

The Economic Club of New York

M. M. Litvinov
Ambassador of the U.S.S.R.

March 16, 1942

Hotel Astor

M. M. Litvinov

Ambassador of the U.S.S.R.

Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen:

I feel honored to be among the representatives of the United Nations, whom you have kindly invited to address your members today. I should like to take advantage of this opportunity to give you a brief summary of my country's contributions to the common cause of the United Nations. We are all partners in one great enterprise, and it is quite natural that we should from time to time keep one another informed as to the number of shares we hold, how many have been paid up, what we require from the common fund for the branch of the enterprise each of us is in charge of, and what our prospects for the future are.

Furious battles, never ceasing or relaxing for a single day, or a single hour, have now been going on for nine months in the east of Europe, over a front of about 2,000 miles; battles which, for length of front, for intensity, for the numbers of men and the amount of military material involved, have no precedent in history.

The first result of this situation is that, during nine months, the bulk of Hitler's armies, practically the whole of his powerful military machine has been kept busy at the eastern front. When he started his offensive, Hitler, who underestimated the Soviet Union's power of resistance, thought it was safe to leave, by way of reserves and for garrison and police

requirements, a good many divisions in Germany itself and in the countries occupied by him. As soon as he did realize the power of resistance of his Soviet foe, he was compelled to requisition for this purposes, divisions, whole armies, from his satellites -- Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Rumania, Finland, and even Spain. This means, that in the course of these nine months Hitler has been prevented from taking any considerable military action on any front. And this has, in sober fact, give our allies a breathing-space, during which they were able to accumulate military forces without undergoing appreciable losses.

At the same time, as well as keeping the Hitler military machine staked down to our front, we have also, from day to day, been destroying its best units. We retreated for six months, fighting all the time, and it would be hard to say when we dealt more serious blows at the enemy - while we were on the defensive, or now during the offensive. The losses in manpower of the German army have, on their own showing, run into millions. Tanks, airplanes, cannon, machine guns and other armaments have been destroyed and seized by tens of thousands. Only think what might have been the power of Germany now, if Hitler had maintained intact the armaments with which he began attacking the Soviet Union, plus the nine months' output of the factories of Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Austria and the other occupied countries. I wonder what coalition could then have kept abreast of German armaments, not to mention surpassed them.

The Soviet Army has destroyed the moral as well as the physical force of the enemy. Hitler's army crossed the Soviet frontier at the height of his glory, after having won campaigns in

Belgium, Holland, France, Norway, Yugoslavia and Greece, without losing a single battle, and without a single reverse. Such an army was justified in believing the legend of its invincibility. This legend has now been exploded. The German army did, at first, push back the Red Army, and seize towns and territory, but never without encountering the fiercest resistance from Soviet troops, and suffering immense losses. It had to hang around Kiev and Odessa for weeks and months, seizing these towns only at a terrible cost. It has been hanging around Leningrad seven months and cannot take it. It has been unable to take Sevastopol, to penetrate into the Caucasus, or even to hold Rostov. Finally, it lost the two month battle of Moscow and has been forced to retreat all along the front, in some places hundreds of miles. This isn't much like invincibility, is it?

Hitler may seek for scapegoats among his generals, he may blame the Russian winter, he may say it isn't a proper Aryan winter, that it is in the service of the Bolsheviks, or the Jews, or the capitalists, or the plutocrats, but that will not help him to revive that legend of his invincibility. A commander-in-chief must reckon with all factors, and not only factors, he must reckon with possibilities. And that autumn follows upon summer, winter upon autumn, is not just one of those things that may happen it happens every time. Hitler was mistaken if he thought the Russian winter would be influenced by Goebbels's propaganda, or that the frost and snow would take his orders.

And so, Hitler's soldiers had to realize for the first time that war is not always a picnic not just a series of lightning victories, that rapid advance does not necessarily mean nothing but an opportunity for loot. Those of Hitler's soldiers, who survived, saw their comrades perish by the thousands, their regiments and divisions shrinking daily, found in the villages they seized nothing of any value to them, all foodstuffs having been carried away or destroyed by the inhabitants. They saw that even in the villages behind the front they were not in safety, but were exposed to constant attack from the rear, from the flanks, by guerrilla fighters. They saw that they had to fight not only the army, but literally the whole population; they saw that their invincible Fuehrer was not always able to lead them forward, but had sometimes to follow them meekly in their retreat.

They saw that the promises of their divine fuehrer regarding the immediate capture of Moscow and the speedy ending of the whole eastern European campaign were but cheap, lying prophecy. How could their morale, their will to fight, their confidence in themselves, in their high command and in their Fuehrer, fail to be shaken? And to all this must be added the deprivations and the suffering imposed upon inadequately clothed and equipped men by the Russian winter. It may therefore confidently be asserted that the former Hitler army, which entered Soviet territory drunk with victory and success, no longer exists; that it has deteriorated not only physically through the destruction of its crack divisions and the filling up of its ranks with immature youths and older men but also - morally.

