Telegram of USSR ambassador to Britain, I.M. Maisky sent to the People's Commissariat on Internal Affairs of the USSR, dated 31 March 1943

CIPHER TELEGRAM MOST SECRET

High priority

Today I visited Churchill and handed over to him Comrade Stalin’s message dated 29 March[[1]](#footnote-1)\*. Churchill was gloomy and beetle-browed, and his hands were slightly shaking when he took the envelope from me. Apparently, he thought that the message is a reply to his yesterday's message about the convoys. Having looked at the message content, Churchill brightened up at once, as if a burden had been lifted off his shoulders. Having reached the quote in which Comrade Stalin advises to unceasingly chase the enemy, Churchill jumped out of his seat and exclaimed: “Of course, we will not let them come to their senses”. Then, coming up to the map hanging on the office wall, he began to explain his strategic plan in detail. Its essence is that, approximately in the next two weeks the British hope to surround the Germans and Italians along the radius of about 50 miles from Bizerta[[2]](#footnote-2), to shower them with bombs; to destroy all the ports of retreat (in which, by the way, the enemy has already started to build planked footways necessary for evacuation) and to cut them off from the seaside with the help of the surface fleet. “We should capture and destroy all the Axis army in Tunisia! - Churchill exclaimed - That should be our Stalingrad!” I do not know if the British would follow the plan drawn up by Churchill. From past experiences I’m inclined to view the Prime Minister’s calculations with caution[[3]](#footnote-3). We’ll see. Churchill then returned to his seat and continued to read through the message. I closely observed his facial expression when he reached the quote about “scoundrels” who say that “Britain is not conducting war in any way” [[4]](#footnote-4), a spasm of sorts passed over Churchill's face. With strong excitement he closed his eyes for an instant, and when he opened them again, they were full of tears. It was no act. Churchill is emotionally expressive. I observed this many times before, even as early as in the pre-war years. He is easily susceptible to sudden impulses of feelings, and at such moments he can loose self-control and make promises, which later, in a more rational, normal mood, cannot be kept. But that is incidental. It was obvious that Churchill was truly deeply moved and took Comrade Stalin’s message close to heart. Then he turned to me and said: “You’ve never brought me such a remarkable message. Great thanks to Stalin!”

MAISKY

[FPARF, f. 059а, inv. 7, fold. 13, file 6, pp. 255-256]

Keywords: Second front

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bizerte – a port in northern Tunisia; French naval base (1881-1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Maisky was proven right. The Anglo-American forces did not meet the deadline outlined by Churchill. Bizerte was taken by the American forces of the 2nd Corps only on 7 May. The significance of this achievement was huge: "the German-Italian group was clamped in a vice. Units and subdivisions began to surrender. The total number of prisoners in the region reached 40 thousand".(Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna 1941 – 1945 godov. T. 9. M., 2014. p. 312). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stalin’s message read: [The film (*Victory in the Desert*)] "perfectly illustrates how Britain is fighting, and accurately exposes those scoundrels – there are such in our country - who claim that England is not at war, but is only observing the war from the sidelines" Published in: Pechatnov V.O., Magadeyev I.E. Perepiska, T. 1. p. 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)