's comments suggest, German planning afforded little thought to mobilized reserve forces. While the British underestimated the size of the Red Army Air Force, they did have a much better idea of the scale of Soviet forces, particularly armour, than the Germans did.

British authorities also assessed the possible outcomes of a German invasion of the USSR. British estimates emphasized that Soviet resources might embarrass invaders as would the defensive value of the Red Army and the sheer size of the country itself. Supply issues stemming from Russia's poor road network and unique rail gauge were noted by the

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[52] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, May 31, 1941. WO 208/1761
[53] Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*...11, 13.
[54] Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*...13.
[55] David M. Glantz. *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941-1943* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005). 247. Most of the Soviet tank park was in storage rather than active service in June 1941.
[56] Department of the Army, "The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations (1940-1942)," *Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-261a* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, March 1955.). 42.

JIC in May.[57] The domestic effects of a German invasion also were considered. On January 6, 1941, Firebrace told the Director of Military Intelligence, General Davidson, that "a war in defence of their country against Germany would have the full approval Russian people [sic] and would probably unite dissatisfied elements behind Government."[58] By late May the JIC, anticipating that the Soviets would use "every means" available to avoid war by giving concessions to the Germans, noted that while Germany could "quickly overrun the Ukraine and reach the Caucasian oilfields," such an attack would benefit the Soviet government by assisting it in "strengthening its hold except upon those parts actually occupied by the Germans."[59]

As to how long Soviet resistance would last, opinion either accepted what intelligence indicated was German expectation (6-8 weeks),[60] or else was simply a guess. Harold Nicolson, serving in the Ministry of Information, stated on June 22 that Russia would be defeated in three weeks. Two days later, Nicolson claimed that the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for War said that 80% of War Office experts thought Russia would be "knocked out" in 10 days, resulting in a great German victory.[61] The Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, was "prepared for headlong collapse of the Red Army and Air Force. On the other hand, it is possible that they may do much better than we think."[62] General Sir Alan Brooke, commander of the Home Forces, later claimed that "my

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[57] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, May 31, 1941. WO 208/1761
[58] Military Attaché Moscow to D.M.I., January 6, 1941. WO 208/1758
[59] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, May 23, 1941. FO 371/29483/N2893
[60] "G.A.F. Intentions." Government Code and Cypher School intelligence summary, May 31, 1941. HW 13/2
[61] Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-1964*, ed. Stanley Olson (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd. 1980). 213.
[62] Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-45*, ed. Ben Pimlott (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1986). 233.

own opinion at the time, and an opinion that was shared by most people, was that Russia would not last long, possibly 3 or 4 months, possibly slightly longer."[63] Ismay related that General Dill was not alone in his opinion that the "Germans would go through them like a hot knife through butter."[64] The War Cabinet conclusions of June 16 related that diplomatic circles in Moscow believed that Russia could not hold out for longer than three or four weeks. "By the end of that time the enemy might be in Leningrad, Moscow and Kieff [sic]." Interestingly, however, the War Cabinet noted that western Russian armies could retreat to the East, and that "militarily Siberia was a separate entity from European Russia" and "in all probability the Russian Armies in Eastern Siberia could hold their own against a Japanese attack. They were regarded as the most efficient of the Russian Armies."[65] None the less, Churchill probably summarized prevailing British opinion when he told Dill on June 22, "I suppose they [the Russians] will be rounded up in hordes."[66]

Several trends dominated the British perception of the Red Army from the late 1930's until June 1941. The purges, together with lacklustre Soviet performance in the field, caused a devaluing of Soviet military power, just as the German crisis reached its climax. Previous experience with Russian military forces and beliefs about Russian national character undoubtedly influenced this view as well. British observers saw the Red Army in traditional national terms: as a mass of stoic Slavic peasants led by incompetent despots. Simultaneously, however, British sources reckoned the Red Army to be

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[63] Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939-1945*, ed. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001.). 166.
[64] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...225.
[65] War Cabinet Conclusions, June 16, 1941. CAB 65/22/26
[66] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. 313.

formidable on the defensive and impressive in size. British estimates were far better than German in assessing the size of Soviet armoured forces, the "vast" reserves available and the relative strength of morale and cohesion. British intelligence estimates also afforded the Soviet Union a strategic depth that the Germans did not by indicating the size of Soviet territory and by emphasizing that a German invasion would rally the population around the regime. Herndon concludes that British assessments from 1935-1939 consistently portrayed the Red Army as formidable to an invader but of questionable effectiveness in the offensive role.[67] Despite poor Soviet performance in 1939-40, this concept remained central to British perception of Soviet power until June 22, 1941. British observers were pessimistic about the prospect of effective Russian resistance to a German invasion, but this owed more to an overestimate of German capabilities than an underestimate of Soviet powers of resistance. Observers offered different estimates for the duration of Soviet resistance, each implying that his time frame was widely accepted. In reality, intelligence reports refused to make such predictions, and these impressions spoke mostly to the British sense of inferiority following the French debacle than to anything else. As Kitchen summarizes, British military intelligence on the Soviet Union was not a priority and therefore largely guesswork.[68] This guesswork was the product of perceived national characteristics and superficial observations that fit within a version of the Russian steamroller framework modified by the experience of the First World War and the triumph of Communism.

This intelligence picture was painted in a period of shifting political winds for the concerned parties. For a time, in 1938 and 1939, it appeared as if the Soviet Union and the

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[67] Herndon, *British Perceptions*...312.
[68] Kitchen, *British Policy*...44.

status quo powers might close ranks to smother Nazi Germany. In this drama, Michael Carley paints a tragedy populated by heroes and villains. The Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov was one of those on the right side of history. To the cosmopolitan Litvinov, with a British wife, Nazi Germany was a "mad dog that can't be trusted, with whom no agreements can be made, and whose ambition can only be checked by a ring of determined neighbours."[69] Gorodetsky contends that the Soviets increasingly pushed toward expedient cooperation with foreign powers, causing an "erosion of the ideological dimension of Soviet foreign policy."[70] Similarly, Pons argues that the Soviets remained receptive both to collective security and warmer relations with Germany while they strove to come out on top in the coming conflict.[71] To some extent then, the ball was in the British court. If they could be flexible enough, there was a chance of enlisting the Soviets in an effort to counter Nazi Germany.

In 1936, Anthony Eden became the new Foreign Minister. At first Eden was regarded as anti-Soviet, putting an end to rapprochement and writing in January that there was "hatred in his [the Soviet] heart for all we stand for."[72] Until his resignation in February of 1938, however, Eden increasingly was regarded as more favourable than others in reaching out to the Soviet Union, even if the motivation was practical rather than ideological. Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to the Cabinet, complained in 1937 that Eden was too fond of "those foul Russians, who, I am sure, would let us down. The latter, unless I am mistaken, only want to get us all embroiled and then to force Bolchevism [sic] on a

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[69] Quoted in Carley, *1939*...10.
[70] Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*...1.
[71] Silvio Pons, *Stalin and the Inevitable War 1936-1941* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).
[72] Quoted in Carley, *1939*...14.

shattered Europe. They would like to get us all divided and fighting, as they have succeeded in doing to Spain, and to take advantage of the mess to inculcate their sinister theories and methods."[73]

The Foreign Office generally favoured an anti-German alliance with the Soviet Union. Russian analysis in the Foreign Office was headed by Fitzroy Maclean, who reported to the head of the Northern Department, Sir Laurence Collier. Neilson characterizes Collier as a sort of Liberal internationalist who believed in making common cause with other nations and for whom the Soviets were very much a lesser threat than Germany.[74] From Collier, opinions, analysis and information moved to Sir Orme Sargent, the Deputy Permanent Under Secretary, and then to Sir Alexander Cadogan, who reached the position of Permanent Under Secretary (PUS), the senior career professional in the Foreign Office, in 1938. Many aspects of Anglo-Soviet relations never went past Sargent or specialists in the War Office.[75] In the end, however, the Chamberlain government did not desire confrontation with Germany and the diplomatic capitulation at Munich, confirmed in March 1939 by Germany's occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, discredited western governments in Soviet eyes.

This breach of the Munich agreement led to a new round of approaches to the Soviets. This decision was not taken simply because of diplomatic reality, but also had broad support in Britain. Gallup polls taken between December 1938 and March 1939 indicated that most Britons favoured the USSR over Nazi Germany, and Communism over

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[73] Quoted in Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia...*, 24. 190.
[74] Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia...*,33.
[75] Folly. *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union...*4-8.

Fascism. From April through June 1939, polling indicated that 84% - 87% of the public desired a military alliance between Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union,[76] probably less because public attitudes turned toward the USSR, than they did away from Nazi Germany. However, the appointment of Molotov as Foreign Minister hardly improved the tenor of negotiations. He generally is remembered as a poor diplomat, though Churchill thought him cunning.[77] Viscount Chilston, British ambassador to Moscow from 1933-39, commented that "the question for a British Ambassador here is not how much he can do, but merely how much he can stand."[78]

Chamberlain's government reciprocated these attitudes and entered negotiations with the USSR like someone pinching their nose to avoid the smell. Perhaps given the bias of the Foreign Office and the Northern Department, or simply because of his reputation for getting things done, the decidedly anti-Soviet head of the Central Department, William Strang, was put in charge of negotiations.[79] This suggests that the Chamberlain Government was interested more in dictating to the Soviets than in any serious give and take. In addition, the British attitude toward these negotiations was lackadaisical, while Poland quickly became an issue. Poland, a physical obstacle to Soviet intervention, trusted the Soviets no more than the Germans. The Soviets feared that any deal would make them victims, or leave them to carry the burden of war. Gorodetsky cites unilateral British guarantees to Poland on March 31, 1939 as marking the "crucial move" toward the

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[76] Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*...30-31.
[77] Albert Resis. Ed. *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics, Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 1993). XIX.
[78] Quoted in Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia*...25.
[79] Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia*...35.

Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.[80] Many British conservatives found the idea of a military alliance with the Soviet Union anathema (others, like Churchill were more practical). As Crowson notes, Chamberlain met Hitler personally, while not even a cabinet minister saw Stalin.[81] Chamberlain, echoing the most negative intelligence estimates, believed the Red Army to be incapable of offensive military operations and distrusted Soviet motives, "which seem to me to have little connection with ideas of liberty and to be concerned only with getting everyone else by the ears. Moreover she is both hated and suspected by many of the smaller states notably by Poland[,] Rumania and Finland so that our close association with her might easily cost us the sympathies of those who would much more effectively help us if we can get them on our side."[82] Collier, conversely, thought the Soviets crucial to the defence of Poland. "I cannot help feeling that the real motive for the cabinet's attitude is the desire to secure Russian help and at the same time to leave our hands free to enable Germany to expand east-wards at the Russian expense if we think it convenient." He added that the Russians must suspect as much.[83]

Whether Soviet policy sought better relations with Germany, collective security engagement within the international state system or was simply subject to internal politics, is debatable.[84] However, the replacement of Litvinov with Stalin's crony Molotov, clearly moved the USSR from Litvinov's failed policy of engagement with western powers,

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[80] Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*...4.
[81] Crowson, *Facing Fascism*...116-117.
[82] Quoted in Carley, *1939*...108.
[83] Quoted in Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia*...284.
[84] See Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War: Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933-1941* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1995).

toward greater freedom of action, ie. rapprochement with Germany.[85] As a pariah amongst nations and ideologically opposed to all the capitalist states, the Soviets were disinclined to serve either faction in a war amongst the capitalist powers. As a 1930 memorandum for the Chairman of the Defence Sector of Gosplan (Soviet economic planning) indicated, in one scenario for war "the imperialists start a new world war amongst themselves. We may end up being dragged in to such a struggle either on the side of one of the coalitions, or, the most likely for us, as a third warring party, having both of the hostile coalitions fighting amongst themselves as opponents."[86] With collective security and internationalism discredited, the Soviets fell back on self-interest.

The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, and the subsequent revelation of secret protocols leading to the dismemberment of Poland, shocked Great Britain and France. The Soviet invasion of Finland at the end of November drew demand for intervention and further alienated the USSR from her would be allies. These events caused "bewilderment" and then hostility toward the USSR from the British public. The Labour Party stated publicly:

> The Red Czar is now the executor of the traditional imperialism of Czarist Russia...Stalin's apologists defend the Russian war against Finland because they believe or seem to believe that the Soviet system is superior to any other...and may justly be imposed by force or cunning upon States which are 'weak from a military point of view' and have no powerful allies...they defend tyranny, either because they do not know, or those who know refuse to tell, that Fascism and Bolshevism have identical political systems.[87]

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[85] Though Litvinov had become discredited by this point for a variety of reasons, not all of them having to do with performance. See Albert Resis, "The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact," *Europe Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jan., 2000), 33-56.
[86] Quoted in Hill, *The Great Patriotic War*...10.
[87] Cited in Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*...32-35.

Worse yet, the new economic relations with the USSR gave Germany, otherwise under blockade, access, albeit limited, to the vast resources of Soviet Russia and to far flung imports including such luxuries as over a million tons of soya beans from Japanese occupied Manchuria.[88] This crippled allied strategic plans, which rested on the notion of wearing Germany down via blockade before landing a decisive blow. Edward Ericson even goes so far as to argue that Germany could not have waged the war it did without Soviet economic help in 1939-40.[89] On March 28 1940, one report on German oil supplies held that it was down to a reserve of less than 2 million tons, near the "danger" point of 1 million tons. As a result, "in nearly every section of the Sub-Committee's Report so far discussed, we see the vital importance to Germany of Russian and Roumanian [sic] oil supplies." Indeed, in September 1939, the War Cabinet apparently decided to purchase as much Romanian oil as possible in order to deny it to Germany.[90]

In this context, Britain and France planned to intervene against Russia, most significantly to destroy Soviet oil installations in the Caucasus, which accounted for most of Soviet oil production. The idea of crippling Soviet oil production through air attacks against the Caucasus petroleum industry was actually a British idea dating back to 1927.[91] In early 1940, however, France took the lead in proposing an air campaign against Caucasian oil. In late March, the British and French Chiefs of Staff suggested that operations could commence within a month, involving 108 British and 89 French aircraft

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[88] Ronald C. Cooke and Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Target: Hitler's Oil, Allied Attacks on German Oil Supplies 1939-1945* (London: William Kimber & Co. Limited, 1985). 23.
[89] Edward E. Ericson, *Feeding the German Eagle: Soviet Economic Aid to Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999).
[90] "German Oil Supplies," War Cabinet memorandum, March 28, 1940. CAB 66/6/38
[91] Patrick R Osborn, *Operation Pike: Britain Versus the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000). 139.

based in the Middle East.[92] Reconnaissance flights were even conducted at the end of the month over the Baku oil installations, drawing fire from Soviet air defences and a failed attempt at interception by fighters.[93] However, the British were already getting cold feet. In early March the COS had analyzed Soviet supply to Germany, concluding that the "extent of this assistance is at present limited by the weakness of the Russian transportation and industrial systems, and is likely to be on a small scale in 1940...the risk of initiating war with Russia would be acceptable only if it led to a result which might cause the early defeat of Germany," but, "there is no action which we could take against Russia which would bring about the early defeat of Germany."[94] In addition, the British apparently hoped to improve relations with the Soviets,[95] and subsequently proposed simply to purchase Soviet oil themselves, much as they had tried with Romania.[96]

With the Finnish war coming to an end and passions dampened, the British renewed their hope for an alliance or understanding with the Soviet Union. Woodward concluded that the French, fearing the human cost of assaulting Germany directly, were "inclined to underrate these risks and to exaggerate the possibility of breaking German resistance, by depriving her of Russian oil." The British, on the other hand, "held back from the French proposals...owing to a higher evaluation of the risks and a lower estimate of the results of our action against Russian oil supplies." The British Government was also less afraid of Soviet influence on domestic politics and more sceptical of the results of Soviet-German

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[92] Osborn, *Operation Pike*...142-143, 150.
[93] Ronald C. Cooke and Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Target: Hitler's Oil*...31.
[94] "Military Implications of Hostilities with Russia in 1940," Chiefs of Staff Committee memorandum, March 8, 1940. CAB 66/6/21
[95] Ronald C. Cooke and Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Target: Hitler's Oil*...28.
[96] Osborn, *Operation Pike*...153.

collaboration.[97] It was not the last time that bombing the Caucasian oilfields would be proposed.

The defeat of France in June 1940 brought Winston Churchill to power and changed the military and strategic equation. Churchill came from the pragmatic side of conservative politics and refused to treat the Soviets as a hostile neutral. Within days of taking power in May 1940, with the French army on the verge of collapse, Whitehall sent the Labour politician Sir Stafford Cripps as ambassador to Moscow, a position left vacant since the Finnish war. This appointment was made despite the poor relationship Cripps had with Churchill. Cripps already had spent time in Moscow in February trying to repair relations with the Soviets and end the Winter War. Described by Charmley as a "left-wing socialist gad-fly,"[98] Cripps, unlike Eden, did not think the Nazi-Soviet relationship would last. A "deep ideological cleavage between the two governments" remained, and "the German association was only looked upon as a temporary expedient."[99] This appointment marked the beginning of a shift back toward engagement with the USSR, though hardly surprising, given the string of military setbacks suffered by the allies. To Cripps, however, British efforts never were satisfactory. On September 25, Cripps complained to politician and propagandist Walter Monckton that "it's clear beyond all doubt that HMG haven't the

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[97] Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume 1* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970). 454.
[98] Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance*...25.
[99] Gabriel Gorodetsky, Ed. *Stafford Cripps in Moscow 1940-1942: Diaries and Papers* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2007). 23 – 25.

slightest desire to work with Russia. They want to try and jockey Russia into hostility to Germany but not as a friend of ours who is to take a part in rebuilding civilisation!"[100]

Folly characterizes the winter of 1940/41 as a period of reserve, when the Soviet Union was regarded as weak and Britain hoped that evidence of German intentions (such as troop movements to the East) would convince Stalin that his policy toward Germany was failing.[101] Many outstanding differences, like the annexation of the Baltic States (the British had £1,000,000 in property in Estonia alone, now likely to be nationalized),[102] plagued Anglo-Soviet relations. Cripps told his superiors on December 23 "I think that Anglo-Soviet relations are now neither better nor worse than they were 6 months ago except in so far as they have been prejudged by our undertaking regarding Baltic States...it is therefore for His Majesty's Government to decide whether to make a fresh attempt to clear the ground in advance by a...compromise or to wait till pressure of events induces the Soviet Government to seek such a solution." Cripps recommended maintaining an attitude of "non-hostile reserve."[103]

Meanwhile, British perceptions of Soviet actions and political direction were changing. In November, military intelligence posited that "Stalin had assumed that the war would be long drawn out and that he might, having done his preliminary grabbing, sit with his hands folded until both sides reached exhaustion point. He would then intervene decisively on the side of the winning group with the well-based belief that he would then

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[100] Cripps to Walter Monckton, September 25, 1940, quoted in Gorodetsky, Ed. *Stafford Cripps in Moscow*...70.
[101] Folly. *Churchill, Whitehall*...17, 20.
[102] Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume 1*. 476.
[103] Cripps to Foreign Office, December 23, 1940. WO 208/1758

be the master of Europe and most of Asia." However, the French collapse had upset these plans. The annexation of the Baltic States was an attempt to improve the Soviet position. While the British Empire remained Stalin's long term nemesis, Germany had eclipsed her in the near term. "Another slight indication of a possible change of policy is shown in the approaches made to our Military and Air Attaches in Moscow."[104] While the overbearing British preoccupation was defence of the British Isles from German invasion, events in the Balkans provided an opportunity to influence the Soviet attitude. On February 23, 1941, Churchill told Eden that the "best way of gaining Russians is a good throw in Balkans," and "events alone will convince them."[105] Churchill wished to form an Anglo-Yugoslav-Greek-Turkish alliance to confront Germany, and encourage Soviet intervention.[106]

Ultimately, events in Yugoslavia caught the Soviets flat footed, while Britain, driven from Greece, failed to make a "good throw." Churchill used the opportunity to warn Stalin about the redeployment of German Panzer divisions to southern Poland (derived from ULTRA intercepts). More significantly, the following day Churchill told Cripps to approach the Soviets, not to ask for assistance, but to emphasize Soviet self interest. "What we want them to realize, however, is that Hitler intends to attack them sooner or later, if he can; that the fact that he is in conflict with us is not in itself sufficient to prevent him doing so if he is not also involved in some special embarrassment, such as now confronts him in Balkans, and that it is consequently in Soviet interests to take every possible step to ensure

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[104] "The Foreign Relations of U.S.S.R." Military Intelligence memorandum, November 2, 1940. WO 193/642
[105] Churchill to Eden, February 23, 1941. PREM 3/395/16
[106] Churchill to Eden, March 28, 1941, quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...419-420.

that he does not settle his Balkan problem in the way he wants."[107] This message reflected the growing British frustration with Soviet inaction, given their mutual self interest in checking German hegemony. With the collapse of the Balkan front, it became clear, as Harold Nicolson noted on March 2, that Britain's "only hope is that America and Russia will come in on our side."[108] On April 19, the Foreign Office told its embassy in Washington that recognition of Soviet control of the Baltic States could be made in exchange for "solid advantages, such as supply of war materials to Turkey and Greece and restriction of supplies to Germany from and through Soviet Union." Either way, "we must already now consider to what length we may have to go to bring about improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations beneficial to our cause."[109] Nicolson was not alone in his assessment.

By May, the evidence that Germany was preparing for a confrontation with Russia was overwhelming. For complex reasons, Stalin ignored the excellent intelligence available to him, but Britain did not. Germany simply could not conceal such a massive redeployment of troops, equipment and supplies from disloyal or open mouthed observers, signals interception and aerial imagery. On May 14, an assessment of German movements concluded that "either the purpose is blackmail or it is war. No doubt Hitler would prefer a bloodless surrender. But the quiet move, for instance, of a prisoner-of-war cage to Tarnow looks more like business than bluff." By May 20, Britain understood that the codeword "Barbarossa" was used in relation to Russia, though its significance was unknown. On May

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[107] Churchill to Cripps, April 4, 1941, quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...447-448.
[108] Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*...203.
[109] Foreign Office to Washington, April 19, 1941. PREM 3/395/16

31, ULTRA indicated that the *Luftwaffe* was "marshalling its forces on the Eastern frontiers for large scale operations against Russia" and would be prepared to strike Russia at the "end of June," if the Crete operation ended soon.[110] On May 16 Churchill told General Smuts that "it looks as if Hitler is massing against Russia. A ceaseless movement of troops, armoured forces and aircraft northwards from the Balkans and eastward from France and Germany is in progress." On June 3, noting a memorandum by General Sikorski, Churchill concluded that Germany would aim to pressure concessions from the USSR rather than actually attack, though "at any rate, either war of a show-down is near."[111] By June, the indications of German preparations were so overwhelming that a German invasion seemed increasingly the most likely outcome.

