An official War Office map from February 1943

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What is this source?

This is an official War office map used to plot the advance of Soviet forces against the Germans in 1943. The War Office was the government department in charge of the armed forces. Today it is called the Ministry of Defence.

Senior commanders and politicians would have used this map.

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 Germans 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...

The Soviet general who masterminded the victory at Stalingrad was General Zhukov. He is still a hero in the USSR today. His statue can be seen outside Red Square in Moscow.

Zhukov was an intelligent commander and a quick learner. After Stalingrad he copied many of the Germans' tactics. He quickly recognised the importance of fast moving tanks supported by aircraft. The rest of the war on the Eastern front was dominated by giant tank battles.

How will you use this source?

1. How does this map help historians to see how bad the situation was in October 1942?
2. What do you think the mood would have been in the War Cabinet at that time?
3. How much ground did the Soviets take back by February 1943?

4. Many historians see Stalingrad as the turning point in WW2. How does this map help to explain that view?
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.