And we are entitled to speak of the demoralization of the German rear as well as that of the German army. We know that the attack on the Soviet Union was from the very beginning extremely unpopular in Germany. Her rapid and intoxicating successes could but arouse in the German people an irrepressible desire to consummate their victories as soon as possible. The very fact, therefore, of Hitler's embarking upon a new war, a war against such a powerful state as the Soviet Union, was bound to cause, and did cause, bitter disappointment in Germany. The people, however, reconciled themselves to the new war so long as the German army kept on advancing eastwards, seizing territory and great cities; so long as they hoped that the rapid debacle of the Soviet armies, and the liquidation of the whole eastern front, promised by Hitler and his henchmen, would come off. The determined resistance of the Soviet armies, which resulted for Germany in the arrival of hundred of trains of wounded, filling the hospitals to overflowing, a sudden influx of announcements in the press of officers and soldiers fallen on the eastern front, could not but increase this disappointment. If we add the disaster which overtook Hitler before Moscow, the series of retreats beginning for the German army, the discrediting of the Fuehrer's own public solemn declaration on the second of October that the Red capital was bound to fall in a few days, and the eastern campaign to come to an end, the prospects of further war in the east, of which the end is not yet in sight, it will be easy to understand the moral state of the German People at present.

This is what the Red Army has achieved. And I know you give it due credit for it. But I sometimes think that credit, I would even say admiration, is deserved also by my country's

ability to cope with the supplying of its armies, to make good, not only day by day losses of material, but also those heavy losses caused by the unexpectedness of the initial assault.

You understand, of course, that the problem of supplies became more and more complex and difficult of solution, as Hitler's armies penetrated into our country, and began to occupy our industrial districts. For while Hitler, as well as maintaining intact his own factories, plants and workshops, with their output scaring all the time, had at his disposal the industrial centers of almost the whole of Europe west of the Soviet frontier, we were losing plant after plant, and those our best and biggest, practically all engaged in war industry -- aircraft and tank factories, automobile works, hydro-electrical and other power stations, as well as sources of raw material. Indeed in the circumstances it must be considered almost a miracle that we have kept our armies supplied at a level enabling them to achieve what I have just spoken of.

I have summed up the results achieved not from any wish to boast, but rather in order to point out the possibilities they create, the ways to further action which they reveal. For after all with only those resources which the Soviet command had at its disposal, plus that assistance which the United States and Great Britain have been able to give (assistance, extremely valuable, and deeply appreciated), it became possible for the first time to thwart Hitler's plans, to place obstacles in the way of the victorious march of his armies, to bring them to a standstill, and to drive them back.

We have not driven them far -- at the most two hundred miles, here and there -- but it is obvious, is it not, that, if our strength can be increased, or -- which may be easier to achieve -- if the German forces can be split or weakened on the eastern front by diversion elsewhere, it will be possible to push them still further back, to the German frontier, to Berlin, and beyond. And the further back the German armies are pushed, the greater their demoralization, the greater the fermentation of discontent within Germany, the greater will be the activity shown by the Hitler-hating populations in the countries he has subjected, populations only waiting for a signal to decisive action. And the only signal they will recognize will be a serious defeat for the German army.

It seems to me that practical ways for winning a victory over Hitler, the mainspring of the Axis, are for the first time in sight. There may be other ways, but so far I admit I have not heard of any. We are a little too fond of general statements to the effect that we shall triumph in the end, we cannot fail to triumph, and victory will be ours, and so on. But when we make such utterances I think it unlikely that we visualize any practical way of achieving this end. It is to be feared that the more we console ourselves with general statements as to the impossibility of our losing the war, because of the inevitable triumph of good over evil, the further we shall be from looking for realistic ways to victory.

It is sometimes objected that practical ways to victory involve risk, and there is no denying the truth of this. Military operations between more or less equal forces generally do involve risk.

Does not Hitler owe his considerable successes to highly risky ventures in Norway, Crete and elsewhere? There may be much greater and more actual risk in waiting, in doing nothing, in letting slip one opportunity after another; and action involving risk has at any rate some chance with success.

Complacency and the tendency to inertia arise to a certain extent out of the idea that the war is going to last a long time. Of course it may -- it may drag on through 1943, 1944, and even longer. But this does not mean that nothing should be done to try to end it sooner. Every extra year of war will mean hundreds of thousands, if not millions more killed and wounded, billions more in material outlay, still greater deprivation and suffering for the civil population in all countries. Would not the shortening of the war in itself be worth some risk? We are apt to think that every year added to the war is a chance added to victory. In other words, we invite time to be our ally. But I think time is but a treacherous ally, ready to fight on either side. It would of course be advantageous for us to play a waiting game, while accumulating vast reserves of armaments, in greater quantities than the foe can, if only the foe would pledge himself during that time to inactivity. But you and I know very well that this is just what he would not do, that he would take advantage of his present successes for still further advance, for the occupation of more and more points of vantage, for the seizure of fresh sources of raw material, for the enslavement of more millions of people, for the acquisition, it might be, of new allies. And these advantages might more than counterbalance any superiority in arms which we might have gained during a one way truce of this sort.

These, gentlemen, are the considerations which I set out to put before you. I should like to assure you that they are dictated solely by the anxieties with which the whole military situation inspires me, and I should like to think that I am speaking in the interests of the common cause of all the United Nations. We are all interested in the speediest possible ending of the war, the speediest possible conclusion of a just peace treaty, enabling each nation to develop in accordance with its own aspirations and ideals, without interference from outside, and in no fear of war again breaking out.