Most observations, rooted in British ideas of strategic attrition, centered on a German grab for the key Soviet resource nodes in the Ukraine and Caucasus and therefore underestimated the true scope of German plans. In November 1940 an evaluation entitled "The Opening Stages of the Russo-German War, 1941" predicted, citing Napoleon's campaign in 1812, that "Germany has no intention of marching on Moscow" and would seek a decisive battle between Lvov and Kiev.[112] The JIC concluded on June 5 that German intentions toward the Soviets were economic in nature and that further collaboration was more likely than war.[113] Equally, on May 30 the Turkish Foreign Minister told the American Charge d'affaires that "Germany is bound to provide for the possibility of the

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[110] "G.A.F. Intentions." Government Code and Cypher School intelligence summary, May 31, 1941. HW 13/2
[111] Churchill to Smuts, May 16, 1941 and Churchill to Ismay, June 3, 1941, quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...676, 750.
[112] "The Opening Stages of the Russo-German War, 1941." Military Intelligence memorandum, November 1940. WO 208/1758
[113] Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, June 5, 1941. FO 371/29483/N2893

war lasting a long while by taking possession, peacefully or otherwise, of the Ukraine and the Caucasus petrol deposits in order to assure her supplies...Stalin will not allow an armed conflict to arise."[114] After meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on May 31, Cadogan noted that they thought "that Germany is *prepared* to attack Russia. I agree, but *I* believe that Russia will give way and sign on the dotted line. I wish she wouldn't, as I should love to see Germany expending her strength there. But they're not such fools (as *our* General Staff). But we must consider how we can use threat or fact of bombing to Baku."[115] In early June, Maisky was unsurprised when Eden told him that Germany had plans for attacking Russia. However, the Foreign Office still thought that the Soviets would make concessions rather than fight.[116] This also was the view of the military intelligence departments in the early weeks of 1941, although one officer admitted that this conclusion was opposed by the military attaché in Moscow, though "the opinion of M.A. Moscow has a strong flavour of Sir Stafford Cripps about it."[117] Cripps had a better idea of the contours of German plans (an invasion to the Volga or Urals) in March, when British analysts had yet to make any firm conclusion about Germany's plans in the East.[118]

None the less, preparations were being made to aid the Soviets if and when Germany attacked and the Red Army resisted. On April 19, Cripps cabled the Foreign Office saying that the Soviets "may within a few weeks be in desperate need of what help

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[114] Ankara to Moscow (diplomatic intercept), May 30 (received on June 3), 1941. HW 12/265
[115] Alexander Cadogan, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945*, ed. David Dilks, (NY: G.P. Putnams's Sons, 1972). 382.
[116] War Cabinet Conclusions June 5, 1941. CAB 65/18/36
[117] Military Intelligence Minutes, January 8, 1941. WO 208/1758
[118] Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*...158.

we can give them."[119] On June 4, solutions of a cable from the Japanese ambassador in Berlin reporting a conversation with Joachim Ribbentrop,[120] led the JIC to conclude that a German attack on the Soviet Union was imminent, though an ultimatum still was expected. Hence, plans were made to assemble a military mission to Moscow once hostilities began.[121] On June 15, Churchill told President Roosevelt that "From every source at my disposal, including some most trustworthy, it looks as if a vast German onslaught on Russia was imminent...should this new war break out, we shall, of course, give all encouragement and any help we can spare to the Russians, following principle [sic] that Hitler is the foe we have to beat."[122]

The cooperation of the United States was critical to aiding the Soviets. Viscount Halifax, the British ambassador to Washington (and Foreign Secretary until December 1940), was tasked in June to approach the Americans about providing economic assistance to the Soviets in the event of war between the Soviet Union and Germany. On June 15, Halifax related a conversation with the American Under Secretary of State, in which Sumner Welles said that the United States had no objection, in principle, to providing economic aid to the Soviets, "the difficulties were purely practical." This economic aid would "involve either machine tools, war material or certain raw materials such as copper and rubber. All these classes of goods were urgently needed either by the United States Government themselves or by us, and he did not therefore think there was very much that

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[119] Cripps to Foreign Office, April 19, 1941. PREM 3/395/16
[120] Berlin to Tokyo (diplomatic intercept), June 4 (received June 18), 1941. HW 12/265
[121] F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations Volume One*. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1979). 478-479.
[122] Churchill to Roosevelt, June 15, 1941, quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...806-807.

United States Government would be able to do for Russia. He promised however to have the matter looked into in greater detail." Given the possibility of Japanese action, the Americans wished to see "how the situation might develop" before making any "hypothetical commitments to Russia."[123] The Ministry of Economic Warfare listed the resources the Soviets would need if the Ukraine and Caucasus were lost, and that oil and wheat "could, in certain circumstances, be best obtained from the United States."[124] On Saturday June 21, the day before Barbarossa launched, a State Department memo outlined American policy toward the Soviets in case of war with Germany. "we should so far as possible, without interfering in our aid to Great Britain and to victims of aggression or without seriously affecting our own efforts of preparedness, permitting it even to have such military supplies as it might need badly and which we could afford to spare."[125] On the same day, Hugh Dalton and Mark Turner (from the Ministry of Economic Warfare) discussed sending British aircraft to Russia. They doubted the efficacy of Russian air power and floated the idea of sending British planes to Russian aerodromes to bomb the Ploesti oilfields and, reflecting the reports from military intelligence of poor Soviet navigation abilities, the possibility of sending British navigators to Russia.[126]

In a moment of prescience, with many recent reports from Japanese diplomatic staff across Europe indicating that German-Soviet hostilities were impending, the Japanese Foreign Minister predicted "a sequence of developments" including "the sudden outbreak

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[123] Halifax to Foreign Office, June 15, 1941. FO 371/29482/N2831
[124] Postan to Coote, June 16, 1941. FO 371/29482/N2831
[125] Quoted in Raymond H. Dawson, *The Decision to Aid Russia, 1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959). 63.
[126] Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War*...233.

of a German-Soviet war, an Anglo-Soviet alliance, and an American-Soviet rapprochement followed by America's entry into the war."[127] For years, an Anglo-Soviet alliance had often been imagined, but not realized. With the collapse of France and the advent of Churchill, these approaches became more serious, as the British realized that an alliance with the Soviets was necessary to defeat Germany. Intelligence on the Red Army was mixed but indicated at least the possibility of a successful defence of their vast country, even if British decision makers were overawed by German power. From early 1941, British policy pivoted toward an alliance of mutual self interest with the Soviet Union, and planning for aid when Germany attacked it. As Michael Carley puts it, Anglo-Soviet efforts were just enough to keep each other 'in play," but "finally, each had to prove to the other its ability to survive the Nazi onslaught-the British in 1940 and the Soviet Union in 1941."[128]

[127] Tokyo to Moscow (diplomatic intercept), June 17 (received June 22), 1941. HW 12/265
[128] Carley, *1939*...259.

## Chapter Two:

## Preconditions and First Steps, June-July 1941

In May 1808, a popular uprising peeled Spain from France's orbit. In the following month the British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, enumerated a foreign policy doctrine: "we shall proceed upon the principle, that any nation of Europe that starts up with a determination to oppose a power which, whether professing insidious peace or declaring open war, is the common enemy of all nations, whatever may be the existing political relations of that nation with Great Britain, becomes instantly our essential ally." As Harold Temperley and Lillian M. Penson explain, "there is no doubt that the measure, if not new in principle, was new in practice. For it meant allying with a nation not with a government."[129] Winston Churchill, an enthusiastic amateur historian, surely found Britain's situation of June 22, 1941, to be familiar. Perhaps that sense shaped his radio address to the nation that evening, which at once offered full support to the Russian people and refused to apologize for past antipathy toward the Soviet Government. Churchill expressed British solidarity with Russia's struggle and offered the "Government of Soviet Russia any technical or economic assistance which is in our power, and which is likely to be of service to them." The only Cabinet member who was seriously consulted before the broadcast was Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Supply.[130]

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[129] Quoted in Harold Temperley and Lillian M. Penson, ed. *Foundations of British Foreign Policy From Pitt (1792) To Salisbury (1902).* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966). 23-24.
[130] Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...837, 834.

"Whitehall was intimidated by German combat power, contemptuous of Soviet capabilities, and predisposed to act cautiously," is Brian Farrell's summation of the British attitude toward the German invasion of the Soviet Union.[131] This chapter will assess the initial British reaction to the invasion and their attempts to influence events in June and July 1941. It became increasingly clear in the opening weeks of the war that the Soviets were resisting more effectively than most British observers had anticipated, making the proposition of aiding the Soviets more appealing. By the end of July, British decision makers increasingly thought that Russian resistance would be prolonged. Meanwhile, several problems emerged in Anglo-Soviet cooperation. One was the issue of liaison, the sharing of intelligence and information and the coordination of military planning. Another was the issue of airpower; the limits of German quantity and Soviet efficiency, and the question of whether to use British air assets to aid the Soviets, most specifically by protecting northern ports and bombing the Romanian oilfields at Ploesti. There were also questions of operational assistance and material aid to Russia. All of these issues rested on the development of relations between the British military mission and their Soviet counterparts. The British gave more serious thought to aiding the Soviets, and judged their survival more likely, in the early weeks and months of the war, than usually is acknowledged. By the end of July, conditions were in place to make supply to Russia a reality.

The military mission to Moscow, called "30 Mission," departed Britain on June 25 for the Soviet Union, by way of Catalina flying boat. It was headed by a veteran

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[131] Farrell, *The Basis and Making*...162.

intelligence officer and former military attaché to Berlin, with an unusual knowledge of the German military,[132] General Noel Mason-MacFarlane. It consisted of army, navy and air elements meant to coordinate with their Russian opposites, later joined by other "experts" when deemed useful. Hugh Dalton claimed that MacFarlane did not initially want the task, as he doubted the Russians would last three weeks, and "doesn't like the Russians anyhow."[133] MacFarlane, while professional and well informed was, like many, initially sceptical of Soviet powers of resistance. A Russian mission soon reached London under General Golikov (Admiral Kharlamov became de facto head of the mission on July 12).

However, information on the scale and outcome of German operations in the opening days of the invasion remained scarce. For their part, Soviet leaders often had little idea of what was happening at the front, due to communication difficulties and a fluid operational environment. Additionally, distrust of Britain ran deep and the Kremlin understood that it was in Britain's interest for Germany and the Soviet Union to go to war. Some Soviet officials thought Britain might even join the Nazi crusade in the East, particularly given the mysterious flight of Rudolf Hess to England in May. A few months later, Litvinov claimed that when the German invasion began, "all believed" that "the British fleet was steaming up the North Sea for a joint attack, with Hitler, on Leningrad and Kronstadt."[134] Even by July 3, the War Cabinet did not have definitive information as to the extent of German advances into Russia.[135] On June 29 Cripps reported about a conversation with Molotov, from whose "general description of what was happening I

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[132] C.I.G.S. to Marshal S. Timoshenko (People's Commissar of Defence), June 24, 1941. WO 216/124
[133] Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War*...238.
[134] Quoted in Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion*...315.
[135] War Cabinet Weekly Resume for June 26 – July 3. CAB 66/17/24.

gathered that the situation on the fronts is very grave especially in the Baltic provinces and around Minsk."[136] ULTRA provided some insight into German operations through solutions of German traffic which often included information obtained through intercepts of Soviet signals. On June 28, Cadogan recorded that "our secret news shows that Germans are not having it *all* their own way in Russia." The following day he added, the "Russians still seem to be inflicting some damage on Germans. The surprise Russian big tank seems to be a success. But we can't hope for too much."[137] Indeed, Soviet medium and heavy tanks were giving the Germans local trouble. Around June 24 in Lithuania, one KV-1 tank held up much of the 6th Panzer Division for most of a day.[138]

On June 30, the War Cabinet struck a more negative tone, saying "authentic news was scarce. But it looked as though the Russian forces had been concentrated too far forward and had been taken by surprise...the Russian military position appeared to be very grave, although German air and land losses had been considerable."[139] However, German victories on the border failed to translate into a Soviet collapse, while Russian reserve forces were substantial. Ismay recalled that it was "soon clear that the Red Army was resisting stubbornly, and that the forecast that they would be beaten to their knees within a matter of weeks was very wide of the mark. In fact there was a glimmer of hope that they might be able to hang on to Moscow and Leningrad until the Russian winter set in."[140] Of course, the British needed faith in the seriousness of Russian resistance before they could

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[136] Cripps to Foreign Office, June 29, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3260
[137] Cadogan, *The Diaries*...390.
[138] Erhard Raus, *Panzer Operations: the Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus 1941-1945*, trans. Steven H. Newton (De Capo Press, 2003). 21-34.
[139] War Cabinet Conclusions, June 30, 1941. CAB 65/18/43
[140] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...227.

justify any form of assistance as remunerative. The Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky, recalled in his memoirs Lord Beaverbrook answering his queries about a second front by asking rhetorically, "let me be frank with you...will you really fight? Won't the same thing happen with you that happened in France?" Beaverbrook promised to raise the issue, but the point was made.[141]

An immediate goal of the military mission to Moscow, and of British efforts to aid the Soviets directly or indirectly, was simply to encourage Russian resistance so that they would not collapse as the French had done the previous year. On June 23, the Joint Planning Staff assessed how Britain might exploit the German preoccupation in the East. It also explored "action to prolong Russian Resistance," including increased air operations, naval raids, and simulating operations in the West.[142] The Admiralty instructed the naval part of 30 Mission that "your primary task is the prolongation of Russian resistance as this is obviously of very great importance to British interests." In the event of Russian defeats, the naval mission was supposed to "stimulate" resistance from remaining Soviet forces and also to keep naval equipment and ships from falling into German hands.[143] On July 3, MacFarlane wrote that "the extent to which we can keep them [the Soviets] encouraged will in my opinion have a most direct influence on their resistance. First and foremost they want to see us taking advantage of what they consider to be German weakness in the West,

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[141] Ivan Maisky, *Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador, the War: 1939-43,* trans. Andrew Rothstein (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1968). 162.
[142] "Action Arising out of German-Russian Conflict," aide memoire by the Joint Planning Staff, June 23, 1941. WO 193/666
[143] "Instructions to the Naval Section of the British Liaison Mission to the U.S.S.R." June 24, 1941. ADM 1/12671

so as to relieve pressure on them...particularly air pressure."[144] This pointed to a basic contradiction in the British position. Britain needed assurances of Russian will to fight before it could consider substantial aid, but Russian will was believed to rest, in part, on whether the British could intervene in some way. The Soviets were happy to encourage this belief if it made British aid more likely. This struggle was at the heart of Anglo-Soviet relations over the summer. Soviet opacity would leave the British to make this decision on their own from what information was available.

MacFarlane's telegrams generally were sent either to the Director of Military Intelligence, General Davidson, who passed the relevant material up for circulation within the War Cabinet, or directly to the Chiefs of Staff. The different service components of the mission also reported to their own departments, while Cripps sent material to the Foreign Office. With so few sources of information from this new front, the impressions of MacFarlane and his officers certainly shaped views in Whitehall. Shortly after arriving in Moscow, MacFarlane met several high ranking Soviet officers, including Marshal Timoshenko and General Zhukov (Defence Minister and Chief of the General Staff, respectively). Timoshenko was greatly optimistic, "he was in fact blatantly confident...almost boastfully confident that Russia was fully capable of dealing with Germany although he admitted German pressure was quite heavy. He was clearly not much interested in the possibility of our being able to help to any appreciable extent." MacFarlane did not believe that Timoshenko was acting, but doubted his claims, saying "it is far too early to say if this confidence is justified or if he is perhaps living in a fool's

[144] MacFarlane to D.M.I., July 3, 1941. WO 32/15548

paradise. I have an uneasy feeling that the latter is more probable. Leaders of the type represented by the Marshal and his Sub-Chief of Staff are not of the same calibre as the Chiefs of the German Army."[145]

Zhukov, who was not one of Stalin's cronies, struck a different tone than Timoshenko, "his request for material and intelligence and his insistence on urgent replies were hardly consistent with the Marshal's optimism." Zhukov provided a shopping list of war materials, including 6,000 aircraft, ASDIC sets, air-borne magnetic mines and so on. MacFarlane again emphasized the exaggerated confidence of the Russian officers. "Our general impression of the Conference was that the General was not much interested in our war experience, that he was out for all he can get and that without something with which to barter we shall achieve nothing. Intelligence seems to be almost the only immediate medium we possess for barter and it is absolutely imperative that we be given as much hot operational news daily as possible."[146] The fantastic nature of the Soviet requests for material aid, their blasé attitude toward offers of assistance, and the conflicting impressions of the situation given by Timoshenko and Zhukov, gave the Mission and Whitehall little reason to send substantial quantities of war material to Russia at this early date.

Intelligence sharing was an obvious initial step in cooperation as MacFarlane indicated in his request for "hot operational news." The Mission also requested information such as the *Luftwaffe* order of battle and equipment.[147] The Foreign Office passed diplomatic intelligence to the Soviets, as when they cabled Moscow on July 4 to say: "you

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[145] MacFarlane's diary, June 28, 1941. WO 32/15548
[146] MacFarlane (via Cripps) to Chiefs of Staff, June 28, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3277
[147] Air Mission (Moscow) to Air Ministry, June 30, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3306

may inform Soviet Government that we have sure information that decision of Japanese Government is only to watch developments in Eastern Siberia and perhaps increase preparations in order to restrain U.S.S.R. They will not participate immediately in Russo-German war."[148] Of course, it was dangerous to reveal British methods, sources and procedures to the Soviets, particularly given poor Soviet signals security. On June 25, Davidson reminded those concerned to ensure that when the Russians passed British intelligence to subordinates or other departments, they must never "disclose that it has been obtained from a British source."[149] Intelligence obtained via ULTRA decrypts was a particular problem, as the Soviets could not be allowed to know that Britain read such high level German traffic lest the enemy be tipped off. On July 16, a cable was prepared which quoted from German signals: "Russians threatened with envelopment at Smolensk...Russians are to be prevented from withdrawing. Railways in the rear to be bombed." The next day, the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service told the Prime Minister that such intelligence could not be given directly to the Soviets as no agent could relay it so quickly (contradicting the cover story which credited it as coming from a highly placed source). Instead, the "gist" of the material would be fed to the Russians folded into other information. It was also suggested that MacFarlane tell the Russians that "we possess a well placed source in Berlin who has occasional access to operational plans and documents."[150]

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[148] Foreign Office to Moscow, July 4, 1941. FO 371/29486/N3669
[149] D.M.I. to Moscow, June 25, 1941. HW 1/8
[150] Note to the Prime Minister, July 17, 1941. HW 1/14

Despite a lack of reciprocity from the Russians, the British frequently gave valuable intelligence to the Soviets, including warnings about compromised Soviet ciphers (for example, that the enemy was reading traffic from the Soviet 17th Air Division), the location of German headquarters and supply dumps, and German operational planning (such as the intended targets for air attack, and the readiness of various forces).[151] On July 6 MacFarlane also approached the Soviets to collaborate on "low grade" "Y" material (radio intercepts) and to exchange "Y" officers. Lack of reciprocity slowed the proceedings until on July 29 the Russians passed on a low grade *Luftwaffe* 3-letter cipher. Soon, the War Office sent a "Y" officer with low grade German ciphers, declaring that they were not expecting anything in return.[152] On August 29, three days after the Soviets asked for it, the British gave the Russians full information on the Japanese order of battle with MacFarlane telling Panfilov that "we ourselves had now been waiting a fortnight for information from the Russians about the Japanese army. This is a good example of the incredible slowness and disorganisation of the OTDEL."[153] Two days later, MacFarlane informed Dill that:

> We have had repeated requests to get information from Russians about their dispositions in Far East and elsewhere. It has been suggested that they might exchange this for information about our forces in Malaya or for our estimate of Japanese Order of Battle. This is a vain hope...Under existing circumstances Russians will never reveal their own dispositions or intentions. Apart from other considerations they mistrust our security principally on account of press and B.B.C.[154]

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[151] Signals Intelligence from Air Ministry to Military Mission Moscow, July 1941. HW 20/520
[152] 30 Mission to War Office, June 6, 1941, War Office to 30 Mission, July 29, 1941, War Office to 30 Mission, August 9, 1941. HW 61/36
[153] 30 Mission war diary, August 29, 1941. WO 178/25
[154] MacFarlane to C.I.G.S. August 31, 1941. WO 178/25

Indeed, Kharlamov, upset over the British press's use of German sources, thought that its "drive for sensation was stronger than the sense of Allied unity."[155] Ultimately, as the official history of British intelligence during the war noted, "the German attack on Russia produced no effective arrangements for the exchange of intelligence between the British and Soviet governments." Britain got more information about the Soviet order of battle through decrypts of German signals than information freely given by Soviet liaison personnel,[156] primarily because of Soviet opacity and refusal to reciprocate. Soon, Britain abandoned any efforts at cooperation in cryptanalysis, though it did continue to pass on much disguised ULTRA material.

By the second week of the invasion, the Soviets clearly were suffering badly but there was no indication of a collapse. The Foreign Office remained better disposed towards the Soviets than other departments. As Victor Rothwell notes, it was Eden who set the pro-Soviet tone within the Foreign Office at this time.[157] On July 8, Eden informed Churchill and the War Cabinet of a conversation he had with Maisky and commented that:

> It is difficult to look ahead with any confidence in modern war, but it is surely at least possible that a month from now the Russians will still be in the field and fighting back, though in all probability very hard pressed. I fear that if even by then we are still unable to stage any land operation to relieve the pressure on Russia, the effect upon our position internationally will be bad. The world visualises us as having now a well trained Army at home and the command of the seas...If we are still unable to act a month from now, no amount of explanation will convince world opinion that we have not missed a chance.[158]

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[155] N. Kharlamov, *Difficult Mission* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986). 46.
[156] F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations Volume Two* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981). 41. 58.
[157] Victor Rothwell, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography 1931-57* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). 60-61.
[158] Eden to the Prime Minister, July 8, 1941. PREM 3/395/17

Following a July 10 Defence Committee meeting which "discussed assistance to Russia," General Sir Alan Brooke was surprised by Eden's proposals. "As a late S of S for war he must know well what the army's situation is, and yet the proposals and suggestions he put forward might have been based on gross ignorance of the weakness of our defence of this country. If this is the best democracy can do it is high time we moved forward to some other form of government!"[159] By June 30, Cadogan was complaining about the lack of a plan for "harrying Germans in the West." According to Cadogan, the British would look foolish if they did not exploit the opportunity afforded by the German invasion.[160] Clearly, there was a discrepancy between the political and military viability of intervention, as evidenced by the comments of Eden and Brooke. This was a balancing act that depended on other overriding concerns, above the interests of a particular department.

