

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: STALINGRAD

Extract from a letter from the Soviet ambassador in London,
Ivan Maisky, to British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden

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I do not think that such an approach is justified. Stalingrad is not just one more of the Soviet towns which require restoration. Stalingrad is Stalingrad. Stalingrad is one of the greatest landmarks in human history - as an unsurpassed example of heroism and endurance, and as a turning point in the present war.

Indeed, suppose for a moment that Stalingrad in the autumn of 1942 would have fallen: what would have been the consequences? In this case the Germans most probably would have been able to move north up the Volga, as Marshal Stalin indicated in his speech on the 6th November, 1942, with the most appalling consequences for our defence. At the same time if Stalingrad had fallen the Germans would have moved down the Volga, swept through the Caucasus to the Caspian Sea, occupied Baku, penetrated Iran, and moved towards the Persian Gulf and India. Simultaneously they would have overrun the whole Middle East and established their rule in Africa. Such would have been the vista of events that would have followed the fall of Stalingrad.

EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: STALINGRAD**What is this source?**

This extract comes from a letter from Soviet ambassador Maisky to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. He was responding to an earlier letter from Eden.

In 1943 the British people raised huge amounts of money to help Stalingrad. Maisky wrote to Eden asking for Stalingrad to be supplied with essential equipment for communications, power and medicine. Eden said that Britain could not supply this equipment because its industries were all geared to war production. This letter is Maisky's response to Eden's refusal.

What's the background to this source?

Hitler's main aim was to conquer a large empire in Eastern Europe. In June 1941 he attacked the USSR. At first his forces were successful and the USSR was close to collapse. In the spring of 1942 he attacked the southern USSR. Again his forces advanced at first but they were then held back at Stalingrad. In a bloody battle lasting several months German forces were gradually surrounded and then defeated. By early 1943 they were being driven back out of the USSR.

The Soviet winters of 1941 and 1942 proved to be key allies. Winter halted the German advance in 1941. In 1942 German troops were not prepared for winter conditions in the USSR. Many died from starvation and cold in Stalingrad. Many historians believe that this battle was the turning point of World War 2.

It's worth knowing that...

Stalingrad was completely devastated during the battle. The city was flattened by bombing and months of fighting. It is estimated that there were around 1.1 million Soviet casualties in the battle. When the Germans first bombed the city at the start of the battle it is estimated that 40 000 civilians were killed.

Disease and malnutrition affected both sides by the end of the battle. Of the 91 000 German soldiers taken prisoner at the end of the battle only about 5000 returned to Germany.

How will you use this source?

1. According to Maisky, why is Stalingrad special?

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2. What would have happened if Stalingrad had fallen?
3. Maisky was upset because Eden had refused a request for essential equipment to help rebuild Stalingrad. Does this mean his claims are more or less valid?
4. The money for the equipment Maisky wanted had been raised by British voluntary donations. What does this tell you about the popular mood in Britain?
5. Is there any part of this source you would quote in your final report to the Prime Minister?

Use the report table to help plan your report.