

Second World War Could Have Ended in 1943 Had Allied Bombing Focused on Military-related Targets

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Britain's air commander Arthur Harris was convinced that efforts to "scourge the Third Reich" by "bombing Germany city by city", as he put it in July 1942, would bring the war to a swift end. The outcome behind these increasingly destructive air raids proved very different to how it was foreseen.

British, and from 1943 American attacks, against densely populated areas – often avoiding armament hotspots – served to lengthen the Second World War by as much as two years.

In Europe, Allied air raids performed a central role in allowing the German war machine to roll on largely undamaged, before it came shuddering to a halt in the east.

Amid the thick of the action was Albert Speer, since his personal appointment as Nazi war minister by Hitler in February 1942, and he noted of Allied air tactics that "the war could largely have been decided in 1943 if instead of vast but pointless area bombing, the planes had concentrated on the centres of armaments production".

Speer was an architect by trade, had never fired a gun before, and so he was "thunderstruck" at his assignment to succeed the deceased Fritz Todt.

"I have confidence in you", Hitler reassured an uncertain Speer, "I know you will manage it. Besides, I have no one else. Get in touch with the Ministry at once and take over".

Speer's wide-ranging capabilities quickly came to the fore. Each month, the Nazi leader rang him to receive updates on armaments production, before jotting the results down in a prepared document.

In the spring of 1943 for example, Hitler contacted Speer and said to his minister upon hearing of the customary dazzling figures,

"Very good! Why, that's wonderful! Really, a hundred and ten Tigers? That's more than you promised... And how many Tigers do you think you'll manage next month? Every tank is important now".

The dictator rounded off these conversations with a brief analysis of what was unfolding at the front.

"We've taken Kharkov today. It's going well", he [informed Speer](#), before

resuming with, "Well then, nice to talk to you. My regards to your wife".

The victory that Hitler was referring to, in eastern Ukraine, is known as the Third Battle of Kharkov, which concluded during the spring melt of March 1943. For Hitler it represented a measure of revenge following Stalingrad, a disaster which he was mainly responsible for.

At Kharkov – the Soviet Union's third largest city – the Germans [were outnumbered](#) by 8 to 1 in manpower and 5 to 1 through tanks; but a combination of elite Wehrmacht and SS divisions, led by Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, inflicted more than 80,000 casualties on the Red Army who were completely driven from Kharkov by 16 March 1943.

The Tiger heavy tank, that Hitler implored Speer to produce in maximum numbers, played an important role in recapturing Kharkov, which helped to stabilize part of the eastern front.

Yet in 1942, had "Bomber" Harris concentrated his air attacks against the German war economy, they could have decimated production of Tigers – which had appeared on the battlefield for the first time near Leningrad in September 1942.

Recognizing the danger perhaps a little late, Speer warned Hitler on 20 September 1942 that,

"the tank production at Friedrichshafen and the ball bearing facilities in Schweinfurt were crucial to our whole effort".

Towards the end of 1940, the Royal Air Force had introduced Stirling and Halifax four-engine heavy bombers, which could carry pay loads of explosives weighing up to 14,000 pounds (over 6,000 kilograms). Both aircraft also held flying ranges in which to roam across Germany without refuelling.

British bombers – which dwarfed their Luftwaffe counterparts – were rolling off the production lines in increasing numbers from 1941. Had the Stirling and Halifax, bolstered from February 1942 with the Lancaster, been sent towards German industrial zones in regular squadrons, they could have inflicted grievous harm upon the Nazi war industry even prior to 1943.

With Hitler spurred into action by Speer's forebodings about factory vulnerability, he ordered greater anti-aircraft defences to be erected around these regions. Yet Hitler need not have worried too much. British commander Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff, outlined conclusively behind closed doors on 15 February 1942 that "the aiming points are to be built-up areas, not, for instance, the dockyards or factories".

The panzer complexes in Friedrichshafen, along Germany's far south, did not experience serious Allied bombardment until late April 1944. Thereafter, the raids were still intermittent at times and non-existent mostly.

The even more important ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt, in central Germany, were not attacked [at all until](#) 17 August 1943 – when Allied aircraft suffered heavy losses and the installations were mostly undamaged. Nazi Germany's ball bearing facilities were pivotal not merely to the performance of her panzers, but also to U-boats, aircraft, heavy armour and

other weaponry.

The greatest tragedy of many underlying these air attacks, was that it enabled the death camps in central and eastern Europe to remain in mass killing mode for much longer. From early 1942, the Nazis ramped up their systematic genocide mostly perpetrated against Europe's Jewish populations, and also on Slavic races, Romani people, etc.

Hundreds of thousands of human lives could have been saved, had German war centres been demolished in 1943 or even 1944. What's more, by at least late 1942 the Allies [had information](#) that the Nazis were committing massive crimes against humanity.

In the meantime, on 30 May 1942 Air Marshal Harris implemented the first 1,000 bomber raid over Cologne, western Germany, a Roman-era city. Among the airplanes were almost 300 four-engine heavy bombers, featuring the Stirling, Halifax and new Lancaster. This demonstration of terror bombing had little effect on German military capacity, simply destroying thousands of civilian homes, along with schools, hospitals and ancient buildings.

One can imagine the possible impact, in early summer 1942, had these British bombers been dispatched instead towards Nazi Germany's ball bearing and panzer depots. Little collective thought was given to such ideas, because of the determination to hit urban environments. The following month, June 1942, the Nazis embarked on their renewed offensive eastwards with heavy armour that was pouring out of these unhindered factories.