Meanwhile, On July 2 MacFarlane informed Whitehall that a travelling "Polish ex-officer" observed that Soviet military deployments were going smoothly. "No congestion or confusion on railways. On June 26 he saw a very large Russian tank concentration estimated at about 1000 tanks near Dvinsk." The Russians were also "doing well in the air." An advance copy of this report was forwarded to the Prime Minister.[161] Cripps continued to encourage some tangible aid, as the Soviets "are standing up magnificently against tremendous pressure and some gesture of active, as distinct from verbal help would do much to reinforce their determination." The significance of immediate action, said

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[159] Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*...170-171.
[160] Cadogan, *The Diaries*...390-91.
[161] MacFarlane to Foreign Office, July 2, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3350

Cripps, "cannot be over-stated."[162] In Ankara, on July 4, the British military attaché reported that the German embassy thought Soviet resistance was unexpectedly robust. The Russians were "not surrendering but fighting till last. Germans admit own losses tanks and land troops very severe...Germans originally confident reaching Moscow three weeks and outline campaign in six to eight weeks. Now talk of minimum 3 months."[163] It was not yet clear whether Russia would survive the onslaught, but the Germans certainly had underestimated their quarry. Meanwhile, the Foreign Office, in particular, was becoming restless with British inaction.

In this context, on July 7, Reginald "Rex" Leeper, a diplomat and civil servant and head of the Political Intelligence Department in the Foreign Office, produced a memorandum entitled "Political Aspects of a German Defeat by Russia." He argued:

> It has hitherto been assumed that Germany would gain a rapid victory over Russia and on this assumption the future strategy of the war has been planned...It may be, however, that our estimates of Russian resistance may have to be revised. German Blitz tactics are based on rapid victory, a policy of hit or miss. So far they have always hit and hit quickly. What happens if they miss and have to start all over again? Total warfare is successful against those who have not yet accepted its full implications, but in the case of Russia, a State as totalitarian as that of Germany, the full implications have been accepted.

He warned that British efforts "may well be dimmed by the much greater battle now in progress between Germany and Russia, a battle on which so much depends and in which we are playing no significant part in the eyes of Europe. The Russians may in fact put us completely in the shade...the political consequences of such a development may be extremely serious in Europe, here and in America." Basically, Leeper said if Russia was

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[162] Cripps to Foreign Office, July 2, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3352
[163] Military Attaché Ankara to Foreign Office, July 4, 1941. FO 371/29486/N3485

seen as the driving force behind Germany's defeat, it would gain immense political capital. He was also suggesting that the nature of the Soviet regime did not render it as vulnerable to collapse under German assault as western governments. This memorandum was seen by Oliver Harvey, Eden's secretary (who described it as "interesting"), Cadogan and Eden.[164] From an early date, the Foreign Office was slightly encouraged by the degree of Soviet resistance and discouraged by the indecisiveness of their own government, though no one yet advocated substantial direct support to the USSR. All, however, emphasized the German reliance on rapid military victory. In January 1941, Military Intelligence had concluded that "whatever the reason for a German attack on U.S.S.R. may be, a quick decision will be sought, since Germany knows she cannot support a war on two fronts nor can she afford to remain without Russian raw materials for any length of time."[165] As Leeper indicated, if the initial German gambit failed, as it easily could in Russia, Germany risked becoming mired in a total war of attrition which would benefit the allied powers who controlled most of the world's resources.

The most important of these resources was oil. By early 1941, the Ministry of Economic Warfare emphasized the idea of a dwindling German oil reserve. Immediately before Barbarossa, Whitehall discussed aiding the Soviets in bombing Romanian oilfields. Equally significant was the possibility that Germany might seize Soviet oil facilities in Caucasia, which reopened the possibility of bombing them, but in a new context. On June 23, the War Cabinet Joint Planning Staff, among other things, suggested that "we should be

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[164] "Political Aspects of a German Defeat by Russia." Paper by R.A. Leeper, July 7, 1941 (minutes by Harvey, Cadogan and Eden, July 8, 1941). FO 371/29486/N3718

[165] "The Strategy of the Red Army in a War Against Germany." Military Intelligence memorandum, January 27, 1941. WO 208/1758

prepared to bomb the Caucasian oilfields from Mosul. Preliminary action to enable this to be done has already been set on foot."[166] This "preliminary action" included the revision of plans from 1940 to bomb the Caucasian oilfields (with 4 squadrons of Blenheims, some Wellingtons, and fighters for protection – the British did not think much of Soviet air defences nor the resilience of their oil infrastructure).[167] The British military mission in Moscow was joined at this time by several "oil experts" from the Middle East.[168] As the official history of the air offensive against Germany states, strategic bombing had "a singular position in British strategy," much of it focused on the destruction of Germany's oil sources. Unfortunately, the early years of the bombing offensive were largely a failure, while the MEW was overly optimistic about German material vulnerabilities. Thus, in short, "hopes were raised of success by blockade and bombing which could not be fulfilled."[169]

On June 30, Hugh Dalton circulated a memorandum to the War Cabinet that said "if the Hun push reaches the Caucasus, the destruction of the oilfields will be of vital importance to us, in this job the help of Russian experts will be most valuable, if not absolutely essential. But the Russians may hesitate to paralyze the whole Soviet economy, and Sir Stafford Cripps told me that an offer by His Majesty's Government to make good the loss [replacing equipment and supplying oil both during and after the war] later might be decisive in obtaining Russian consent." Dalton asked the Cabinet to authorize Cripps to

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[166] "Action Arising out of German-Russian Conflict," aide memoire by the Joint Planning Staff, June 23, 1941. WO 193/666
[167] Ronald C. Cooke and Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Target: Hitler's Oil*...59-60.
[168] Air Ministry to RAF HQ Middle East, June 26, 1941. AIR 8/564
[169] Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945: Volume 1: Preparation Parts 1, 2 and 3* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961). 155-158. 299. 280.

discuss these issues with the Soviets.[170] No doubt, Dalton also appreciated the need for American help in this issue. During a War Cabinet meeting the following month, "the Minister of War Transport pointed out that, during the war, oil imports into Russia would necessarily have to come from the United States. Their participation was essential in any measures to compensate in part for the destruction of these oilfields." The Soviets already had asked the Americans for oil and some had been shipped to Vladivostock. This was considered acceptable so long as it did not disrupt American shipments of iso-octane for British aircraft.[171]

30 Mission attempted to impress upon the Soviets the significance of German petrol vulnerability. On July 9, MacFarlane informed the Chiefs of Staff that they were doing what they could, but had the impression that "the Russians are most unlikely in the meantime to make an adequate effort. I want you to realise this in case you are relying on Russians to carry out this clearly vital task...a personal message from you or the Prime Minister preferably after we have produced concrete diversion in the north might well help."[172] RAF officers from 30 Mission were sent to the Black Sea region to coordinate with Soviet aviation and encourage their efforts. They supplied detailed intelligence on Romanian oil targets (Ploesti and the port of Constantsa) and suggested that parachutists be used to neutralize them – something the Russians indicated an interest in.[173] MacFarlane revived this suggestion on August 10 when he asked the Chiefs of Staff to loan a company

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[170] "Denial of Oil to the Enemy." Memorandum by the Minister of Economic Warfare (Hugh Dalton), June 30, 1941. CAB 66/17/18
[171] War Cabinet Conclusions. August 21, 1941. CAB 65/23/11
[172] 30 Mission to War Office, July 9, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4016
[173] Cripps to Foreign Office, July 17, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3831

of British parachute infantry to aid this task. This request was denied, the COS explaining that the Soviets had their own parachutists.[174] On July 17, the Joint Intelligence Committee reminded MacFarlane of German petrol vulnerabilities. The next day, Orme Sargent, number three in the Foreign Office, asked Victor Cavendish-Bentinck (diplomat and chairman of the JIC) about this "petrol war," the possibility of sending technical experts to aid the Russians and whether "the Russians are now anxious to discuss oil well demolition...?" However, the War Office believed the Russian interest in petrol was instead related to its use in bombs.[175]

Whether bombing Romanian oil installations was even a priority to the Soviet leadership was unclear. On July 20, MacFarlane gave the JIC Russian requests for intelligence on German industrial targets in eastern Germany. The JIC supplied the information, but cautioned that bombing anything other than the Romanian oil and transport system was "unremmerative [sic] at this stage."[176] By July 22, the RAF team reported from the Crimea that the Soviets were not up to the task of bombing Romanian oil installations (despite grandiose Soviet claims). As Cripps noted, their efforts were enthusiastic but ultimately small and "insufficient."[177] On August 11, MacFarlane reported that the Russians were losing interest in bombing oil installations and were, instead, "flirting with raids on Berlin." He would continue to encourage Russian attacks on the Romanian oil fields, but its Air Force was not a strategic force. "From information at our/my disposal" continued MacFarlane, "it is clear that the gallant resistance of the

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[174] 30 Mission to War Office, August 10, 1941. FO 371/28489/N4594
[175] J.I.C. to MacFarlane, July 17, 1941 and Sargent to Bentinck, July 18, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3959
[176] J.I.C. to 30 Mission, July 22, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4017
[177] Cripps to Foreign Office, July 22, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4006

Russian forces is causing Germany to use up her oil reserves at a rate which will well nigh cripple her by the end of this year."[178] A bombing campaign against oil targets could exacerbate German problems, but only Britain had the bombers to perform this mission.

30 Mission concluded that sending British heavy bombers to Russia would show "the flag in South Russia" and "probably commend itself greatly to Russians who appear to be devoting surviving bulk of air effort to support of their army in the field...the desirability of our intervening urgently and obviously assist Russia in some fresh direction is great."[179] Cripps asked whether "a few squadrons of heavy bombers" could be sent to attack Romanian oilfields and ports.[180] However, this idea never gained much traction owing to the difficulty in transporting such a force, while the British mission in Washington noted "there is no profit in immobilising aircraft, bombs, personnel and equipment for many months in an attempt to bring them into operation within Russia" when those resources could "be brought far more speedily and in fact immediately into action against Russia's enemy from outside Russia."[181] The Foreign Office, however, kept pressing this point. On August 6, Sargent wrote to Ismay about the need for Turkish or Persian acquiescence to transport equipment and personnel to Southern Russia. Eden thought the plan would provide "enormous advantage" and encouraged continued pressure on the Turks and Persians. Sargent asked Ismay whether the COS thought the idea was feasible "provided

[178] 30 Mission to War Office, August 11, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4594
[179] 30 Mission to War Office, July 31, 1941. WO 193/666
[180] Cripps to Foreign Office, August 2, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4256
[181] Britman (Washington) to Air Ministry, July 17, 1941. AIR 20/3910

access to South Russia were assured."[182] However, logistical difficulties prevented the scheme from passing the initial planning stages.

The final nail in the coffin for this idea came on August 13 when the Chiefs of Staff Committee indicated that, while three bomber squadrons could be redeployed from the Middle East, "this would however leave the Middle East with only two heavy bomber squadrons for a period of three months." Because these bombers were needed to attack Libyan ports, "we could not accept at the present time any weakening in the forces which are helping to prevent the build up of enemy strength in Libya." This was a very serious consideration because of the poor British position in North Arica at the time: Tobruk was under siege and Operation *Battleaxe* in June had been a costly failure. After also noting the logistical problems, the Chiefs of Staff rejected the proposal, however, "if the Russian front still holds, the attack of oil may be of decisive importance. If the situation permits we might then make all necessary preparations to operate squadrons in South Russia at the conclusion of the winter period." Nor would it "be right to press the Russians to concentrate their air attacks against Roumanian oil when we ourselves are bombing Berlin and not concentrating against synthetic oil installations."[183] The Ministry of Economic Warfare, 30 Mission and the Chiefs of Staff all had different priorities. The MEW focused on the economic aspects of the "wear-down" strategy, 30 Mission on aiding and appeasing Russia and the service departments on strengthening their forces. The COS disliked the idea for operational reasons, while the Prime Minister and Foreign Office prioritized

[182] Sargent to Ismay, August 6, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4346
[183] COS Committee, note by the Chief of Air Staff, August 13, 1941. WO 193/666

attacks on German civilian morale.[184] The German fuel situation was unenviable, but the British failed to adequately consider certain factors. By curtailing other consumption (such as restricting *Kriegsmarine* operations) the *Wehrmacht* was able to maintain its mobility past 1941.[185]

British thoughts turned slowly from bombing German oil sources, to ensuring that those in Caucasia would not fall into German hands. While Stalin had promised that the oilfields would be destroyed if the Germans approached, British decision makers were not so sure. On July 22 Stalin had "accepted the principle of co-operation with us for the planning of oil demolition generally," but he also emphasized that this would happen only at a time of his choosing. Cripps was not convinced he would destroy the Caucasus oil industry, lest it lead to a Soviet dependency on Western Powers.[186] In late August, with the *Wehrmacht* threatening to overrun the Donbas region, Churchill felt unable to make any demands on the Soviets given their economic dependency on Caucasian oil, and British inability to replace it. "It was impossible for us to say what M. Stalin would do in regard to this issue. He thought that we must be ready to bomb the oilfields ourselves if the Russians did not destroy them." The War Cabinet decided to consult with the Americans, who already had been approached by the Soviets over oil importation, and to have Cripps, should the opportunity present itself, ask whether "demolition plans were ready and whether we could offer any assistance." Cripps was instructed to apply great tact on this

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[184] Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive*...291.
[185] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (NY: Viking Penguin, 2007). 493-494.
[186] "Lord Hankey's Committee on Preventing Oil From Reaching Enemy Powers." August 19, 1941. CAB 66/18/20

"very delicate" issue.[187] Ultimately, however, British fears failed to materialize as the Germans never approached the oilfields that year.

For a time, there were serious discussions about deploying British aircraft to Russia to assist bombing operations or personnel to assist in the destruction of Caucasus oil installations. The British were keen on providing intelligence that would aid Russian bombing operations and 30 Mission proposed various schemes for direct British intervention. However, the Russians lacked strategic airpower and the British simply did not have the bombers to spare given their unsatisfactory position in North Africa. The entry of Russia into the war had complicated the oil equation but the limitations of British power eliminated any substantial intervention.

By July 17, the War Cabinet concluded "that the Germans expected to reach Moscow in about three weeks and to have full control of Western Russia in six or eight weeks. They seem to have been surprised by the degree of Soviet resistance, and to be disturbed by their own heavy losses in men and materials...it will, however, be noted that, for all the slowing up of the advance, it still continues."[188] Leeper's paper from the previous week must have seemed increasingly prophetic. There also was movement on other fronts. On July 12, Great Britain and the Soviet Union signed a joint declaration which precluded a separate peace and made a vague statement about cooperation against the common foe. The Cabinet also discussed the supply of raw materials. A list of raw materials needed by the Soviets was presented to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, including 10,000 tons of rubber, 500 tons of tin, 70,000 bales of wool and so on. The Committee

[187] War Cabinet Conclusions. August 21, 1941. CAB 65/23/11
[188] War Cabinet Weekly Resumé. July 10 to 17, 1941. CAB 66/17/39

agreed that these commodities should be shipped as soon as possible, and decided that the routes which could be used to supply Russia were Iran and Iraq, the Trans-Siberian Railway, the Northern Ports and Archangel and Murmansk.[189] On July 9, Golikov told Eden that he "hoped we might be able to assist in the supply of material, particularly aircraft, anti-aircraft guns and bombs. The Russians were not short of this material, but with the intensity of the fighting that had been raging their losses had naturally been considerable."[190] Golikov then provided another shopping list of military items to the Vice Chief of Air Staff, which included 3,000 fighters and 3,000 bombers, 20,000 AA guns (25-47mm), bombs, bomb sights and other equipment.[191]

From the beginning there had been discussions about providing material aid. At the end of June, Maisky asked about collaboration between Britain and Russia, and Eden replied "that we were with them up to the hilt in all military and economic measures for the defeat of Germany." The War Cabinet approved "the line" taken by Eden.[192] On the day before, however, the War Office told the Commander-in-Chief Far East that cooperation with Russia "will not extend to military alliance nor are there any plans for despatch of military forces or supply of war material." The only aid to Russia would be indirect – increased operations in order to relieve pressure on the Red Army.[193] Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, suggested that raids, part of a dummy invasion effort, be launched

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[189] Appendix to 30 Mission Diary. WO 178/25
[190] "Record of an Interview Between the Foreign Secretary and the Members of the Soviet Military Mission." War Cabinet memorandum, July 9, 1941. CAB 66/17/29
[191] Air Ministry memorandum, July 16, 1941. AIR 20/3910
[192] War Cabinet Conclusions, June 30, 1941. CAB 65/18/43.
[193] War Office to CinC Far East, June 29, 1941. WO 193/666

on northern France, possibly by Canadian troops.[194] On June 23, Lord Hankey suggested a number of ways in which Britain could exploit the situation, as "we are in with these ruffians we ought to make the best of it." Hankey also stressed the need to "ascertain Russia's principal military needs, emphasising the importance of detailed specifications in the case of war material."[195]

Of course, the prospect of a British invasion of France was repeatedly floated by the Soviets for many months, though Maisky later claimed this was done simply to pressure the British in order to receive concessions on other issues.[196] Kharlamov claimed that the Soviet Mission was ordered to stress the need for material assistance and a second front, some combination of joint operations in the far north, a British landing in France or a diversion in the Balkans.[197] Such an operation was unfeasible because British resources were stretched in the summer of 1941 between the war in North Africa, home defence, the air war in Western Europe, the Battle of the Atlantic and imperial deterrence. Additionally, Britain lacked air superiority over France and the experience and special equipment needed to conduct an amphibious invasion (the bloody debacle at Dieppe in August 1942 – involving the Canadians mentioned by Portal - proved that this capability would be long in gestation). As Farrell says, "the heart of the matter was that the British had not yet even **begun** to prepare for a return to the continent in any fashion."[198] There was talk of raids on the continent, and the COS instructed the joint planning staff to make preparations for a

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[194] COS Committee minutes, June 23, 1941. WO 193/666.
[195] Hankey to Prime Minister, June 23, 1941. PREM 3/395/16
[196] Ivan Maisky, *Memoirs*...188.
[197] Kharlamov, *Difficult Mission*. 32-33.
[198] Farrell, *The Basis and Making*...163.

campaign in Norway.[199] However, Britain was ill prepared for any of these options, while no small scale landing would unduly alarm the Germans. Agitation for such action would grow however.

Central to the calculus of whether and what war materials and resources to supply the Soviets with was the question of how long Russia would last under the German onslaught. The opening weeks of the war presented a mixed picture, but did not conform to the grimmest scenarios predicted by British observers. On July 9, General Davidson sent the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff several policy questions. When MacFarlane asked "am I right in assuming that it is vital to us to keep the Russians sweet and fighting, as every day they hold the Germans means German losses and material wastage," the answer was "yes." When MacFarlane asked "and that to attain this object it is worth running any risk, other than obviously stupid ones," the decision was "a question of degree, to be judged here."[200] However, on July 10 the Chiefs of Staff concluded that any decision on aid depended on "our estimate as to whether the Russians can hold out for more than a month or two. At present there seems to be little reason to change our original opinion that prolonged resistance is unlikely."[201] As the month of July wore on however, it became increasingly clear that the USSR might not collapse at all. Beaumont contends that Stalin's appeal of July 19 (Beaumont characterizes Stalin as making an "apologetic" reference to the annexations of 1939-40 while admitting weakness and asking for a second front) finally embarrassed Britain enough to begin committing to supply, where direct action was

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[199] C.O.S. Committee, extract from minutes, July 26, 1941. WO 193/666
[200] D.M.I. to V.C.I.G.S., July 9, 1941. WO 32/15548
[201] "Co-operation with the Russians." COS Committee memo, July 9, 1941. WO 193/666

impracticable.[202] Churchill responded to implicit criticisms of British efforts by explaining that "anything sensible and effective that we can do to help will be done. I beg you, however, to realize limitations imposed upon us by our resources and geographical position."[203] Yet, plenty of information and opinion in July encouraged the British in such directions beyond accusations from Soviet leaders.

From the start, the consistent confidence of Soviet leaders calmed the fears of men like MacFarlane despite their understanding that Soviet officers overstated their successes. On June 30, Golikov gave the "impression of quiet confidence and of not being in the least rattled by present situation,"[204] while the Air Mission thought Soviet officers were making wild claims but their confidence, "whether justified or not, it does not seem to be play-acting."[205] On July 4 MacFarlane gave Davidson his initial impression about the commitment of the Soviet leadership to the war, saying:

> I'm going to give you a guess with every possible reserve....I believe the Kremlin and the Army are now committed. If they are beaten or forced to make a bad peace they are sunk. I don't think they are any more in a position to double cross us. But you can't trust the Kremlin one inch and the Army can't do a thing without the Kremlin's knowledge and sanction. They are all oriental and self-centered and-satisfied and look upon us as a junior member of the firm who is not pulling his weight.[206]

On July 7, after a meeting with Major-General Panfilov (liaison to 30 Mission), MacFarlane reported "the general picture painted was reassuring, Gen. Panfilov hinting that signs of stabilisation were apparent and also that a large scale counter-attack was

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[202] Beaumont, *Comrades in Arms*...30-31.
[203] Churchill to Stalin, July 20, 1941, Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...964.
[204] 30 Mission to War Office, June 30, 1941. WO 178/25
[205] Air Mission (Moscow) to Air Ministry, June 30, 1941. AIR 8/565
[206] MacFarlane to D.M.I. July 4, 1941. WO 32/15548

probably being prepared."[207] On the 12th, Stalin and Shaposhnikov were confident of victory but, in a rare moment of honesty, "stressed hard times ahead."[208] On July 24, Davidson summarized MacFarlane's thoughts to the CIGS. Relations between the Mission and their Russian opposites was "excellent" (though the Russians were opaque). "The most encouraging part is the way in which Stalin is taking charge himself and the continued lack of evidence of disorganisation and despondency. The regime and the Army Chiefs are committed and they would appear to be fighting flat out with the knowledge that they are automatically eliminated if they fail."[209] It was clear that the Kremlin had the will to fight.

Reporting throughout mid July reinforced the growing perception that Axis forces were encountering determined resistance. On July 14, the British military attaché in Helsinki noted Finnish reports of "strong Russian resistance" with counter attacks re-establishing Soviet positions on some islands in the Baltic.[210] On July 21, he related that "retiring Russians carrying out demolitions and firing the forests. Finns hindered in extinguishing the fires by Russian air attacks" and that the Finns were "meeting stiff resistance in area of Kuolismia."[211] A scorched earth policy was a good measure of Russian resolve. The Cabinet concluded that "the situation might well be more serious than the Russians were prepared to admit, although the Germans must be experiencing considerable difficulties over maintenance."[212] Soviet political will seemed to be holding firm and there was the growing sense that it was their ability to keep fighting that was a potential limiting

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[207] 30 Mission War Diary, July 7, 1941. WO 178/25
[208] 30 Mission to War Office, July 12, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3737
[209] Summary of MacFarlane to D.M.I., July 24, 1941. Forwarded to C.I.G.S. on July 31, 1941. WO 32/15548
[210] Military Attaché Helsinki to Foreign Office, July 14, 1941. FO 371/29486/N3731
[211] Vereker (Helsinki) to Foreign Office, July 21, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3983
[212] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 14, 1941. CAB 65/19/5

factor, not their desire to do so. The calculus for the War Cabinet was the depth of Russian resistance versus the German ability to sustain their offensives. As Cadogan wondered: "(1) Have the Russians got a strategic reserve (2) can German transport keep the pace going?"[213]

The reintroduction of dual command between military officers and commissars caused consternation but was quickly explained away. On July 17 MacFarlane noted the induction of millions of men into the army and speculated that "the probability is that Stalin wants to ensure that the army does not get out of control politically...at my meeting tonight with Panfilov a military commissar was present throughout. Panfilov introduced him as his secretary!"[214] On the same day, the JIC told 30 Mission that it was clear the Germans were suffering heavy casualties and were meeting far stronger resistance than they had anticipated. These losses might damage morale and "break the German home front sooner than material and military considerations might lead us to believe."[215] This was significant, as it placed Russian resistance beyond simply a distraction for Germany, but within the British strategic framework of attrition. Signals intelligence indicated the Germans were concerned about Russian air attacks because of the inadequacy of their own fighter protection, while the serviceability of German aircraft was reported to be low.[216] On July 17, the War Cabinet noted that MacFarlane "considered that the Germans would

[213] July 14 entry. Cadogan, *The Diaries*...392.
[214] 30 Mission to War Office, July 17, 1941. WO 178/25
[215] J.I.C. memorandum for MacFarlane, July 17, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3959
[216] A.C.A.S. to MacFarlane, July 15, 1941. HW 20/520

probably continue to drive the Russians back, but only at the cost of much harder fighting than they had anticipated."[217]

The Soviets gave the British optimistic figures for German losses, which further emphasized the heavy attrition being sustained by German forces. On July 19, MacFarlane told the Chiefs of Staff that he could not vouch for claims about German losses as described by Panfilov, "but his confidence and optimism are at least consistent. Admiral Miles who returned from Murmansk area today reports the situation up there seems well in hand and the Jugo-Slav Minister returning from Turkey today reports very large and steady troop movements on Russian railways from South to North in and North of Caucasus."[218] Information on Soviet rail efficiency was particularly noteworthy as Russian infrastructure was believed to be decrepit. It also gave an indication of the scale of Soviet reserves.

By the fourth week of July, British policy was changing. On July 23, the Prime Minister emphasized to the Chiefs of Staff Committee "the tremendous fight which the Russians were putting up. Every effort must be made on our part to assist and encourage them." Churchill then rebuked the Chiefs, telling them that "the question of assisting the Russians should be regarded as most urgent and should be handled in a sympathetic spirit by the Service Departments."[219] Discussions about the specific delivery of war material had only recently begun, but Russian resistance was paving the way forward. The Chiefs of Staff were, understandably, concerned about the inadequacies of their own equipment

[217] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 17, 1941. CAB 65/19/7
[218] 30 Mission to War Office, July 19, 1941. WO 178/25
[219] C.O.S. Committee Minutes, July 23, 1941. WO 193/666

inventories, but, as Churchill's comments indicate, the hope of an enduring Eastern Front was more important.

Still, German progress in their offensive was inescapable. On July 24, the Swedish Foreign Minister passed on information obtained from a German source, claiming:

> Russian resistance is considerably stronger than expected but German plan is to thrust forward armoured units in order to create big pockets and annihilate Russian armies. The idea was not to press forward an advance to Moscow, Leningrad etc. until Russian armies have been completely destroyed and fierce Russian counter attacks indicated that they are playing into German hands by keeping troops in forward positions rather than withdrawing them. Nevertheless it is not expected that Russian main armies will be completely crushed for another six weeks from now. Germans are surprised at the number of Russian troops and vigorous resistance on Finnish front and particularly at Murmansk.[220]

Finnish reports described these troops as "much improved since the last war," though the British military attaché believed the Finns continued to "under-estimate their opponents."[221] The War Cabinet weekly summary noted that "German leaders have been at pains to excuse themselves on the grounds of inevitable difficulties. There is no doubt that supply problems are considerable and that much fighting is still taking place behind the leading troops. It is probable, however, that when infantry formations have come up to relieve the mechanised troops, the advance will regain its impetus, subject possibly to some refitting for the armoured formations." The Russian situation around Murmansk was reported to be in hand and Soviet resistance elsewhere was slowing the German offensive. Despite German breakthroughs near Smolensk, "there is little doubt that the spearhead so formed has left behind it whole formations of Russians who are offering serious resistance

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[220] Mallet (Stockholm) to Foreign Office, July 24, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4054
[221] Vereker (Helsinki) to Foreign Office, July 26, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4089

to the consolidation of the advance."[222] Indeed, on July 26 the German Chief of Staff, Franz Halder, noted in his diary that the "enemy defence is becoming more aggressive; more tanks, more planes. In addition to ten new divisions previously listed, fifteen more new divisions have been reported."[223] By late July, the German campaign was increasingly one of fits and starts and high intensity, attritional battles, with the operational goal of the invasion (destruction of the Red Army) nowhere near completion.[224] Attrition, fierce and unrelenting Soviet opposition, supply issues and lack of strategic direction plagued the Germans. The latest information indicated that the Germans would not be able to crush the Red Army until September. However, given British understanding of Soviet strategic depth, there was now a real hope that they would survive until the winter.

Thus, by the end of July, the Russians appeared to have survived the initial *Blitzkrieg*. Numerous reports indicated that the German war machine, although still advancing into Russia, was being worn down by constant fighting and long marches. There was a corresponding shift in discussions toward explaining Russian success and analysing the material ability of the Soviets to continue fighting. On July 30, MacFarlane reported that the Russians were "counter-attacking frequently. Enemy has had very heavy casualties and his efforts appear disjointed."[225] The following day he told Davidson that "the Russians have put up a better show than you envisaged, and...are still alive and kicking hard after about 6 weeks." Several factors were in the Soviet favour, including the pre-war study of

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[222] War Cabinet Weekly Summary, July 17-24, 1941. CAB 66/18/2
[223] July 26, 1941 entry, Halder, *The Private War Journal...Volume VI*...271.
[224] See David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk 10 July – 10 September 1941 Volume 1* (Solihull: Helion & Company Limited, 2010).
[225] 30 Mission to War Office, July 30, 1941. WO 178/25

armoured warfare ("they have clearly studied this business of dealing with strong armoured thrusts very carefully."), the direct support of the army air force with large numbers of "machines of very latest modern performance about which we appear to have known but little," the quality of their tanks, the efficiency of their mobilization and the cohesion of their leadership ('there have been no signs that I can detect of dissension or of any unwillingness to fight the German who is very healthily detested" – to which Davidson commented: "good."). MacFarlane concluded that "I think the German has been very much surprised by the Russian 'come-back' after the big losses and indeed major defeats that he suffered in the opening phase especially in the Minsk sector." To this, the D.M.I. added "yes."[226]

The Soviets had the will to fight but the question was how long they could maintain the ability to do so with the Germans seizing more and more Soviet territory. In order to answer it, a broader examination of Soviet means of resistance was necessary. On July 21, Military Intelligence commented that the German invasion "has in all probability done much to restore that love of country always latent in Russia." If the Germans did not advance past European Russia, it was deemed likely that the Soviet Government would retire to the East and continue the war.[227] On July 21, Professor Postan of the MEW opined to the Foreign Office that "if Stalin retired to Asiatic Russia and drew his supplies from the various areas east and south-east of the Urals, the industrial capacity available to him

[226] MacFarlane to D.M.I. July 31, 1941. WO 32/15548
[227] "The Joint British-Soviet Declaration and its Bearing on the Future Course of Military Operations Against Germany." Military Intelligence memorandum, July 14, 1941. WO 208/1777

would be sufficient to support in the field an army about one-quarter of its present size."[228] None of this was entirely new. Pre-war analysis had also indicated the likelihood of popular Russian resistance to a German invasion, the possibility of the Soviet Far East continuing to fight after the conquest of European Russia as well as the huge reserve of men and material available to the Kremlin.

On July 31, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee gave a report to the War Cabinet entitled (somewhat misleadingly) "The Effects of a Russian Collapse." The paper characterized Stalin as beating a nationalist war drum, and having no choice but to fight to the last. Nor was this a short term tactic as "there are signs (of which we await confirmation) that the Soviet Government have a plan to move the seat of government and are taking preliminary steps to put it into effect. There is evidence that the Soviet Government's economic plans envisage a long war." If this was done, the regime could be maintained, at least for a time. The JIC suggested that the Volga river was such an obstacle that the Germans might not even intend to venture beyond it. As it was, Germany would find grave difficulties in controlling and extracting resources from European Russia, especially as the Russians seemed to be following through on Stalin's call to leave nothing to the invader. Should most of European Russian fall into German hands, some 30% of Russia's industrial base was east of the Urals, varying for different industries. Additionally, the Soviets seemed to envisage a long war and were making "some preparations for expanding the capacity of their armament industry east of the Urals. It is possible that Russia would retain industrial capacity sufficient for the maintenance of some 40 to 50

[228] Postan to Coote (letter used by J.I.C.), July 21, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4067

divisions, excluding the Far Eastern Army...in any case the maintenance of substantial military and air forces must be dependent upon Russia's being able to supplement her own resources by keeping open lines of supply with the outside world." Russian resistance in the East could be "a spur to continued local resistance by the population of the occupied part of the country" where the anti-German feeling of the peasantry would be greater than existing anti-Soviet feeling, especially given the lack of a political alternative to the Soviet regime (thanks in part, according to the JIC, to Stalin's purges). The JIC expected the Axis to have to maintain 75-100 (mostly German) divisions in the east, depending on the seriousness of continued resistance.[229] At the very least, the war in Russia would remain a significant drain on German resources, no matter the precise line reached by the *Wehrmacht* at the end of the year.

Most British decision makers, overawed by German power, were initially pessimistic about the Eastern Front, but determined Soviet resistance and consistent confidence projected through 30 Mission quickly changed minds. There was genuine British interest in directly aiding bombing efforts and in sharing intelligence, but the former was unrealistic and the latter was largely dismissed by the Soviets. By late July, it was increasingly clear that both the Germans and British had underestimated the Soviets. The latter was critical, as while the British generally maligned Russian military skills, pre-war estimates emphasized the size and cohesion of the Red Army, the vastness of its equipment stocks and breadth of territory it could fall back on. The Soviets were certainly not being honest and forthright with the British but their confidence and cohesion, together with what

[229] "The Effects of a Russian Collapse." J.I.C. memorandum, July 31, 1941. WO 208/1777

little could be ascertained about the course of the fighting, indicated that the Russians were fully committed to the war and the German invasion was not achieving the rapid victory on which its war machine relied. This was duly appreciated by British decision makers, who were beginning to think about a prolonged German commitment in the East and how Britain could prolong it even further. Analysis indicated that the Soviet regime was prepared to continue to fight no matter what. They were evacuating what they could to the east and, with foreign material aid, could still maintain a large military force even without European Russia. This was all an important precursor to a substantial supply effort as the British needed to be sure aid would not be completely wasted. Therefore, by the middle of the summer, the initial question of whether to supply Russia had been all but answered and there remained only the question of with what, and in what quantity.

## Chapter Three:

## At the Hungry Table: Material Aid, July-August 1941

By the end of July it was becoming clear that British aid to the Soviets would not be a waste of scarce resources, but the question remained: what to give and how to give it? The speed and quantity of assistance depended on the cooperation offered by the Soviets, practical limits such as material availability and transport (which relied heavily on American generosity) and Britain's perception of actual Russian need for equipment and their ability to utilise it. Although an invasion of France was impossible, some military action could, even if in only a small way, alleviate the pressure on Soviet forces. The obvious candidate was to increase the tempo and scale of air operations over Western Europe. As Churchill told Stalin on July 7, "we hope to force Hitler to bring back some of his Air power to the West and gradually take some of the strain off you."[230] Churchill even took inspiration from a scheme concocted by H.G. Wells to burn down the Black Forest with incendiary bombs.[231] On July 18, the Soviets suggested targets for the British bombing campaign, including tank factories in Essen and Nuremberg and rail junctions east of the Ruhr. The Air Staff seriously considered these proposals and Portal asked the planning staff whether some aircraft could be sent to Archangel as a "gesture" (these would be American aircraft – Air Marshal Harris had approached Roosevelt about this several days earlier).[232] The strategic bombing campaign was central to British "wear-down"

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[230] Churchill to Stalin, July 7, 1941. CAB 65/19/3
[231] Kitchen, *British Policy*...58.
[232] Note to V.C.A.S. July 19, 1941. AIR 20/3910

strategy, but alone could offer only limited return until better resourced and conceived. Meanwhile, this campaign was a heavy drain on British resources. In the first 18 nights of August, 107 bombers were lost in ineffectual raids over Germany.[233]

Another key component of the British strategy of strategic attrition was the Royal Navy. How British naval power might be used to provide tangible aid to the Soviets was unclear. On June 24, as the military mission prepared to depart for Russia, the Admiralty concluded that operations in the far North would be unproductive because of logistical issues (such as the lack of an advanced fueling base), a shortage of warships, the threat of air attack (for which the British could muster "no effective air defence"), and the lack of coordination with Soviet air and naval forces. Finally, the Germans were not using the northern Scandinavian ports much and had no significant naval units there.[234] The situation soon changed. On July 5, the Chiefs of Staff cabled MacFarlane saying that they appreciated "the desire of the Russians that we should take such naval action as is possible in the northern area of operations and they may be sure that we are putting in hand the necessary preparations and collecting the necessary warships with all possible speed."[235] The Foreign Office told MacFarlane that, for security reasons, there would be no advance warning.[236] On the following day, the Admiralty told the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet that "it is essential that we should do everything possible to assist the Russians," including attacking "enemy transports which are reported to be at Petsamo,

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[233] Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive*...254.
[234] "Instructions to the Naval Section of the British Liaison Mission to the U.S.S.R." Appendix C: "Action in Far North." June 24, 1941. ADM 1/12671
[235] C.O.S. to MacFarlane, COS Committee Annex. July 5, 1941. WO 193/666
[236] Foreign Office to MacFarlane, July 5, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3374

Kirkenes and in the Varanger Fjord."[237] This change stemmed from the increasing recognition of the need to aid the Soviets in any way possible and also the direct input of Churchill, who had greater influence with the Admiralty and the RAF than the War Office, which he derided as "hidebound, devoid of imagination, extravagant of manpower and slow." Churchill also personally liked Pound and Portal more than Dill.[238] On July 7, Churchill told Stalin that "the Admiralty have at my desire prepared a serious operation to come off in the near future in the Arctic, after which I hope contact will be established between British and Russian Navies."[239]

Rear Admiral Vian was chosen to command efforts to aid the Soviets in northern waters, as Force "K." Vian later wrote that "the Prime Minister at once determined that all that could be done *must* be done to help the then groggy bear towards its second wind. We should, he said, grasp its right paw in the Black Sea, and its left in the White." On July 12, Vian met Golikov and Pound, who told him to dispatch a naval force to Murmansk to operate against Germany's "sea-borne supply route," though "much would depend on facilities available at the proposed bases, and the degree of security they enjoyed."[240] By July 10, the naval staff was "studying" the possibility of sending some cruisers and smaller vessels to northern waters, though air cover was needed. The possibility of basing 200-300 aircraft around Murmansk also was being studied, although it involved many logistical questions. Additionally, the despatch of a naval force to northern waters "would entail the

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[237] Admiralty to C-in-C Home Fleet, July 6, 1941. PREM 3/395/16
[238] Quoted in Alex Danchev, "Dilly-Dally, or Having the Last Word: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and Prime Minister Winston Churchill," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan, 1987), 21.
[239] Churchill to Stalin, July 7, 1941. CAB 65/19/3
[240] Sir Philip Vian, *Action this Day* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd. 1960). 63-64.

despatch of oilers and minesweeping craft and would amount to a considerable commitment." The Joint Planning Staff had been studying Russian requests for air and naval co-operation and was convinced that the Soviet delegation did not understand the problems that would arise.[241] By July 12, the Admiralty informed the War Office of the "requirement" in "North Russia" for a mobile light AAA battery at a "very early date" and for "four sets R.D.F. G.L. [radio direction finding] for employment in early warning role both complete with personnel." Arrangements should be made in "anticipation of official approval of C.O.S."[242]

When Vian flew to Polyarnoe, the naval base north of Murmansk, he experienced first hand the poor navigation abilities of Soviet pilots. Half of the aircraft transporting his group had to turn back to Archangel because they lost sight of their flight leader in cloud cover. The port defences were only promises, with "none being existent." When asked whether his submarines could interdict German supply lines, the admiral in command responded "no, they were insufficiently trained; and this seemed to surprise the ever-present Commissar." He told the Chiefs of Staff that with 24 hours of daylight in the Kola inlet at this time of year, and no serious port defences, surface ships could not be based there. However, "we should send a submarine or two. These, while themselves operating, might spur the Russian submariners into activity."[243] Two British submarines, HMS Tigris and Trident, were sent to Murmansk the following month with the twin missions of

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[241] C.O.S. Committee minutes, July 10, 1941. WO 193/666
[242] Admiralty to War Office and Air Ministry, July 12, 1941. WO 193/660
[243] Vian, *Action this Day*...66-67.

interdicting German sea lines of communication and encouraging greater ambition among the 16 Soviet submarines present.[244]

Meanwhile, the British considered sending fighter squadrons to Murmansk. Planners considered the idea of sending 200-300 aircraft as well as some surface ships (three cruisers and a destroyer flotilla) to Murmansk and/or Archangel but rejected it because of problems with infrastructure, logistics and port defences that needed to be put to the Russian delegation.[245] When the subject arose again on July 24, Portal said "that the origin of this idea was to protect a naval force at Murmansk. As, however, it would not be possible to send any long-range fighter squadrons and as there was an absence of any efficient warning and plotting system, the proposed despatch of R.A.F. squadrons would not provide secure protection. It would, on the other hand have a good psychological effect and he thought that it might be necessary to accept the scheme as a political gesture."[246] Two days later, Churchill approved sending two squadrons of Hurricanes to Murmansk, despite Portal's belief that the scheme "has little to commend it on military grounds." It was estimated that it would take 14 days to prepare and embark the squadrons, 8 days to sail and 4 days to disembark everything.[247] On August 4, the COS frankly informed 30 Mission that "mainly for political reasons we have agreed to send 40 Hurricanes complete with pilots and ground equipment to assist in defence of Naval base at Murmansk...military

[244] "General Survey of the Situation." Memorandum by Captain R. Bevan, August 26, 1941. ADM 199/606
[245] "Report by Executive Planning Staff," July 9, 1941. WO 193/666
[246] C.O.S. Committee minutes, July 24, 1941. WO 193/666
[247] C.A.S. to Prime Minister, July 26, 1941. PREM 3/395/4

value of this force will be low owing to absence of stable line of communication with U.K."[248]

The aircraft reached Murmansk with the *Dervish* convoy at the end of August. By September 13, they had been in action and downed three enemy aircraft for the loss of one.[249] The presence of British aviation units allowed training to occur with Russian personnel,[250] as Russian officers and mechanics were attached to the squadrons in order to learn about Hurricane maintenance.[251] This was an important consideration for Britain had already committed to supplying the Russians with significant numbers of combat aircraft. The remaining Hurricanes were to be left behind when British personnel withdrew in October (having accomplished little – the British even felt that their personnel had received too little Soviet media attention).[252] Even so, Bentinck wrote "we have a mania for offering the Russians advice and technical experts, neither of which they want, and which only arouses their suspicions."[253] The Soviets wanted equipment from the British, not an intellectual intervention in the form of advice or "experts."