Lack of accuracy with aerial bombing, mostly due to poor radar and navigation, was an issue for the Allies – but among such an enormous volume of aircraft, a proportion would surely have found their mark against Germany's arms industries. Schweinfurt and its ball bearing plants were bombed a paltry 22 times throughout the war, as Cologne was raided on 262 occasions while Berlin endured 363 attacks.

By the spring of 1945, less than 2% of all Allied bombs had fallen upon the Germans' war-related factories. Much of the rest was dumped over populated regions and workers' homes. Quite revealing is that, at the post-war Nuremberg trials, absent from court proceedings was the issue of aerial bombing of urban civilian targets. Such deliberations would have shone light on potential Allied war crimes relating to "dehousing" and so on, which they pursued far more than the Luftwaffe.

Meanwhile, as the war advanced beyond 1942 much of the cream of Wehrmacht armies had been wiped out; though they could, in fits and spurts, still send out soldiers of fearsome repute. Among those was Werner Wolff, who after 1942 became one of the most decorated of the Nazis' young infantrymen. On repeated occasions, the 20-year-old Wolff destroyed Soviet tanks single-handed [such as in](#) the mid-1943 Battle of Kursk, less than 300 miles west of Moscow.

On 14 October 1943, a daylight raid over the Schweinfurt factories reduced German ball bearing construction by an alarming 67%. To Hitler's pleasure, American bombers suffered heavily during this attack, but a follow-up assault would have dealt a deadly blow to Nazi war production, heralding the conflict's conclusion.

Speer confessed, "what really saved us was the fact that, from this time on [October 1943], the enemy to our astonishment once again ceased his attacks on the ball bearing industry". The Allied raids over ball bearing centres did resume sporadically for a time, but once more

stopped abruptly in April 1944.

Yet there may well be a separate factor behind these sometimes baffling policies, practically avoided and obscured to this day. Following the German defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943, and almost certainly by spring 1944, Western intelligence departments had earmarked Soviet Russia as the upcoming enemy.

Days after Hitler's invasion of the USSR, then Missouri senator Harry Truman (future vice president and president) said he hoped that Germany and Russia would "kill as many as possible" between them, with Washington ideally providing assistance to either side that was losing in order to prolong the fighting.

The British were especially uncomfortable with their having the Soviet Union as a major ally. Field Marshal Alan Brooke, from December 1941 the principal adviser to Winston Churchill, wrote in July 1943 that the Soviet Union "cannot fail to become the main threat" after the war. Brooke continued, "Therefore foster Germany, gradually build her up, and bring her into a federation of western Europe".

Brooke [complained that](#), "this must all be done under the cloak of a holy alliance between England, Russia and America", while he denounced the Soviet populace as "this semi-Asiatic race". Brooke's views are particularly telling, as from winter 1941 he was also Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and so held command of the entire British Army.

Britain's disdain for Bolshevism long predated the war, and mostly prevented London from signing an alliance with Moscow prior to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. A British union with the Kremlin before autumn 1939, together with France, would have made it much trickier for Hitler to initiate a large-scale European conflict.

On 16 April 1939, Stalin formally suggested that a second triple entente be formed aligning Russia, Britain and France against Germany, as preceding the First World War. Britain's government quickly rejected Stalin's overtures and the Soviet dictator – already in contact with the Nazis – finalized his pact with Hitler four months later, ensuring that war would again be a certainty.

In April 1944, two months before the D-Day landings, London had formulated long-term strategic planning commissions, advancing the redevelopment of both Germany and Japan in opposition to the USSR. It is likely these strategies were evolving during 1943. In the opening months of 1944, Western military intelligence was now concealing from the Kremlin vital information on German troop formations in the east; while the British and Americans amassed "superbly detailed and accurate" material on Russian military forces.

It is therefore not outlandish to propose that German industry may have been spared the brunt of Allied air attacks, partly also in order to preserve it for planned hostilities with Russia. In the summer of 1943, the Allies were aware too that German technological advances, regarding rocket and missile design, far exceeded that of the Western powers. Washington and London would be tempted indeed to lay their hands on the technicians and their futuristic formulas, realized after the war as hundreds of Nazi scientists were sent to the United States. It was a German citizen and former SS major, Wernher von Braun, who masterminded America's space program.

During autumn 1944 the British Foreign Office [warned that](#),

“It is already becoming known that our soldiers are thinking of a possible war against Russia”.

Like-minded ideas prevailed in the US capital for months, as borne out by General Leslie Groves’ remarks in March 1944.

In late 1944, Britain’s high command was expounding plans which included rearming Germany for the envisaged attack on Russia. At this time also, high level British intelligence was privy to “super secret appreciations” leaking out from Washington that the Soviets were their imminent new foe.

In May 1945, with the ink still damp on German surrender papers, Churchill [had conceived](#) the “elimination of Russia” – with Moscow still officially an ally – in a proposed land invasion comprising hundreds of thousands of Allied troops, along with 10 re-equipped Wehrmacht divisions.

It was called Operation Unthinkable: A war plan broadly scorned by scholarship since late 1990s declassified documents finally revealed its contents. On closer inspection, however, Operation Unthinkable looks quite plausible when combining all of the above factors.

RAF planes were marked down to strike Soviet cities from British bases in northern Europe. Following the US atomic attacks on Japan in early August 1945, nuclear weapons were attached to such schemes. On 15 September 1945, the Pentagon was breaking out alone in her position as the great world and nuclear power, with a stratagem to attack vast areas of the Soviet Union with scores of atomic bombs.

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