Other avenues of direct naval action bore more immediate fruit. On July 15, Molotov suggested to Cripps that Spitzbergen and Bear Island be occupied, because of the "1500 Soviet workmen in coal mines all liable for military service who could be mobilised there," an idea which Cripps thought a good one.[254] On July 17, the Joint Planning Staff

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[248] War Office to 30 Mission, August 4, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4552
[249] V.C.A.S. to Prime Minister, September 13, 1941. AIR 20/956
[250] D.C.A.S. to Secretary of State, August 6, 1941. AIR 20/956
[251] V.C.A.S. to Prime Minister, August 28, 1941. AIR 19/287
[252] See H. Hanak, "Sir Stafford Cripps as Ambassador in Moscow, June 1941 – January 1942," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 383 (Apr., 1982), 336-337.
[253] Quoted in Kitchen, *British Policy*...99.
[254] Cripps to Foreign Office, July 15, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3738

commented that "the alliance between Great Britain and Russia has given Spitzbergen a strategical value which it did not previously possess" (note the word "alliance" – specifically rejected by the War Office three weeks earlier).[255] In addition to a sweep of northern waters it was decided, initially, to rescue Soviet and Norwegian miners on Spitzbergen and Bear Islands, and establish a re-fueling base there. However, political factors complicated the operation. The Norwegian Government, which owned the territory, had to be consulted and insisted that the Soviet Government recognize the Norwegian government-in-exile, and that Norwegian personnel accompany the expedition.[256] It was decided to use Canadian troops in the operation, but this also proved problematic as the JIC thought that a British station on Spitzbergen might be subject to German attack. Bentinck expressed his fear on August 1 that the Germans might capture any Canadian garrison "in order to try and make bad blood between Canada and ourselves by showing that we let the Australians and New Zealanders down in Greece and Crete and had done likewise by the Canadians in Spitzbergen." Ultimately, Britain decided that two battalions of Canadian troops (in the event, reduced to one), 25 Norwegians and a Russian liaison would compromise the ground element of Operation "Gauntlet," but there would be no permanent garrison.[257] The operation, conducted on August 18, found no German opposition. All Soviet and Norwegian citizens were evacuated. The landings were not completely without incident, however. Admiral Vian recalled how his troops liberated stores of vodka at

[255] Joint Planning Staff, July 17, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4071
[256] Eden to Collier, July 18, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3858
[257] Bentinck to Sargent, August 1, C.O.S. Committee, August 5, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4327 - N4328

Barentsburg which "made it necessary to *carry* the rear-guard on board."[258] The army, responding to accusations of misbehaviour, reported that the only incident was with the Russian Consul, "who with (?friends) was carried on board dead drunk."[259]

In addition to evacuating Spitzbergen, the Royal Navy conducted demonstrations to intercept German shipping in the Arctic in late July and August. On July 30, aircraft carriers HMS Victorious and Furious attacked targets around Petsamo and Kirkenes, including a German depot-ship and four merchant vessels, losing 12 torpedo aircraft and 4 fighters in the process.[260] These operations were a substantial risk to and commitment of naval forces by an already stretched Royal Navy which had to escort convoys across the Atlantic, keep the Mediterranean open to British shipping, counter Axis surface ships and deter Japan. Given the threat of German aviation, submarines and mines, Vian was glad that operations were not more ambitious. His ships "owed their survival, I believe, to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, who, in the long-drawn discussions with our Allies, unfailingly supported the view that no political object would be served by attempting military impossibilities."[261] The purpose of these operations was largely to show that Britain was not idly sitting as the Soviets were crushed by the *Wehrmacht*. These operations constrained Axis attacks in the far north, and perhaps helped reduce the threat to Murmansk. However, on July 21, the situation at Murmansk was "reported to be in hand"[262] while by August 26, the British liaison at Polyarnoe indicated that, without

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[258] Vian, *Action this Day*...71.
[259] AIDAC to Admiralty, August 29, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4879
[260] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 31, 1941. CAB 65/19/12
[261] Vian, *Action this Day*...73.
[262] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 21, 1941. CAB 65/19/8

substantial reinforcement, German and Finnish forces lacked the strength to take Murmansk anyway.[263] Arguably, the mere threat of British naval power combined with more activity from Soviet aviation and naval assets could have accomplished whatever British warships did.

However, this naval activity also aided the advent of convoys to Murmansk and Archangel. Both before, and in the early days of the German invasion, Britain was making plans to provide raw materials and some finished products to the Soviets. Since intelligence reports indicated that even if the Germans overran European Russia, the Soviet Government possessed both the will and some means to continue resisting, British ability to support continued resistance was of paramount importance. Raw materials and economic aid was promised quickly as it required less assessment of the need of the recipient and his ability to utilise it. It was also more readily available. As Cripps told Molotov on June 27, in terms of aid, "Economic – the maximum possible in view of limited means of transport. Militarily – advice and technical help. But we had no men or materials to spare."[264] The issue of transport was fundamental. Given shortages of British shipping and warships for escort, and the inadequate anti-aircraft defences at Soviet northern ports, the idea of shipping material there was not attractive. The only other available routes were through Vladivostock and, to a limited extent, Persia. On June 29, 30 Mission told the MEW that it was necessary to develop alternative routes to the Trans-Siberian railway, suggesting that everything possible be done to improve routes through Iraq and Iran. Furthermore, rolling stock ordered for Turkey could be used in Iran instead, in order to increase rail capacity.

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[263] Monthly report, R. Bevan (Polyarnoe), August 26, 1941. ADM 199/606
[264] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 9, 1941. CAB 65/19/3

On July 1, the Soviets told the Mission that they "wished to utilise Vladivostock for the cargoes of rubber wool and tin. They wished to utilise the route through Iran and Irak for cargoes of flax which will be supplied from India."[265]

The supply of materials, however, initially was long on promise and short on substance. The MEW indicated cryptically on July 17 that "steps have been taken, in cooperation with other Government Departments, to meet their [the Soviet's] most urgent demands."[266] The Soviets found these delays incomprehensible. On July 23, the Colonial Office warned that the Soviets, feeling "grave concern" over these delays, wanted to send a representative to Singapore to oversee the effort (specifically rubber and tin shipments). The Cabinet supported this proposal so that the Soviets could witness the difficulties for themselves.[267] On July 28, the Russians asked for 10,000-12,000 tons of rubber from their ally. The War Cabinet agreed to this request and concluded that "if necessary, in order to ensure speedy supply, we should send 10,000 tons of rubber from stocks in this country."[268] The Economic Warfare Report for July stated that "supplies of strategic materials, including rubber, tin, wool, lead, jute, boots, cobalt, industrial diamonds and shellac, are already on their way to Russia, while certain Russian exports have already been received here. Further assistance to the U.S.S.R. has taken the form of the repair of Russian ships."[269] The First convoy (*Dervish*), carrying a mixed cargo of raw materials and finished goods (including aircraft) reached Archangel on August 31. It consisted of six merchant

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[265] Appendix to 30 Mission diary, July 1, 1941. WO 178/25
[266] War Cabinet economic warfare memorandum , report for June, by Hugh Dalton, July 17, 1941. CAB 68/8/46
[267] Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor Sir S. Thomas, July 23, 1941. WO 193/921
[268] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 28, 1941. CAB 65/19/11
[269] War Cabinet economic warfare memorandum , report for July, by Hugh Dalton, August 21, 1941. CAB 68/8/52

vessels, some quite elderly, and nine escorts, including three minesweepers meant to be stationed in northern Russia. A covering force led by HMS Victorious was present to prevent interception by the *Kriegsmarine*. Additionally, the elderly aircraft carrier HMS Argus delivered the Hurricanes meant to help defend Murmansk. The next convoy, P.Q.1, consisting of 11 merchant vessels and 8 escorts, would not sail until September 28.[270] Such escort was a substantial commitment of resources. On September 18, the departure of shipments from the East coast of the United States was delayed because "without dangerously weakening escorts for our trade convoys we cannot provide separate escorts for the American ships and for Convoy W.S. 12.Z."[271] Indeed, the commitment of ships at all, even elderly ones, was onerous given the shortages of shipping across the board. On September 1, Churchill would ask Roosevelt for the loan of 12 liners and 20 cargo ships (crewed by Americans) in order to transfer two additional British divisions to the Middle East.[272]

American support was crucial for substantial aid to Russia. As Sargent noted on July 9, successful exploitation of the war in the east required "the co-operation of the United States" and Britain must take this case to the President with "vigour."[273] Like the British, the Americans saw encouraging signs that the Soviets were not likely to collapse soon. Within two days of the start of Barbarossa, the Americans freed about $40,000,000 in Soviet assets and chose not to apply the Neutrality Act to Russia. On June 24, Roosevelt stated "we are going to give all the aid that we possibly can to Russia," though a list of

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[270] Richard Woodman, *The Arctic Convoys 1941-1945* (London: John Murray Ltd. 1994). 36-37. 42.
[271] War Cabinet notes on Middle East reinforcements, September 18, 1941. PREM 3/281/11
[272] Churchill to Roosevelt, September 1, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers...*1146-1147.
[273] Memorandum by Orme Sargent, July 9, 1941. FO 371/29486/N3540

specific items was needed.[274] On June 26, the Americans began to organize a special committee to handle Soviet supply, soon under the control of Colonel Faymonville, a former military attaché who was sympathetic to the Soviets. By July 22, the Americans had cleared some $21,940,000 of industrial equipment to be sent to the Soviet Union.[275] However, American decision makers were no more keen simply to bail a sinking ship than the British. As Secretary of War Henry Stimson recorded in his diary, some were "just hellbent to satisfy a passing impulse or emotion to help out some other nation that is fighting on our side."[276]

The arrival of Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's lend-lease representative and diplomatic fixer, in London and Moscow in July, helped to convince American decision makers that the Soviet Union needed greater aid. Hopkins was among a minority of American officials who believed that "everything possible" should be done to keep Russia in the war.[277] Cripps complained at the time about the defeatist attitude of American officials in Moscow, and noted how the arrival of Hopkins improved their mood.[278] MacFarlane reported on July 31 that Hopkins "soon discovered the rottenness and defeatism of the local American Ambassador and Embassy and I hope we'll see some changes soon." Moreover, on meeting with Hopkins "we are all agreed here that Russia must be kept going and that some very careful and far-sighted planning is necessary as regards apportioning war material between

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[274] Quoted in Robert Huhn Jones, *The Roads to Russia: United States Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969). 34-36.
[275] Dawson, *The Decision*...129, 151-155.
[276] Quoted in Beaumont, *Comrades in Arms*...36.
[277] Dawson, *The Decision*...172-173.
[278] Gorodetsky, ed. *Stafford Cripps in Moscow*...138-140.

us, America and Russia."[279] MacFarlane clearly thought that the Soviets would survive the German onslaught (though with how much of the country in their hands was unclear) and the time had come for serious aid. Hopkins left Moscow convinced that the Russian military situation was not as bad as thought.[280] Maisky credited Hopkins as being indirectly responsible for the supply conference and influencing Roosevelt and, vicariously, Churchill during the Atlantic Conference of mid August.[281] Ismay too credited Hopkins, through the reports of his conversations with Stalin, with convincing allied leaders that "immediate aid to Russia on a gigantic scale was essential."[282] Hopkins was frustrated with the inability of Soviet personnel to discuss technical details not cleared with Stalin,[283] but unlike the British, he was little interested in reciprocity. After discussions in London, Hopkins proposed to Roosevelt that "a small number" of pursuit planes should "at once...be taken from United States stocks and British aircraft waiting shipment" and offered to the Soviets. Additional categories included bombers starting the following April, some A.A. guns immediately, "followed by monthly allotments of up to 50 next winter," and 2,000 tons of Toluol (solvent and octane booster for fuels) "now from British and American stocks to be followed by 2,000 tons a month from United States production." Aviation gasoline and lubricants were to be supplied as requested along with about one third of the raw materials. Half of the complete munitions plants and some of the machine tools and industrial equipment were also to be supplied.[284]

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[279] MacFarlane to D.M.I. July 31, 1941. WO 32/15548
[280] Langer. "The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission..." 468.
[281] Ivan Maisky, *Memoirs*...182.
[282] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...228.
[283] Jones, *The Roads to Russia*...49.
[284] Foreign Office to New York, July 24, 1941. AIR 20/3910

On August 11, Churchill issued a directive that "the re-equipment of the Russian armies should be studied at once upon the grand scale." He suggested that a conference be held in Moscow with Beaverbrook leading the British delegation, in September, "by when it is hoped we shall know where the Russian front will lie for the winter."[285] In the meantime, Britain and the United States increasingly coordinated their efforts at supply. On August 10, it was reported from Washington that the U.S. was willing to offer 400 tons of condensed milk, 4,000 tons of copra and old French stocks of aluminium and leather. Additionally, the Soviets would be allowed to place priority orders for machine tools worth $5,000,000. A reply from the Foreign Office the next day noted that the Canadians had agreed to export some 280 tons of sole leather (150 tons from the U.S.) and there were plans to offer 700 oz. of Iridium and an additional 1000 oz. from the U.S. Furthermore, the Russians had accepted an offer from the British for 3 million boots (500,000 already shipped) while the British were seeking cooperation with the Americans over additional materials.[286] Aluminium presented a particular problem, as the Soviets would lose ¾ of their aluminium factories to the Germans while the Americans were short themselves. Hence, the Americans generally favoured supplying finished products over raw materials.[287] This would, in part, be solved by shipments of aluminium from Canada,

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[285] Directive of August 11, 1941 by Winston S. Churchill and Churchill to Attlee, August 12, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1053, 1061.
[286] Washington to Foreign Office, August 10, Foreign Office to New York, August 11, 1941. AIR 20/3910
[287] The Western Allies would end up supplying perhaps 42% of Russia's aluminium and ¾ of its copper during the war. Munting, "Lend-Lease..." 499-500.

starting with 5,000 tons offered in September.[288] By comparison, the Soviets produced only about 68,000 tons of aluminium during all of 1941.[289]

The Atlantic Conference from August 9 to August 12, when Churchill and Roosevelt met off the coast of Newfoundland, was as important in the history of supply to Russia as it was to the allied war effort as a whole. The two world leaders informed Stalin:

> We have taken opportunity afforded by consideration of report of Mr. Harry Hopkins on his return from Moscow to consult together as to how best our two countries can help your country in the splendid defence that you are making against Nazi attack. We are at the moment co-operating to provide you with very maximum supplies that you most urgently need. Already many shiploads have left our shores and more will leave in immediate future.
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> The needs and demands of your and our armed services can only be determined in the light of the full knowledge of the many factors which must be taken into consideration in conjectures that we make.

A supply conference should be held in order to acquire the "full knowledge" of the "many factors" to be considered in the planning and delivery of supply.[290] Churchill saw the Soviets as a "welcome guest at hungry table." The "need of large supplementary programme both for ourselves and U.S. forces makes review and expansion of U.S. production imperative. President proposes shortly to ask Congress for another 5 billion dollar loan-lease Bill."[291] By this time, Churchill was wondering not whether Russia would still be in the war, but where the front would be during the winter. On August 30, he instructed Beaverbrook to go to Moscow with Harriman to arrange the "long-term supply of the Russian armies." This could only be achieved mainly from American resources,

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[288] Churchill to Cripps, September 9, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1184.
[289] Mark Harrison, *Accounting for War: Soviet Production, Employment, and the Defence Burden, 1940-1945* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 68.
[290] War Cabinet Atlantic Conference Telegrams, August 18, 1941. CAB 66/18/26
[291] Churchill to Lord Privy Seal, August 12, 1941. CAB 66/18/26

though the British could provide such items as boots or material such as rubber. The "rate of supply," continued Churchill, "is of course limited by the ports of entry and by the dearth of shipping. When the metre-gauge railway from Basra to the Caspian has been doubled in the Spring, this will be an important channel. It is our duty and our interest to give the utmost possible aid to the Russians, even at serious sacrifices by ourselves. However, no large flow can begin until the middle or end of 1942...make sure we are not bled white in the process."[292] By August, the British government was committed to supplying Russia in the long term with both raw materials and military equipment. They would have to lean heavily on America, but its production was not matching the expansion of the U.S. armed forces. "Equipment was spread thin" that summer.[293] None the less, the Americans were on board. On August 1, Roosevelt spent 45 minutes lecturing his cabinet on the need to aid Russia in a timely manner – "step on it," he ordered.[294] For the Soviets, expanding production of war material could come only by stripping the civilian sector.[295] Hence, the provision of food stuffs and other raw goods was of particular value, as was Britain's decision on August 16 to give the Soviets £10,000,000 in credit for civilian aid.[296] Thus, in early August the inadequacies of Britain's material stocks were made good by the beginning of a coordinated allied effort to supply Russia with what she needed to stay afloat.

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[292] Churchill to Lord Beaverbrook, August 30, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1136-1137

[293] Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley. *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940-1943* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1955). 72.

[294] Quoted in Martel, *Lend-Lease*...28-29.

[295] Mark Harrison, "Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A., U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938-1945," *The Economic History Review, New Series*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (May, 1988), 174.

[296] Graham Ross, *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations 1941-45* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 14.

Given the limitations of seaborne transportation to Russia, Persia became increasingly important. The Soviet Government already had issued alarmist reports to Britain on the number of German agents active in Persia.[297] This issue concerned the British, particularly given the possibility of sabotage on the rail lines to the Soviet border and the Caspian Sea. Britain also had tremendous concern over increasing interference from the Persian Government in the activities of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. On July 31, the War Cabinet expressed annoyance at Iranian authorities for redirecting oil which "would seriously interfere with the building up of a reserve by the British authorities in Iraq."[298] The Defence Committee determined on August 1 that the Persian Government would be told to expel the Germans, "otherwise British and Russian forces will enter Persia to drive them out."[299] When the Persian response was deemed too lethargic, British and Soviet forces occupied Persia in a nearly bloodless operation. Where this occupation fits within the scale of self interest for the British is debatable. Eshraghi says that "the security of the British position in this area and the British desire not to rebuff the Soviets in their first approach, as an ally, for tangible co-operation" was more important than the presence of Germans in Persia or the need for a secure supply route to Russia. The "question of the supply route and the expulsion of the Germans were inter-related objectives in the sense that if aid was to be sent to the Soviet Union via Iran, the presence of the Germans in Iran could threaten the communication lines and therefore their expulsion was desirable by both

[297] Stalin gave Cripps an exaggerated warning about this on July 8. War Cabinet Conclusions, July 9, 1941. CAB 65/19/3
[298] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 31, 1941. CAB 65/19/12
[299] Defence Committee minutes, August 1, 1941. PREM 3/286

Britain and the Soviet Union."[300] Farrell, conversely, draws a distinction between British military professionals, who saw Iran as a regional buffer state, and Churchill who saw its occupation as the beginning of serious cooperation with the Soviets (even if there was little coordination in the invasion of the country).[301] MacFarlane credited the operation in Iran as aiding in relations between the Mission staff and their Russian opposites. The head of the "Otdel" ("department") even took him aside and "burst into alcoholic tears, and kissed me several times on both cheeks. An eloquent if unpleasant testimony to our uphill endeavours up to date."[302]

The security of Britain's position in the region certainly was a motivation for occupying Persia. Sir Claude Auchinleck, C-in-C Middle East in August 1941, commented in 1943 that the "success of the operation was of the greatest importance to the common defence of India and the Middle East."[303] However, documentary evidence suggests that supply to Russia was the driving British interest in Persia while all other concerns were of lesser importance. On August 25, the War Cabinet thought that, however significant the oilfields were, it was "most important to bear in mind that our ultimate object was to get a secure line of communication with Russia across Persia. Additional forces might well be required for this."[304] Two days later, Ismay minuted "I wish to know what are the plans for pushing on and joining hands with the Russians, and making sure we have the railway in working order in our hands. We do not simply want to squat on the oilfields, but to get

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[300] F. Eshraghi, "Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran in August 1941." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Jan., 1984), 27, 48.
[301] Farrell, "Yes, Prime Minister..." 608-609.
[302] MacFarlane to D.M.I August 29, 1941. WO 32/15549
[303] Despatch from Auchinleck, June 1943. PREM 3/285
[304] War Cabinet Conclusions, August 25, 1941. CAB 65/23/12

through communication with Russia."[305] Eden, paralleling Soviet concerns, later cited the danger of German agents sabotaging Persian railways as the prime reason for intervention.[306] On September 4, Churchill told the War Cabinet that "it was important that we should have complete control over Persia during the war, and more especially of the road and railway communications to Russia. The previous day he (the Prime Minister) had discussed the best methods for developing the railway systems in the Middle East, so that they could not only support our Armies but enable us to increase through traffic to Russia."[307] In the event, the occupation of Persia had the secondary benefit of providing the British with a windfall of obsolete weaponry from Persian stores. Churchill believed that this equipment, including such items as Czechoslovakian built Skoda tanks/tankettes, could be purchased for use by the Indian Army.[308] British resources did not allow for the adequate equipping of their Indian forces.

On September 18, Churchill told Stalin that "I attach great importance to opening the through route from Persian Gulf to Caspian, not only by railway but by a great motor road, in the making of which we hope to enlist American energies and organization."[309] In September, the Persian corridor could support only 6,000 tons monthly which, with American assistance in developing port facilities and railway capacity, increased to 60,000 tons by the spring of 1942.[310] Eventually, 30,000 U.S. Army service personnel were sent to the Persian Gulf in order to facilitate aid to Russia. In the early days, improving

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[305] C.O.S. Committee minutes, August 17, 1941. PREM 3/237/12
[306] Eden. *The Eden Memoirs*...273.
[307] War Cabinet Conclusions, September 4, 1941. CAB 65/23/13
[308] C.I.G.S. to Prime Minister, November, 1941. PREM 3/237/12
[309] Churchill to Stalin, September 18, 1941. PREM 3/395/3
[310] Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley. *Global Logistics*...114.

infrastructure in the region required substantial American contributions. General Spalding told Hopkins in a late September memorandum that "the demands of the new theater are tremendous - 250,000 ship tons of railroad material in one project, more than the total shipments to the Middle East to date, requiring from 50 to 75 ships, with the distance so great that only three trips a year can be made. A big automotive project is superimposed on the railroad project. Diversions of material hitherto destined for Egypt are being made to the new theater."[311] The British may have jointly occupied the country, but they needed American help to increase its transportation potential. In the end, this proved by far the best route with which to supply Russia.

British aid in raw materials to the Soviet Union during the summer was significant. In August alone, it included: 17,700 tons of rubber, 1,500 tons of Tin, 5,000 tons of wool, 5,750 tons of lead, one million pairs of boots, 50 tons of cobalt, £90,000 worth of industrial diamonds, 50 tons of Shellac, and 5,200 tons of jute.[312] Rubber was one item that Britain was in a position to supply in substantial quantity. On August 29, Churchill told Beaverbrook that while the British and Americans had already sent 25,000 tons of rubber to Russia, "there is some hesitation about acquiring the further 25,000 tons needed to meet their total requirement of 50,000 tons...the Russian stocks are low owing to out former blockade and this request is modest. If we fail to have the rubber ready for the ships which they are now sending to Singapore, it will undermine their confidence in our will to help

[311] T. H. Vail Motter, *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1952). 7, 17.
[312] War Cabinet Economic Warfare Report for the month of August. September 19, 1941. CAB 68/8/57

them...to await the Moscow conference would cause an injurious delay."[313] To put this rubber commitment into context, in September, the British estimated that monthly world rubber production was 125,000 - 135,000 tons (of which Britain and the Commonwealth needed 24,000 and the Americans 100,000 – leaving perhaps 6,000 tons per month for Russia unless the Americans were willing to contribute more – which the British thought they should). By mid September, material actually supplied from British or allied sources (excluding American) included 22,250 tons of rubber, 5,000 tons of aluminium, 5,750 tons of lead, 2,500 tons of tin, 50 tons of cobalt, £360,000 worth of industrial diamonds, 5,200 tons of jute, 5,000 tons of wool, 3 million yards of khaki cloth, 1,350,000 pairs of boots etc. Most of these materials were well below Soviet requests but were what could be supplied from British and Commonwealth stocks. Other material was not available at all and had to be supplied by the Americans, such as 3,600 tons of copra. Additionally, some 702,000 barrels of aviation fuel and 800 tons of tetraethyl lead were shipped from British sources in August (mostly via Soviet tankers and cargo ships).[314]

Not only did plans to begin shipping such material predate the war itself, but the course of the war seemed to have little bearing on the issue. This occurred, in part, because from late July the Soviets were clearly putting up a better fight than many predicted, and the MEW and Intelligence departments concluded that the Soviet Union could continue the fight even if most of European Russia was overrun, so long as the remainder was supplied with material. The tonnage of aid would undoubtedly have been larger had better routes and more transport been available at the time or had the Russians been more transparent.

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[313] Churchill to Beaverbrook, August 29, 1941. PREM 3/401/8
[314] "Supplies to Russia." Report by the Raw Materials Sub-Committee, September 16, 1941. PREM 3/401/10

As noted in an August 8 memorandum, "one principal source of difficulty is that the Russians have so far failed to give us any information on which to assess their demands. We do not know their stocks, their production nor the state of the equipment of their forces. Since we are in most cases allocating a deficiency this information is vital. On the other hand the Russians are pressing for full information about American defence production as a preliminary to pressing for allocations from it."[315]

The supply of war material was more complicated than that for raw materials. While the Commonwealth had small surpluses of items such as boots or rubber, it had none for weapon systems. British production of war materials was slow to increase and fell well below anticipated levels. For example, in February 1941, the War Office and Ministry of Supply held that production for gun and mortar ammunition was below requirements. Approximately 14.3 million gun and mortar rounds were held, of the requirement for 90 million, while production for the year was estimated at a maximum of only 61 million.[316] This figure fell well short of requirements even before expenditure was calculated. When, in late July, Maisky approached the Air Ministry for 600 engines for motor boats, the VCAS replied that "so serious is the shortage of Merlin engines [the only suitable engines available] due to disappointments in production, and so many are the calls on these engines that the Secretary of State for Air felt compelled to refuse a recent request by the Admiralty for motor boat engines and is similarly unable to accede to the Soviet application."[317] Because of the sensitivity of such aid, the British required specific information from the

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[315] "Supplies to Russia." Memorandum, August 8, 1941. PREM 3/401/3
[316] Memorandum on gun and mortar ammunition, War Office and Ministry of Supply, PREM 3/55
[317] "Supply of Merlin Engines to the U.S.S.R. for use in Motor Boats." Note by the V.C.A.S. circa July 24-29, 1941. AIR 20/3910

Soviets on the course of the campaign, existing stocks of Soviet equipment and production, their maintenance practices and so forth. The British dependence on the supply of finished goods from the United States, which usually required unique spare parts that were not manufactured in Great Britain, also significantly impeded the supply of weapon systems.

As Hankey indicated on June 23, British supply of military equipment required information on the Soviet situation and needs. This information was not forthcoming. On June 30, Cripps complained to the Foreign Office about the lack of Soviet cooperation with the Military Mission and recommended that Maisky be treated similarly, remarking that "I consider this as the critical moment of our relationship: either Soviet Government must co-operate fully and frankly or else we must leave them to their own devices."[318] On the same day, MacFarlane told Molotov that Britain needed "more detailed information of the situation on the battle front and pointed out that H.M.G. would be far more likely to come to a rapid decision if fully informed than if confronted only by vague statements."[319] Later that day, Cripps amended his remarks due to some positive signs from the Soviet Staff,[320] but MacFarlane still reported that "we gave more than we received but we got much more than we have hitherto been able to get." On July 7, MacFarlane cabled Dill suggesting that the Russian mission in London be squeezed for information and asked if he could "make them [the Soviets – specifically the military mission in London] realise if possible without saying so directly that the help they will get from us depends largely on the extent to which they come across and on the degree to which we are taken into their confidence out

[318] Cripps to Foreign Office, June 30, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3279
[319] 30 Mission to War Office, June 30, 1941. WO 178/25
[320] Cripps to Foreign Office, June 30, 1941. FO 371/29485/N3279

here."[321] This did not happen quickly. As the War Cabinet noted on July 14, the Soviets had given 30 Mission little information, despite various requests for assistance.[322] What they had given was a report that said the Germans had 22 Panzer and 25 Motorised Divisions in the East and that the German effort was divided into three army groups.[323] Things improved late in the month, as the Russians provided their compiled German order of battle for the Eastern Front and asked for British intelligence on German transfers to the east.[324] On August 3, MacFarlane reported that "I have at least got a good joint order-of battle...and Russians are coming across well."[325] In this context, even marginal Russian cooperation seemed a substantial improvement. The obvious importance of the Eastern Front eroded the principle of reciprocity. Information on Russian equipment and deployments was never given. Essentially, the Soviets had called the British bluff.

The unwillingness to let MacFarlane visit the front also was a sore point, though he understood why: the Soviets desired to show everything in the best possible light. On July 9, he informed the COS that "I (?cannot) give you information regarding the value of the Russian forces or of their chances of stemming the German advance unless I can get permission to visit one or more of the main fighting sectors."[326] Unsurprisingly, Cripps sympathised with the Soviet position that "if they allowed the Military Mission to go to the Front, then the Americans would ask for the same facilities and then the journalists would

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[321] MacFarlane to C.I.G.S. July 7, 1941. WO 178/25
[322] War Cabinet Conclusions, July 14, 1941. CAB 65/19/5
[323] 30 Mission diary, July 12, 1941. WO 178/91
[324] 30 Mission to War Office, July 31, 1941. AIR 8/564
[325] MacFarlane to D.M.I., August 3, 1941. FO 371/29488/N4281
[326] 30 Mission to War Office, July 9, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3794

want to go too, and I was aware of the danger of American journalists."[327] On August 6, MacFarlane witnessed a rare moment of candour from Marshal Timoshenko, who "said that if I went to visit a divisional headquarters, I might well find a free fight with German tanks in progress."[328] None the less, the situation improved. By August 7, MacFarlane told Davidson that "on the whole cooperation is coming on satisfactorily. In fact in face of the peculiar conditions here I think progress has been quite remarkable."[329]

It was not immediately clear that the Soviets needed certain categories of equipment. Their first request for aid even admitted to possessing vast quantities of weapons, noting only that they were being depleted swiftly. They immediately did ask for aircraft, AAA, mines, bombs and bomb sights and other aviation equipment. By July 3, the COS told MacFarlane that information on wireless apparatus for night fighters would be sent immediately and, if transport could be arranged, a fully equipped night fighter specimen would be shipped to Russia. However, requests for aircraft could not be met "as intensive operations now being carried out by the R.A.F. are absorbing our entire output. If the Russians will supply lists of their requirements in equipment, we will study carefully whether any can be made available."[330] Harold Balfour, the Under Secretary of State for Air, described British reasoning: "the air defences of Britain had to be kept up to strength and further expanded to meet the threat of heavier enemy raids. Bomber Command had to be built up. The Middle East was crying out for Hurricanes and Spitfires for the Western Desert. As for the R.A.F., so for the Army and Navy. Not a rowing boat, a rifle or a Tiger

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[327] Cripps to Foreign Office, July 22, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3988
[328] 30 Mission to War Office, August 6, 1941. WO 178/25
[329] MacFarlane to D.M.I. August 7, 1941. WO 32/15548
[330] War Office to 30 Mission, July 3, 1941. WO 178/25

Moth could be spared without weakening and without grave risk. It was soon clear that the division between the positives and the negatives was acute."[331] Specimens of aircraft with full equipment were shipped to the Soviets in late July, while British pilots had already arrived to test fly Soviet aircraft.[332] On August 16, a Russian test pilot flew a Hurricane and Spitfire and was "very pleased indeed with the latter aircraft."[333] Spitfires were not forthcoming, however. Not only did the British need every one they could get, but the airplane was considered "delicate" compared to the Hurricane or P-40 and would not hold up well under Russian conditions (it also was noted that, for the same reason, no Spitfires had even been deployed to the Middle East yet).[334]

Sending aircraft to Russia was difficult. Britman (in Washington) concluded on July 16 that "to send aircraft to Russia immediately would probably aid Russian morale but would be strategically unsound." An increase in air operations in the west would be of greater help. If, however, aircraft were sent, those available could include 144 Vultee Vanguards currently earmarked for China (an obsolescent aircraft built by the U.S. for Sweden), 120 P-40's built for France and another 64 currently earmarked for the Middle-East where, they were "urgently" needed.[335] On the following day, Britman said that 415 P-40's had already been delivered to Britain and 501 to Africa, where they were the "fighter basis of the whole British war effort in the Middle East" (and performed well).[336] When the War Cabinet met on July 21, "the Secretary of State for Air thought, however, that it might

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[331] Harold Balfour, *Wings over Westminster* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd. 1973). 167.
[332] 30 Mission to War Office, July 23, 1941. AIR 8/564
[333] 30 Mission to Air Ministry, August 17, 1941. AIR 8/564
[334] Memorandum to Prime Minister from V.C.A.S., August 27, 1941. AIR 20/3910
[335] Britman (Washington) to Air Ministry, July 16, 1941. AIR 20/3910
[336] Britman (Washington) to Air Ministry, July 17, 1941. AIR 20/3910

be possible to make a limited number of aircraft available to Russia without damage to our essential needs...the War Cabinet were also informed that the United States Government were about to make a certain number of aircraft, and also other supplies, available to Russia by the Vladivostock route." Though it would be a long time before these aircraft would be seen at the front, "the encouragement to be afforded by this help, was important...it was also felt that there would be advantage in joint discussion between the United States authorities and ourselves as to the extent and methods of the material help to be sent to Russia."[337]

On July 24, the Soviet Mission met VCAS Freemen. The British promised 200 Tomahawks (the British name for the P-40), provisional upon the supply from the U.S. of spare parts, ammunition etc., and specimens of different aircraft, including night fighters with full wireless equipment. The Russians were disappointed at these numbers, claiming their own losses were "immense" (nearly 8,000 machines in three weeks), but were happier with the offer of technical equipment, including schematics.[338] The promise of 200 P-40's and the future despatch of 200 Hurricanes, substantially weakened British efforts in the Mediterranean, and elsewhere. The RAF was attempting to build its strength in the Middle East over the summer. In June there were around 600 modern aircraft out of a total of 725 RAF planes. By August this total had increased to 1,000 (versus around 800 Axis aircraft).[339] Peak monthly British fighter production for 1941 was 619 Hurricanes, Spitfires

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[337] Extract from the War Cabinet Conclusions, July 21, 1941. FO 371/29487/N3978
[338] "Record of a Meeting Held in the Air Ministry Between Representatives of the Soviet Mission and the Vice Chief of the Air Staff on the 25th July, 1941." July 26, 1941. AIR 20/3910
[339] J.M.A. Gwyer, *Grand Strategy Volume III: June 1941 – August 1942 (Part 1)* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964). 176.

and Beaufighters.[340] Auchinleck estimated that, despite German preoccupations in Russia, the necessary air superiority needed for offensive operations in North Africa would not be achieved until November.[341] Competing needs and limited resources led to painful prioritization even before the advent of aid to the Soviet Union. Of the 22 squadrons desired for the defence of Malaya, only 12 were made available and even then only with aircraft that were second rate and worse.[342] To Churchill, this was like choosing "whether your son or your daughter should be killed."[343]

Further problems complicated the Tomahawk deal. Eden reported that "the United States Government had no spare parts, ground equipment or ammunition (.30 calibre) for the Tomahawk aircraft which we had agreed should be made available to Russia." Not only could the British not supply this equipment, but while the Russians wanted all the aircraft delivered to Archangel, the Americans insisted that 60 from the U.S. be sent across the Pacific.[344] In this context, as aid to Russia became more appealing, Britain began to consider sending its own aircraft – specifically some 200 Hurricanes. On August 27, the Chiefs of Staff concluded that "on purely military grounds, these 200 Hurricanes would pay a better dividend if sent to the Far East or to the Middle East or to Turkey," but the political need to send them to Russia may be "overriding."[345] Churchill offered these aircraft, plus personnel and material support, to Stalin two days later.[346]

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[340] William Hornby, *Factories and Plant* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958). 395.
[341] Defence Committee Meeting minutes, August 1, 1941. PREM 3/286
[342] Gwyer, *Grand Strategy*...19.
[343] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. 360.
[344] War Cabinet Conclusions, August 4, 1941. CAB 65/19/13
[345] Extract from C.O.S. Committee meeting, August 27, 1941. AIR 19/287
[346] Churchill to Stalin, August 29, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1127.

Another area of aid was naval weapons, particularly for mine and anti-submarine warfare. Early on, the British shared the secrets of ASDIC technology. In July, two Soviet Naval officers arrived in England to be instructed in the technology, with the eventual goal of returning to the USSR with the necessary material in order to start work there.[347] On July 26, the Foreign Office cabled New York inquiring about Russian requests in the U.S., and stating that Britain already had sent 200 mines, 300 magnets for minesweepers and 1,000 depth charges and were "making arrangements" to supply another 800 parachute mines and 3,000 depth charges.[348] Some of this equipment began to arrive in Archangel on August 1 with the mine-laying cruiser HMS Adventure,[349] including 100 magnetic mines with another 1,000 "on the way."[350] The depth charges were of particular value, as the Northern Fleet's stock stood at just 6,834 in June (27.8% of requirements).[351]

Even more than July, the month of August provided evidence of the longevity and efficacy of Soviet resistance and hinted at a growing shortage of equipment. The War Cabinet noted on August 4 that the Germans had made little progress, except in the Ukraine, and that there were no signs of a Russian collapse.[352] The same day, 30 Mission remarked that "there is no doubt that the Russians are still extremely confident. They claim that, within reason, loss of territory means nothing to them, provided they can maintain the cohesion of their armies and inflict heavy casualties on the enemy in return." Four days later, "the one thing that seems clear in this great struggle is that Russian morale and

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[347] MacFarlane to D.M.I. Appendix C, September 20, 1941. WO 32/15548
[348] Foreign Office to New York, July 26, 1941. AIR 20/956
[349] Woodman, *The Arctic Convoys*...10.
[350] Colonel L.C. Hollis to the Prime Minister, August 27, 1941. PREM 3/395/17
[351] Hill, "British Lend Lease Aid..." 804-805.
[352] War Cabinet Conclusions, August 4, 1941. CAB 65/19/13

confidence remain consistently high."[353] On August 6, a report from Switzerland, relayed by the Belgian Minister, contained the comments of one "very responsible" German source, which said the German General Staff had been surprised by, among other things, "use by Russians in large quantity of some unexpected types of equipment. He could not give details but understood this included artillery and added that Germans considered themselves fortunate in that Russian troops seemed insufficiently experienced in handling these weapons."[354]

There was now even a hint of reciprocity from the Soviets. On August 12, the head of the British Air Mission told the Air Ministry of a demonstration he and MacFarlane had witnessed of an impressive "rocket bomb." He included technical details of the weapon from the Soviets and declared it to be of the "greatest importance to ourselves."[355] On August 14, Cripps cabled Eden expressing his anxiety over the situation (due, in part, to slow British policy). He initially expected to have to evacuate Moscow in 5-6 weeks but "the Russians have held much better than we anticipated and their supplies of mechanised units and aircraft are much greater than we had thought. But this does not mean that they can go on indefinitely without very considerable help." Eden responded the next day: "I sympathise with your feelings and I am sending copies to the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff...meanwhile I can assure you that difficulty is not lack of desire to help but rather ways and means of giving help effectively...it would not help Russia in any way if we were to make abortive efforts ending in disaster. It must surely be better to base our

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[353] 30 Mission Diary, August 8, 1941. WO 178/25
[354] Kelly (Berne, Switzerland) to Foreign Office (War Cabinet distribution), August 6, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4365
[355] Collier to Air Ministry, August 12, 1941. AIR 40/2106

effort on sound strategy and prosecute it with vigour when we have accumulated the necessary resources in any given theatre." Eden promised that the question would be reviewed once the Prime Minister returned from the Atlantic Conference.[356]

On August 14, the Foreign Office, echoing the analysis of the MEW, informed Tokyo and Singapore that because Soviet resistance had upset their timetable, the Germans were now anticipating prolonged Russian resistance. Indications were that the Soviet regime was prepared to fight to the "bitter end" and even if it did collapse, resources east of the Volga were substantial enough to maintain a national resistance against further German penetrations.[357] Two days later, the Foreign Office received news of a conversation in Istanbul that had taken place in late July between a Mr. Fouad Barbur and a young demobilized Austrian soldier (who had been born in Turkey). The Austrian said that "the Russians contrary to expectation, were fighting like lions. They seemed to have ample material, and they fought their tanks to a finish."[358] The Austrian's remarks remind one of the KV tanks that held up the 6th Panzer Division in Lithuania – their crews refusing to surrender or abandon their vehicles. He also had no doubt that Russian armies were well equipped.

On August 15, MacFarlane told Davidson that the Russians were resisting far more effectively than had been thought possible, and there "is evidence that the Russians are definitely getting down to the prospect of a long war. The troops appear to be – and in fact must be – fighting well in most areas...our initial policy based on misappreciation

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[356]Cripps to Eden, August 14, 1941 and Eden to Cripps, August 15, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4647
[357] Foreign Office to Tokyo and Singapore, August 14, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4685
[358] Major H. Lee to British Consulate, Mersin, July 21, 1941. Fowarded to Eden on July 27, received by Foreign Office on August 16, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4580

revealed a disinclination to treat Russia as a full ally and a sense of relief that Russia was providing a diversion enabling us to get on with our preparations." However, "there are no signs of a Russian collapse being imminent. On the whole very much the reverse." MacFarlane criticized how the allies were "solemnly sitting down to bargain a Rocket Bomb for A.I. Night Fighter equipment, while neither Power will give the other identifications or locations of enemy forces which might give away the source of their information." He went on to recommend "that we should at once come as clean with the Russians who mean to fight as we did with the French who didn't...it is not the slightest use expecting the Russians to believe that we are really helping them in their present critical situation by bombing Western and Northern Germany; or by winning the battle of the Atlantic; or by sending them driblets of available munitions or materials with promises of more to follow." Some kind of diversion must be mustered or else there was a risk that the value of the Eastern Front would be lost.[359] On August 20, Davidson responded that large scale operations in France were impossible and raids would be ineffectual. None the less, "For your personal information plans for raids of varying size are being hurriedly worked on."[360] Indeed, there was a renewed British interest in raiding the coast of France during August and September. The larger significance, however, was MacFarlane's frustration with the policy of reciprocity in the face of ever growing indications of undiminished Russian resolve. In hindsight, MacFarlane's frustrations were becoming moot, as the decision to begin full scale supply to Russia had, in effect, already been made.

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[359] MacFarlane to D.M.I. (note of August 22 requests it be forwarded to CIGS), August 15, 1941. WO 32/15548

[360] D.M.I. to MacFarlane, August 20, 1941. WO 32/15548

On August 20, MacFarlane finally got his trip to the front – in the Smolensk region – where Timoshenko's front had recently begun a counteroffensive. Upon visiting one Russian division, MacFarlane was struck impressed by the high morale of the soldiers, their hatred of the German invader and their skill at concealment. The positive experience continued: "Driving, Road discipline and Traffic Control were all good. Proportion of breakdowns or cases of ditching seemed abnormally low...saw one railway train carrying 23 Medium Tanks steaming West from Moscow. There can be no great tank shortage in this area as in addition to Divisional Tank Battalion operating with Right Forward Battalion I saw at least one unit of some 20 Medium Tanks hidden in Reserve in Battery position area." MacFarlane also was shown dead German soldiers and three batteries of captured artillery which "in most cases the Medium Tanks in the heat of the fight had actually run the guns down. In one Battery three 105mm guns had been treated in this way. The fourth had blown the turret of a Tank to pieces at about 10 yards range before being captured." MacFarlane noted that he was being given a show, but "it can hardly apply outside the Divisional area with the short notice of my visit."[361] The Soviets may have staged the experience but it was perception in Whitehall that mattered and MacFarlane's positive reporting helped shape that. Once again, there was no indication of a shortage of equipment, particularly tanks.

The vigour of these counterattacks, the wealth of equipment displayed by the Soviets, the display of military competence – all witnessed first hand – was no doubt welcome news to Whitehall. As was the destruction of the Dnieper dam by the retreating

[361] MacFarlane to D.M.I., August 21, 1941. WO 178/25

Russians, which MacFarlane thought was a convincing display of Soviet resolve.[362] On August 26, Hugh Dalton recorded Churchill as declaring that the Russians were doing well, directing "jeers" at those who predicted a swift defeat. The Prime Minister believed German losses to be "prodigious." Leningrad might fall, but Moscow would not and the Soviets would last the winter.[363] Unbeknownst to Churchill, German generals were having qualms about the campaign. In his famous August 11 epiphany, Halder noted that "the whole situation makes it increasingly plain that we have underestimated the Russian colossus." As force to space ratios and supply lines worsened, the Red Army was far larger and more resilient than anticipated. "At the outset of the war we reckoned with about 200 enemy divisions, now we have already counted 360. Those divisions indeed are not armed and equipped according to our standards, and their tactical leadership is often poor. But there they are, and if we should smash a dozen of them, the Russians simply put up another dozen."[364]

On August 28, MacFarlane still did not know what reserves the Soviets possessed, however reports indicated that the rail lines were operating surprisingly smoothly "and, in spite of the evacuation of large numbers of people and of much machinery and factory gear to East of the Urals, troop moves are continuing to flow steadily and on a large scale." Some small bits of information indicated the Soviets might be running low of war material: "I heard a remark to-day made by a Russian which may be of certain significance. He said in effect that if a Russian soldier was wounded it was more important to get his weapons to

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[362] MacFarlane to D.M.I., August 29, 1941. WO 32/15549
[363] August 26 entry, Hugh Dalton, *The Second World War*...274.
[364] August 11, 1941 entry, Halder, *The Private War Journal*...*Volume VII*...36.

the rear for future use than to save the man. A callous statement which may however indicate the tightness of the weapon situation."[365] This was the first real indication to the British that the Soviets were short of weapons, apart from modern aircraft and some specialized equipment. Another indication of specific equipment needs came on the same day from Colonel Pika of the Czechoslovak military mission who reported that there was an "almost dangerous optimism" regarding the war. "To-day more reservists are being called up" he reported and though the Russians may have adequate reserves of trained manpower to continue the struggle, "it is perhaps high time that the delivery of tanks and anti-tank guns should start from America and England."[366] To this point, there had been little evidence that the Soviets were short of tanks. The British, however, were short. The German preoccupation with Russia allowed London to toy with the idea of reinforcing North Africa with tanks rather than build up home forces but "two or three weeks must elapse before a decision can be taken whether to increase the despatch of tanks to you over and above present programme. By then I hope we shall be better able to judge the outcome of the Russo-German campaign...should the Russians look like holding their own for the autumn it would be right to take risks here which would otherwise not be justified."[367] By the beginning of September, the issue of tanks would appear in earnest.

While Russian sources had been claiming enormous German losses for weeks, Churchill gave them some credence and on August 31, he asked for the opinion of Sir James Edmonds (head of the Military Branch of the Historical Section of the Committee of

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[365] MacFarlane to D.M.I., August 28, 1941. WO 32/15548
[366] Lockhart to Strang, August 28 (received September 1), 1941. FO 371/29490/N4945
[367] War Office to G.O.C.-in-C. Middle East, July 15, 1941. PREM 3/291/1

Imperial Defence): "according to the best figures we have been able to obtain, the German losses in the ten weeks of their invasion of Russia approach two millions...surely this, if true, is more than they lost in any one year of the last War, and is incomparably greater than in any other ten weeks' period."[368] The implication was clear: assuming these numbers had any basis in reality (they did not, though German casualties were significant – 1.1 million killed, wounded and missing by March 1942),[369] the *Wehrmacht* was being bled white in the East. Surely Britain must do everything in its power to ensure this bloodletting continued. If the evidence indicated that the Soviets possessed the will to continue resisting, then this was the rationale the western allies needed to supply them with war material.

Even before the start of hostilities, there had been planning to send raw materials to the Soviet Union. Shortly thereafter, Britain decided to send whatever war materials it possibly could spare, although the definition of what could be spared was, as yet, less than generous. By late July, this trickle expanded, as the British began promising material (including hundreds of aircraft) that would retard their own preparations and operations. Key decisions were made in August as Churchill, in consultation with the Americans - whose cooperation was essential - broadened the issue of aid into a full out supply effort to keep the Russian armies in the field. Voices from the military mission, the Foreign Office and so on were encouraging a more proactive British attitude to the Soviets which, in MacFarlane's words, meant coming as "clean" with the Soviets "who mean to fight as we

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[368] Churchill to Edmonds, August 31, 1941. Churchill had put German casualties at 1.5-2 million in a broadcast of August 24, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1144. 1101-1102.
[369] Horst Boog and others, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume VI: The Global War*, trans. Ewald Osers and others (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001). 863.

did with the French who didn't." However, there was little Britain could do to take the pressure off the Soviets through military operations. Naval operations in the Far North were a substantial commitment of resources for little practical return, but the symbolic value was important.

That British aid was not speedier and more significant was partly because of the attitude and actions of the Soviets. As Hankey observed, in order to provide arms one needed a good idea of the Russian situation, needs and ability to utilise equipment. Factors like logistics and infrastructure posed other limitations. For example, before basing naval vessels in and sending over convoys to the far north, adequate air defences were required to neutralize the *Luftwaffe*. The Soviets indicated that they existed but British visits to the region confirmed the opposite. Thus, not only was it unwise to base British assets there, considerable naval escort were needed for any convoys bound to Murmansk or Archangel. The Soviets generally failed to appreciate these factors. As Woodward notes: "the Russians knew little about shipping problems, and the extent to which British resources were strained to the limit; they exaggerated the possibilities of large-scale help and consequently attributed the lack of such help to deliberate selfishness and ill-will rather than to the physical necessities of the situation."[370] The occupation of Persia, encouraged by the Soviets, was viewed largely by Britain as a means to better transport material to Russia. This misunderstanding of the physical limitations of aid, in addition to fantastic requests as a negotiation tactic, helped to shape the historiography of the period and to form a narrative of British inaction and stinginess.

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[370] Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War Volume I1*. 28.

It also was unclear at the outset that the Soviets needed substantial aid other than in some specialized areas and aircraft, which the British were prepared to oblige, to their own detriment. As Stahel notes, the USSR still out-produced Germany in every category of weapon in 1941, despite being at peace for the first half of the year and losing most of European Russia during the second.[371] Given the inadequacy of British production and the material lost in 1939-41, it was presumptuous of the Soviets, who had spent years stockpiling vast quantities of military equipment, to expect substantial and immediate material aid from their new ally. The COS summed this up when they told MacFarlane on August 20 that he should "explain that for over a year we have been fighting the whole might of Germany plus large Italian forces in Africa absolutely alone, without, at the same time, being able to neglect the possibility of a stab in the back from Japan" while at the same time noting the loss of the BEF's equipment in France, the threat of invasion and so forth.[372] Assessments were produced that indicated that the Soviet Government could continue to resist with the resources of Eastern Russia, albeit with significant raw material aid from Britain, the Commonwealth and the U.S. British overtures to the Americans, the establishment and improvement of a route through Persia and the increased tempo of aid in August, were partly a recognition of this. Russian resistance in the initial weeks of Barbarossa had turned the question of aid to Russia from one of obligation and risk aversion to a primary strategic concern.

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[371] Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa*...441-442.
[372] C.O.S. to MacFarlane, August 20, 1941. FO 371/29490/N4922

## Chapter Four:

## The Expansion of Aid, September 1941

By July 1941, the British realized that the Soviets would continue to resist in some form or another and August saw the idea of aid broadened to include the full scale re-equipping of Russian armies. These developments were further elaborated in September. It was recognized by the middle of August that only a conference could ascertain Russia's needs and western abilities to provide it. This meeting eventually took the form of the Moscow Supply Conference in late September. Before this occurred however, the promises of aid to the Soviets rose along with the general agitation in Britain to aid its hard pressed ally. British promises included the beginnings of vague plans to form a continuous front with Russia in the near east, and the resuscitation of discussions about action on the continent. More significantly, Britain decided to equip the USSR, within practical limits, unconditionally.

During the summer British public sympathies toward the Soviet Union, and demand that their government aid it, rose. The agitation began in some papers in early July with such articles as "Where's That Second Front?" appearing in the *Sunday Express* on July 6 (the *Daily Express* was owned by Lord Beaverbrook). On July 31, the *News Chronicle* editorialized that Russia was not going to collapse and needed aid forthwith. Gallup polling later indicated that by September, the British public fell roughly into thirds, between those who thought more needed to be done to aid Russia, less, or did not know.[373] This agitation

[373] Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*...52, 65.

found other outlets, as when one branch the Amalgamated Engineering Union wrote the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, on July 11 requesting "that all possible military aid & economic assistance be given to the U.S.S.R. in their gallant stand against hittler [sic]."[374] Such sentiments were viewed dimly by Military Intelligence, partly because of fear that the Communist Party could sponsor domestic unrest and political trouble if the British were not aiding the Soviets.[375] On August 12, MI3 (responsible for intelligence for Eastern and Northern Europe) commented that:

> It is a matter of growing concern to this sub-section that the Press continues to report the progress of the Soviet-German campaign in such a manner that the general public is firmly of the belief that the defeat of the German offensive is only a matter of weeks and that the day when the Soviet Armies will be on German soil is not far distant. In certain newspapers and journals this pep-talk is accompanied by thinly-veiled suggestions that the Imperial General Staff is not doing its best to assist our new Allies in the defeat of the common enemy.

Additionally, MI3 worried if the Soviets suffered serious and apparent reverses, British morale would suffer accordingly.[376] On August 13, MI3 said that several Canadian Intelligence officers reported to the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence that "it was the general feeling amongst the Canadian officers and troops that the Russians had well-nigh won the war, and that a great feeling of optimism was in consequence being created, and metaphorically they were looking forward to packing their kits and returning home."[377]

There was, indeed, room for optimism. The War Cabinet concluded on September 11 that that situation on the Eastern Front had become more serious recently, despite fierce

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[374] Letter from the Amalgamated Engineering Union to Ernest Bevin, July 11, 1941. WO 208/1776
[375] "Policy of the Communist Party." Memorandum by the Home Secretary, July 18, 1941. CAB 66/17/42
[376] M.I.3. to D.D.M.I. August 12, 1941. WO 208/1776
[377] M.I.3. to D.D.M.I. August 13, 1941. WO 208/1776

counterattacks and stubborn resistance from Soviet forces.[378] Plenty of other information, however, distributed to the highest levels of British decision making, instilled confidence in the efficacy of Soviet resistance. Signals intelligence revealed German difficulties. On September 2, the 20th Motorised Infantry Division reported fighting a "hard defensive battle" (circled in red) while combat with Russian heavy tanks in one sector "has not yet finished" (also circled in red).[379] On September 6, the Turkish Military Attaché in Moscow informed Ankara that "although it is certain that the Germans in spite of their now resting on the Dnieper, will seek a definite decision before winter by massing the greatest quantity of forces, it may now be considered [? unlikely)]...that they can put the great part of the Red Army out of action or even reach, before winter, the general line of Vologda-area west of Moscow-Rostov."[380] On September 14, *PanzerGruppe* 1 encountered pockets of Soviet troops who were resisting "stubbornly." In Lubny "civil population in combat, using many petrol-bottles against tanks...undiminished enemy artillery and air activity." Intercepts also indicated that "6 Army is fighting against enemy who is defending himself stubbornly."[381] On the same day, German reports from near Kiev indicated that "so far only small groups of armed civilians and troops have been encountered: These have resisted obstinately but have eventually been destroyed." Additional reports from *PanzerGruppe* 1 detailed how, after destroying some tanks, the Germans encountered rear elements that were "mostly lorries, tractors, armed civilians and so forth. They fought obstinately and bravely, and

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[378] War Cabinet Weekly Resume, September 4-11, 1941. CAB 66/18/41
[379] Signals Intelligence passed to the Prime Minister, September 2, 1941. HW 1/44
[380] Turkish Military Attaché Moscow to Angora (diplomatic intercept), September 6 (received September 11), 1941. HW 12/268
[381] Signals Intelligence passed to the Prime Minister, September 14 and September 15, 1941. HW 1/66

were only destroyed in the course of the morning."[382] Thus, signals intelligence indicated lurching German advances and increasingly determined Soviet resistance, even from civilians. MacFarlane, too, thought that the "Russians have survived Hitler's first rush and whatever further reverses may be in store for them, there are no signs that they do not intend to go on fighting even if further considerable retreat may be inevitable."[383] Davidson had little idea of the reserves possessed by the Soviets, and thus their staying power, but estimated that "the Germans must be far behind their estimated schedule, both as regards timings, and in casualties."[384] Indeed, Edmonds, of the Historical Section, replied to Churchill's query about German casualties in early September, concluding that German losses of 1,950,000 from June-August (this was an average of various reports), was, based on precedent from the First World War, "far from incredible."[385] This comparison gave credence to reports of massive German losses in Russia.

There also was reason to think that the Red Army Air Force (VVS), the largest beneficiary of British war material starting in the late summer, still was a credible fighting force. On September 8, an RAF test pilot returning from Russia reported that "the Russian fighters are of very high quality" and one factory that he visited "was producing 15 fighters a day, and, if certain bottlenecks could be overcome, was capable of producing 25." He saw 400 aircraft at another factory ready to be deployed to the front and was told that the majority of Russia aircraft factories lay east of Moscow, while many others were east of the

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[382] Signals Intelligence passed to the Prime Minister, September 15, 1941. HW 1/70
[383] MacFarlane to D.M.I, September 15, 1941. WO 32/15548
[384] D.M.I. to MacFarlane, September 17, 1941. WO 32/15548
[385] "Estimate of German Casualties in Russia." Memorandum by General Sir J.E. Edmonds, September 5, 1941. Edmonds to Churchill, September 11, 1941. PREM 3/395/17

Urals.[386] Indeed, *Luftwaffe* ace Adolf Galland believed that Soviet aircraft losses were only sustainable because of the remoteness of Russian aircraft factories, likening it to killing ants without ever eradicating the colony.[387] The War Cabinet was told that "in general, there is evidence to show that the Soviet Air Force is still fighting effectively, and it is believed that supplies and replacements are reaching the units satisfactorily."[388] A few days later, ULTRA reported that the XXIV Panzer Corps was bombed by at least 65 Soviet aircraft throughout the day.[389] On September 20, the Air Ministry noted reports both in the Soviet press and German propaganda of Soviet aerial ramming. These incidents displayed the "fighting spirit" of Soviet pilots. A long list of such incidents was compiled, as well as deliberate sacrificial missions by Soviet pilots, including an incident when a dozen airmen attempted to fly obsolete aircraft into German ships near Kronstadt (9 were killed, three bailed out). The latter report was apparently broadcast on the BBC.[390]

On September 4, in response to Churchill's message of August 29, Stalin stressed to the Prime Minister the need for speedy and substantial aid. He thanked Churchill for the offer of another 200 fighters, but stated that such a small number could not effect "serious changes on the Eastern front." The Soviet position had "deteriorated" recently in the Ukraine and Leningrad. Because the Germans regarded the "danger in the west a bluff," they were reinforcing their armies in the East. Hence, Britain must create a second front in the Balkans or France and supply a monthly minimum of 400 aircraft and 500 light and

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[386] Cavendish-Bentinck to Sargent, September 8, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5180
[387] Quoted in Mark Harrison, "The Volume of Soviet Munitions Output, 1937-1945: A Reevaluation." *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Sep., 1990). 578.
[388] War Cabinet Weekly Resume, September 4-11, 1941. CAB 66/18/41
[389] Signals Intelligence passed to the Prime Minister, September 14, 1941. HW 1/65
[390] "Ramming of German Aircraft by Soviet Airmen." Air Ministry report of September 20, 1941. AIR 40/2106

medium tanks. Without these machines or large shipments of raw materials, the Soviets would "either suffer defeat or be weakened to such an extent that it will lose for a long period any capacity to render assistance...by its active operations on fronts of the struggle against Hitlerism."[391] This was the most blunt statement yet sent directly from Stalin, though Cripps and MacFarlane had made similar statements over the summer. Cripps immediately remarked that Stalin's comments were a "perfectly frank statement of the situation" and "unless we can now at the last moment make a super-human effort we shall lose the whole value of any Russian front, at any rate for a long period, and possibly for good...we have unfortunately considered the war here as no direct responsibility of ours, but merely as a war which we desired to assist in any way that we could, without unduly endangering our own position."[392] Given Cripps' known sympathies, and previous statements, this comment was probably not taken very seriously.

When the War Cabinet discussed a reply to Stalin, Churchill said "we would not hesitate to sacrifice 50,000 men if we thought that by so doing we would relieve the pressure on the Russians." He read the Cabinet a draft of his response to Stalin. Beaverbrook opined that its terms "were too harsh and depressing...and he favoured an immediate promise that from the time when navigation would reopen, we would provide the Russians with half of this demand from our own resources. We would then press the Americans to supply the other half from their own resources without diminishing our appropriations...to keep the Russian Army in the field would be an objective worthy of every ounce of our energy." Furthermore, the Secretary of State for Air (Sinclair) agreed

[391] Stalin to Churchill, September 4, 1941. Cited in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1160-1162.
[392] Cripps to Foreign Office, September 4, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5105

with Beaverbrook, but believed that "any such promise would have to be subject to the development of the war." Bevin suggested using Beaverbrook's promises to the Soviets as a means to spur industrial workers to greater feats of production, which was apparently the genesis of "tank week."[393] Cadogan recorded that the "Cabinet confirmed we can't do diversion, and discussed material help, of which we can offer something substantial," and of Stalin's bleak message said: "our evidence does not show imminent Russian break."[394] Clearly the Soviets were under enormous pressure but were unlikely to collapse in the near term. Had this been the case, it would surely have been a reason **not** to send aid. Rather, Stalin's letter arrived when the British were already thinking about substantially increasing aid as the forthcoming supply conference proved by itself.

The MEW produced a detailed analysis of how the German invasion might affect Russian war production. It estimated that currently (the beginning of September), perhaps 20% of Soviet war capacity was lost if measured by a few key materials (such as steel), though was much lower if one excluded these bottlenecks. Further German advances could raise this figure to 30%, rising to 60% of Russia's peacetime armaments production if the Germans reached a line along the Volga, and 65% if along the Urals. However, since war production was determined by the "weakest element," even *if* the Germans reached the Urals, if "production was strengthened and supplemented by imports from abroad, by evacuation from other parts of Russia of materials, skilled labour and machine tools, there is no reason why the potential should not rise well above 35%. In fact most of the raw materials needed for the manufacture of armaments, especially steel and non-ferrous

[393] War Cabinet Conclusions, September 5, 1941. CAB 65/23/14
[394] Cadogan, *The Diaries*...404-405

metals, would be available in quantities equal to more than one half of the entire requirements of the Soviet Army at its full strength." The MEW noted that a "preliminary estimate of imports from abroad which would be necessary to reinforce the economy of that area at its strategic points, is under investigation at present."[395] This summary was compiled just after Stalin's telegram, but its analysis was consistent with that produced over the summer, it reinforced the notion that the Soviets were in it for the duration and given some material support, could sustain their resistance for some time.

Churchill told Stalin that there would be no second front, but did offer half of the monthly totals he asked for and that British assistance would come on the same basis as "Lease-Lend." In addition, Churchill said that "I am cabling President Roosevelt to expedite the arrival here in London of Mr Harriman's Mission, and we shall try even before the Moscow Conference to tell you the numbers of aircraft and tanks we can jointly promise to send each month, together with supplies of rubber, aluminium, cloth." Churchill also informed Stalin that the British were supplying the Persian railway with rolling stock and that by the spring of 1942 its capacity would be raised from two trains a day to twelve. He emphasized the strengthening British position in North Africa and predicted that "once the German-Italian forces in Libya have been destroyed, all these forces will be available to come into line on your southern flank."[396]

Stalin's criticisms reignited British exploration of the feasibility of raiding the French coast, a long simmering idea that was frozen by the same concerns that prevented

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[395] "The Economic Effects of the German Advance on Russian War Potential: Summary." M.E.W. memorandum compiled September 5-11, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5497

[396] Churchill to Stalin, September 5, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1170-1171.

large scale invasion. The War Office noted on July 3 that "the Director of Combined Operations is now working on plans for small scale cut-and-run raids. The proposal for action in the Petsamo area (telegram 706) does not directly affect the Army, but I would draw your attention to the danger of undertaking further adventures, however desirable for political reasons. Any forces use would be provided, armed and equipped at the expense of security at home, and we cannot afford further delay in completing our minimum anti-invasion programme."[397] Even so, Cripps apparently thought in late July that a "demonstration" in the west was forthcoming, and told the American ambassador. The Foreign Office got wind of this news from Washington and was not happy, suggesting that Cripps be sent a "word of warning" about talking to the Americans.[398]

Continued Soviet resistance and resentment towards perceived British inaction, however, led to a re-evaluation of raids in August. On August14 MacFarlane relayed a message from Panfilov's deputy: "tell the General [MacFarlane] that he cannot expect improvement as long as the British Army is doing nothing on land to help us in our struggle."[399] On August 16, the COS considered landing an all arms force on the Cherbourg Peninsula: "it was suggested that this project should be discussed with the Directors of Plans before any detailed study was undertaken. It should be assumed that the force now earmarked for Operation "Pilgrim" [the occupation of the Canary Islands] would be available for inclusion in this operation."[400] However, on August 25 the COS concluded that the British could not force the Germans to withdraw forces from the East and that "a

[397] War Office note to the War Cabinet, July 3, 1941. WO 193/666
[398] Cripps to Foreign Office with minutes, July 30, 1941. FO 371/29489/N4430
[399] 30 Mission to War Office, August 14, 1941. WO 178/25
[400] C.O.S. Committee, August 16, 1941. WO 193/666

landing on the Continent can achieve no valuable result, and might have a serious adverse effect on our future strategy." Thus, "our position should be frankly put to the Russians" and "we should take the press in this country further into our confidence."[401]

The issue of a second front was revisited on September 5, with the same conclusion. The Department of Plans commented that "surely the answer is...a dummy invasion of the Cherbourg Peninsula...rumour of and preparation for an Arctic invasion...continuous reconnaissance raids in Norway, the Low Countries and France." Any of these options could have the same effect as an actual operation but without the cost.[402] The COS persevered with some earlier suggestions, such as whether enough ships and barges could be assembled to convince the Germans that a "feint invasion" was afoot. However, Pound "agreed with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, that the most thorough preparations would be necessary for a bluff of this nature to have any chance of success. Even then he doubted whether the Germans would take much notice of our preparations until a serious threat had actually developed." The Committee "agreed that an operation of this nature would be unlikely in present circumstances to achieve a diversion of enemy forces from the Eastern Front."[403]

The invasion of Persia in August also enabled Churchill's concept of a broad united front in southern Europe and the Near East, the "southern flank" that Churchill spoke of to Stalin. The idea of sending British divisions to Persia dated to August. On September 1, Churchill told Roosevelt he wished to send two British divisions to the Middle East, to

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[401] C.O.S. Committee, August 25, 1941. WO 193/666
[402] "Helping Russia." Department of Plans memorandum, September 6, 1941. WO 193/666
[403] C.O.S. Committee, September 8, 1941. WO 193/666

"hold Turkey and sustain Russia." He also told Portal that British forces in and around the Caspian would be a "gigantic contribution to Russia's war effort" which, combined with bombers, might "long dispute the eastward advance of the Germans."[404] The idea picked up steam following Stalin's September 4 telegram. On the 18th, Eden asked Churchill if he could tell Maisky that help in the Caucasus was being examined. Churchill minuted that "all is governed by shipping. There is no objection to studying any plan; but we must not encourage delusions that any large armies can be sent from Great Britain to fight in Russia." Eden then told Cripps that additional assistance to Russia was being investigated, but "it is essential to know whether, and if so what, stocks of grain have been built up in Trans-Caucasia, or will be built up there within the next few weeks. Our information is that Trans-Caucasia is fifty per cent deficient in grain, but that this can be fully made good from Caucasia if done in time. Can you obtain information on this urgently."[405] There were further logistical complications. As Eden told Maisky, "we were attempting to develop the Persian route for the supply of materials to Russia. If we were now to send troops the capacity of the communications was not sufficient for both purposes, and the troops could only arrive at the expense of the material."[406] Certainly, sending large British forces to Northern Russia was out of the question, but to do so through Persia was a different matter. Churchill still entertained visions of a broad, joined front from Southern Russia to the Mediterranean. "It is very likely," Churchill wrote Sir R. Bullard in Tehran on September

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[404] Churchill to Roosevelt and Churchill to Portal, September 1, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1146-1147, 1147-1148.
[405] Eden to Churchill, September 18, 1941, and Prime Minister's minute/Foreign Office to Moscow, September 20, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5421
[406] Eden to Cripps, September 19, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5501

3, "that large British forces will be operating in and from Persia in 1942, and certainly a powerful air force will be installed." On September 21 he even told Beaverbrook that Wavell would command the "right hand" that supported the Russians around the Caspian basin, in part because he spoke Russian.[407] However, practical issues eventually quashed these hopes.

On September 16, Dill concluded that because of shortages of forces and shipping, "it would be impracticable to send large British Forces either to North Russia or through Persia." Even if these problems were overcome, "transportation difficulties would not allow us to maintain anything but comparatively small forces anywhere in Russia." However, he suggested that the "Joint Planning Staff should examine whether in certain circumstances it would be feasible to move British land and air forces to Trans-Caucasia in order to stiffen Russian resistance."[408] These "circumstances," undoubtedly referred to the German threat to the Caucasus oilfields and also the Middle East and beyond. Ultimately, these plans came to nought. On September 29, the COS "agreed that it would be better to use the very limited overland communications for the provision of supplies for Russia rather than for the maintenance of large British forces in the Caucasus."[409] In late October, the War Cabinet concluded that sending British troops to the Caucasus or Ukraine was a proposal "which we should not entertain."[410] The idea of bolstering the Russian defence of Caucasia with a small British force continued to be floated for months, but also went

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[407] Prime Minister to Sir R. Bullard, September 3, 1941 and Prime Minister to Beaverbrook, September 21, 1941. Cited in Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*. 409.
[408] C.O.S. Commitee Minutes, September 16, 1941. WO 193/666
[409] Hollis to Churchill, September 29, 1941. PREM 3/395/3
[410] War Cabinet Conclusions, October 27, 1941. CAB 65/23/26

nowhere. Sir Alan Brooke, then CIGS, commented on December 1 that "it was doubtful" whether the necessary forces (two divisions and a tank brigade) were available. "It was essential that this force should be accompanied by armoured forces. Where were these to come from?"[411] In reality, any force that Britain could muster to defend the Caucasus, or southern Russia, was too large to be sacrificed, but too small to matter and also would require a substantial tonnage of the aid to Russia in order to remain supplied. No one wanted a repeat of the April 1941 Greek fiasco, where British and Commonwealth forces, initially earmarked for North Africa, were squandered ineffectively supporting a doomed ally. In the end, the British forces earmarked for intervention in Caucasia instead were sent to North Africa, where they were needed because of the operational failures of Operation *Crusader* (November 18 – December 30). The persistence of planning and discussions suggest some genuine interest in providing a diversion in the West or an expedition to help the Russians in the East. However, the resources required simply were not available, and vague hopes of a British presence in Caucasia were challenged by military setbacks in December.

By mid September, there was more evidence than ever before of Soviet equipment needs. On September 13, the Turkish Ambassador in Moscow reported that the Soviets were becoming short on equipment and munitions. "One is beginning to hear it said that in face of this situation it will be impossible to hold the Leningrad-Moscow-Kieff line until English and American help arrives."[412] General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister in

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[411] C.O.S. Committee Minutes, December 1, 1941. WO 193/666
[412] Turkish Ambassador Moscow to Angora (diplomatic intercept), September 13 (received September 16), 1941. HW 12/268

exile, told Churchill a few days later that while there was, as of yet, no danger of food or oil shortages, "if, as seen as probable, the Soviets lose the Donets and Leningrad industrial areas and if the capacity of the Moscow area is impaired, it is improbable that the U.S.S.R. will be able to re-equip their army during the winter without help from abroad and keep up their resistance in the spring of 1942."[413] The JIC shared this conclusion, Cavendish-Bentinck believed that "General Sikorski's conclusions forms an irrefutable argument in favour of Russia receiving such quantities of U.S. war supplies as can be transported over the routes available." Given *Luftwaffe* commitments in the East, "our own output of arms and munitions should increase: probably the extra quantities produced in the U.K. as a result of the absence of air bombardment will exceed the quantities of American war supplies which can be sent into Russia via Archangel, Persia and the trans-Siberian railway."[414] Independent information that the Soviets were indeed short of equipment lent greater significance and urgency to Soviet requests for material. It also provided the British with greater reason to begin expanding the scope of aid.

On September 19, with the Moscow conference approaching, the War Cabinet discussed the new scale of commitments to Russia. Portal said that the proposals for aid to Russia would hurt the RAF and would likely mean that Fighter Command would be under strength come spring, yet "he thought that we must carry them out. He wished the Defence Committee, however, to be aware of the risks which we were taking." Sinclair "suggested that, before making any greatly increased offers, we should find out the Russian situation.

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[413] "An Estimate of the Present Economic and Military Situation of the U.S.SR. and a Forecast of its Development in the Immediate Future." Memorandum for the Prime Minister by General Sikorski, September 17, 1941. FO 371/29490/N5445

[414] Cavendish-Bentinck to Sargent, September 19, 1941. FO 371/29491/N5616

His opinion was that their output of aircraft was still very large. Furthermore, the Russians might like to have equipment in different proportions to that proposed by us." Churchill "pointed out that the Russians had an immense army and presumably, had a very large output of army equipment. Anything we could offer would appear like a drop in the ocean, though it might mean a great sacrifice on our part."[415] British decision makers essentially were correct when they estimated Soviet production as substantial, and British contributions small in comparison. Kharlamov would complain about the small number of aircraft promised by the British over the summer when the Soviets produced 1,807 aircraft in July alone[416] – more than the British July total of just over 1,600 units[417] (the Soviets produced 12,377 combat aircraft through all of 1941).[418] This contradicts Kitchen's characterization that the British "failed to see that the supplies they sent were only a drop in the bucket."[419]

However, even small help could be vital. On September 20, the British liaison in Polyarnoe reported the Hurricanes "were very welcome and can teach the Russians our tricks" and "they [the Russians] have good submarines, brave tough men, good engines and torpedoes but have never studied "the attack" and are now very interested to hear our S/M C.O.s. on the subject – A/S warfare – they have never learned how to hunt S/Ms and attack them with D/Cs, except in an amateurish way rather as we did in 1915. R.A.F. are also surprised at their lack of method when patrolling, and so on. All this is due, I suppose, to

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[415] War Cabinet Defence Committee (operations) Minutes, September 19, 1941, PREM 3/401/7
[416] Kharlamov, *Difficult Mission*. 64-65.
[417] Hornby, *Factories and Plant*...208.
[418] Mark Harrison, *Accounting for War*...68
[419] Kitchen, *British Policy*...79.

lack of contact with other nations for the past 20 years."[420] The message was clear: the Russians were resisting but needed tutelage and some equipment. The British recognized the importance, both politically and tangibly, of sending all the material aid that could be given, even at their own expense. As Langer points out, for the supply conference both Churchill and Roosevelt "picked representatives who were more interested in dispensing supplies than in trading statistics."[421] Even before the Supply Conference, aid had evolved from a position of reciprocity at the outset of Barbarossa, to one of virtually unconditional supply, despite the ignorance of the Russian position. Tanks were now being promised to Russia, despite the fact that 30 Mission was still not allowed to visit Russian armoured units, see the latest models of tanks nor had received any further information on the "rocket bomb."[422] Furthermore, since it was considered unfeasible to send British tank crews to Russia (language difficulties was one reason cited), a small number of instructors would have suffice to train Russian personnel with these unfamiliar machines.[423]

On September 22, the British delegation left Scapa Flow for Russia and arrived there five days later. The flight to Moscow was eventful as local air defences fired on the Russian aircraft ferrying members of the mission. Ismay remembered the Russian aircrew diving to "tree top level" in order to evade the guns and ease identification.[424] This incident prompted Beaverbrook to advise Churchill not to send any more AAA to the Soviets[425] - they clearly had enough and were inexperienced in its use anyway. The allied missions at

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[420] SBNO (liaison) Murmansk (Polyarnoe) to D.M.I. (signed by Sargent and Eden), September 20, 1941. FO 371/29491/N5840
[421] Langer. "The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission..." 468.
[422] MacFarlane to D.M.I., September 20, 1941. WO 32/15548
[423] Firebrace to D.M.I., September 23, 1941. WO 32/15548
[424] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...229.
[425] Kitchen, *British Policy*...76.

the supply conference mainly were tasked with producing quantities of equipment and material that was to be given to the Soviets. "Give and give and give, with no expectation of any return, with no thought of a *quid pro quo*" said Harriman.[426] Real coordination and information sharing was less achievable. The Russian staff, as MacFarlane put it, was "muzzled by the Kremlin," while diplomatic contacts "get no further than Molotov who is, to my mind, without question the 'nigger' in this 'woodpile'."[427]

Beaverbrook apparently got on well with Stalin, as the two drank together and joked, comparing Cripps to "Mrs. Maisky."[428] Still, the opacity that bedevilled relations over the summer continued unabated throughout the conference. Ismay recalled that discussions with Russian officials were frustrating because of their inability to provide basic information. When he asked one Russian officer how many anti-tank guns were in a Soviet division, the answer was that it depended on the type. When Ismay specified an infantry division, the response was "that depends on where it has to fight."[429] Harold Balfour, a member of the Air Ministry, got into a "jam" with the Commissar for aircraft industry. Balfour told the Commissar that "to find out what the Soviet Air Force needed in the way of fighters I had to know something of their first line strength, their reserves and production rate. Through his interpreter Shakhyrin said that he was not authorised to say, so we adjourned." These "log jams" occurred daily and required the intervention of Beaverbrook to clear things up with the Kremlin. Balfour, however, resented the supply

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[426] Quoted by Standley (part of naval mission, former member of the Office of Production Management) in William H. Standley and Arthur A. Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955). 63.
[427] MacFarlane to D.M.I., September 20, 1941. WO 32/15548
[428] Kitchen, *British Policy*...77.
[429] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...230.

minister's approach, commenting "Georgians and Armenians like Stalin and Mikoyan are realists and appreciate expert bargaining. If you give them anything for nothing they think you are foolish and weak. Beaverbrook took all the cards out of my hand."[430] The Americans had their own troubles with the Soviets who, among other things, wouldn't allow their technicians into the country. However, as General James Burns told Roosevelt, "friendship can best be achieved by a general policy of generosity."[431] Firebrace, experiencing first-hand the way in which the Soviets seemed to connect cooperation with the mission to aid, called it "blackmail."[432]

The Moscow Protocol promised generous aid. The British offered 70 general items and another 83 "items of surgical instruments, medicaments and chemicals" up to June 1942. This included 1,800 fighters, 2,250 tanks, 1,800 Bren gun carriers, 100 ASDIC sets, 300 radio sets, telephone cable, 63,000 tons of lead, 27,000 tons of copper and so on. Among the medical items (less than was asked for) were several million hypo needles, 125,000 forceps and 2,196 amputation knives. The Soviets would send some raw materials to the British, including timber and animal skins (1,503 Badger skins were recorded as delivered in the first protocol period). Spare parts were not adequately supplied, however, as the Russians were not "forthcoming in allowing No. 30 Military Mission to study their system of maintenance in the field."[433] None the less, Beaverbrook reported, "I am satisfied that we have a faithful friend now. We cannot over-estimate their enthusiasm now that they

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[430] Balfour, *Wings over Westminster*...176-177. 188.
[431] Quoted in Langer. "The Harriman-Beaverbrook Mission..." 474-476.
[432] Firebrace to D.M.I., September 28, 1941. WO 32/15548
[433] "Report on Fulfillment of the Moscow Protocol, October, 1941-June, 1942." September 17, 1942. PREM 3/401/7

believe our promises will be carried out."[434] Until the end of June 1942, British tank deliveries would equal approximately 9% of Soviet production for the same period.[435] This was a tremendous commitment, since British forces were neither fully equipped nor the campaign in North Africa brought to a successful conclusion. Churchill told the House of Commons that "in order to enable Russia to remain indefinitely in the field as a first-class war-making power, sacrifices of the most serious kind and the most extreme efforts will have to be made by the British people and enormous new installations or conversions from existing plants will have to be set up in the United States, with all the labour, expense and disturbance of normal life which these entail."[436] Not only did these promises retard the re-equipping of British and Commonwealth forces, but American aid to Russia came at the expense of supplies to Britain (exacerbated by the increasing American retention of equipment for their growing forces). Hence, by June 1942 Britain was short 1,613 tanks and 1,800 aircraft from its quotas, preventing the formation of three armoured divisions and many squadrons.[437] On September 30 Portal told Churchill "we are going to be very short of fighters next spring."[438]

Despite Soviet uncooperativeness, British officials returned from the Moscow conference convinced that Stalin's government would keep fighting. In Balfour's opinion, "Russia would never be beaten. Her production effort in men and material was so great that its very mass overcame the disadvantages of a certain technical crudity compared to the

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[434] Supply Mission to Foreign Office, October 2, 1941. AIR 19/287
[435] Hill, "British Lend Lease Aid..." 785.
[436] From Churchill's speech to the House of Commons, September 30, 1941. Quoted in Gilbert, ed. *The Churchill War Papers*...1281.
[437] Beaumont, *Comrades in Arms*...50-51.
[438] Portal to Churchill, September 30, 1941. AIR 19/287

mechanically perfect German armoured units...I felt that if Stalin had ordered men and women to lie down in front of the advancing Germans until the mass of human bones clogged the tracks of enemy armour they would have done so."[439] Ismay, no friend of the Soviets, held that the Russians would fight "to the bitter end."[440] As dysfunctional as Anglo-Soviet relations could be, the Moscow Conference provided the final confirmation for Whitehall that the Russian leadership was committed to fighting it out.

September saw more of a continuation of trends established over the summer than a sudden transition in British policy regarding supply to Russia. In the historiography, the Moscow Supply Conference and, to a lesser extent, Stalin's letter of September 4, are seen as crucial moments. In reality, the decision to increase aid, even at the expense of British equipment needs, predated these events. What did happen in September was that Britain was in a position to expand and define the aid that would be given in the future. Soviet equipment needs came into better focus as evidence accumulated from various sources, including Stalin himself, of shortages. Over the summer the Soviets asked for aircraft and certain kinds of other equipment, but not until September did tanks seriously enter the equation. The period August-September saw the British position evolve from reciprocity to unconditional supply, despite evidence that the Soviets still had much equipment and production capability, making British contributions marginal in most areas. Additionally, one obstacle to supply, lack of information on Soviet forces and production, simply was dropped as a precondition for aid. The Moscow Supply Conference saw the codification of an Anglo-American effort to re-equip the Soviets, establishing Russian armies as the main

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[439] Balfour, *Wings over Westminster*...189.
[440] Ismay, *The Memoirs*...234-235.

opponent to Germany in the near future. Thought had even been put into what raw materials the Soviets would need to keep their armies in the field should European Russia be lost. By September, the Soviets were getting everything that they could reasonably hope for.

## Conclusion

By spring 1941, Britain seemed farther than ever from its goal of defeating Nazi Germany. Its hopes lay in the entry of a neutral great power – the United States or Soviet Union – into the war. Whilst American neutrality was increasingly a farce, Britain had no such relationship with the Soviet Union. When it became clear that Germany was going to invade the USSR in June 1941, the knee-jerk belief was that Germany would prevail, even though intelligence on the Soviet Union painted a more nuanced picture. The Red Army was believed to have suffered enormously from the great purge which, together with Russian national characteristics, served to limit its offensive power. However, British intelligence consistently emphasized its size and vast stocks of relatively good equipment. Furthermore, those same national characteristics that bedevilled Soviet armies when conducting complex, offensive operations, also gave it impressive staying power when defending the vast expanses of the Russian homeland. Thus, it is hard to reconcile the views of British Intelligence and the statements of decision makers about the Red Army and its ability to defend the Soviet Union. The best answer is simply that British leaders overestimated German military power in light of the string of impressive German successes from September 1939 to May 1941. These included embarrassing British arms in North Africa, Greece and Crete in the months Preceding *Barbarossa*. Surely the Bolsheviks would fair even worse. In spite of these ideas, some, particularly in the Foreign Office, were making plans to provide raw materials to the Soviets in case they were attacked.

Once the Soviet Union was invaded, it quickly became apparent that the earlier analyses of some British officials were inaccurate, for three main reasons. One was consistent reporting over the weeks that showed the Red Army, though taking serious punishment, was not losing cohesion. Secondly, contacts with Soviet officers and diplomats gave every indication that the regime was not cracking and was committed to fighting to the end. Thirdly, the MEW concluded that even if most of European Russia was lost, the Soviet Government still would have substantial war industry at its disposal, though it would need foreign aid in order to maintain it. By late July, already committed to supplying raw materials, the British began promising the Soviets substantial war material. This trend steadily increased in August as the British began to liaise with the Americans. After the Atlantic Conference, it was agreed to use western resources to re-equip Russian armies on a large scale. There were also various plans made, some serious, to dispatch British naval and air assets to Russia in order to assist in its defence and bomb Romanian oil fields. However, logistical problems, lack of air defence in the far north and limited British resources meant that these forces were reduced to two fighter squadrons and a few minor naval units, all based in the Arctic.

All of these events happened relatively quickly. Generally, many preconditions are necessary for the effective arming and supplying of a co-belligerent force. These include ascertaining the value of such an endeavour (ie. whether the allied force is likely to remain in the field), what kit is available to be given and what the recipient needs or can utilise in a given environment. In addition, recipient forces need training in how to operate and maintain this equipment, while spare parts and ammunition must be provided. These

materials need to be sourced and transported. The currency of all this is information, and the Soviets gave Britain little. In addition, British resources were stretched near maximum in the summer of 1941 and shipping was in short supply. Therefore, the availability of military equipment and the ability to deliver both served to limit any kind of material aid. The technical aid and instruction that went along with the supply of military equipment was also hindered by Soviet uncooperativeness and disinterest or distrust in British expertise.

It also was not clear to the British at the onset of the German invasion of Russia that the Soviets even needed military supplies, given their vast stockpiles. While there were periodic warnings that the Soviets were running low on certain equipment, owing to fantastic wastage, there was also direct evidence, whether from MacFarlane's visit to the front in August or an RAF test pilot in September, that the Soviets still enjoyed a relative wealth of items compared to the British. This meant that, initially, the supply of war material was considered mainly for political reasons. 30 Mission was inherently interested in good relations with the Russians and so MacFarlane's pleas for greater assistance had to be taken with a grain of salt and measured against cold realities. As the war in the East continued, it became more apparent that the Russians would be short of some items in the near future without a concerted allied reapportioning effort. What would become the Moscow Supply Conference was defined at the Atlantic conference.

Aiding the Soviets also drained finite British resources. Ships that were needed to escort convoys across the Atlantic, counter the Italians in the Mediterranean or deter the Japanese in the Pacific, were instead deployed to the Arctic for mainly political reasons. Hundreds of fighter aircraft, desperately needed to turn the tide in North Africa, were

instead sent to Russia to provide meagre reinforcement for her depleted air forces. By the middle of September, the British were committed to supplying the first of many tanks, which would bolster Soviet defences in front of Moscow, but also retard the growth of Britain's armoured forces. Even the invasion of Persia was largely undertaken in order to increase the tonnage of aid that could be delivered. Supply must be considered both in terms of the benefit to the recipient, and the cost to the provider. It was a drop in the bucket for the Russians, but it was life blood for Britain. The price would be paid in North Africa and in Asia.

Aid increased steadily through August and expanded even more greatly during September. The Moscow Conference, billed as the gathering that would determine material need and allocation, saw the allies reaffirm what was already in motion; large scale supply of war material. Initially, the British had wished to treat with the Soviets on a reciprocal basis, with an exchange of information followed by frank discussions. The Soviets were opaque and demanded aid in exchange for cooperation. British policy therefore became contradictory. The fact that aid was given, and given relatively quickly, speaks to the strategic importance British leaders gave to the Eastern Front. The Soviet Union had become the foremost, to use Farrell's phrase, "grinding agent,"[441] within the context of British "wear-down" strategy. The Soviets won this ignoble battle because they held the cards; the British needed them more than they needed the British. Thus, the aid that could be given became virtually unconditional.

[441] Farrell, "Yes, Prime Minister..." 622.

One might wonder how fast and significant British aid would have been had the Soviets cooperated fully, or more shipping been available. Had British or American production been more substantial, or their own needs less, more could have been given. None the less, despite all the limitations and dysfunction, only a few months went by before British (and American) equipment and raw materials began to trickle onto the battlefields and into the factories of the Soviet Union. Items such as rubber, given by the British in large quantities from an early date, were particularly valuable. In a November 6 speech, Joseph Stalin gave a rare acknowledgement of this, saying "it is a fact that Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union have united into a single camp." He cited the supply conference which "decided systematically to assist our country," yet admitted that "still earlier Great Britain ensured to our country of such needed materials as aluminium, lead, tin, nickel and rubber."[442] The first of 400 modern fighter aircraft that were promised began arriving in Russia in August and the following month. Before the start of the supply conference, the first examples of British tanks were shipped. The Eastern Front was no longer simply a happy respite for Britain.

Russia would almost certainly have survived the German onslaught without British aid, but it was valuable, particularly in the form of raw materials or specialist items such as naval equipment or technical information. Britain made great sacrifices to aid her ally in its time of need. The summer of 1941 must be seen as the period in which British leaders assessed the war on the Eastern Front, and concluded that it was a primary strategic concern for Britain. All that could reasonably be done to help, must be done. The British

[442] Cited in Hill, *The Great Patriotic War*...76.

could not risk leaving themselves too weak, but were willing to sacrifice progress on their own priorities, such as the war in North Africa, in order to increase Soviet war fighting capacity. Until Britain could return to the European continent, the USSR would have to face most of the *Wehrmacht* with its own forces, but not on its own. Over the summer of 1941, British policy evolved from a phase of reciprocity and reserve, to one of supply without pre-conditions before the Allied delegations even met in Moscow in September 1941.

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