ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT AMERICA IN JAPANESE WAR
PROPAGANDA TO THE UNITED STATES

JOEL V. BERREMAN

ABSTRACT

Japanese war propaganda directed to the United States is here analyzed to show the obstacles to propaganda effectiveness imposed by cultural differences and a faulty appraisal of the frames of reference of the listening public. The assumptions are appraised in terms of their appropriateness to American listeners.

The recognized aim of propaganda is the modification of attitudes and, through them, of overt behavior. It is improbable that propaganda, dependent on the symbolic stimuli of spoken or written words, can alone change attitudes. Certainly it cannot do so except under conditions most favorable to the acceptance of the suggestions which it offers. Functionally, then, propaganda is contributory to a total situation, and its effectiveness is dependent upon that constellation of stimuli of which it is a part.

Accordingly, war propaganda must be adapted to the actual conditions in the enemy country and to the current attitudes and specific susceptibilities of the enemy audience. This adaptation is particularly difficult in war propaganda for two reasons. First, contact with the listening audience is almost completely cut off so that there is no way to know accurately the conditions in the enemy country which constitute the other parts of the total situation. Second, the propagandist is generally dealing with peoples of another nation, with different culture, language, and national traditions which are often but imperfectly understood even by foreign “experts.”

Neither of these difficulties is unique to war propaganda, but the separation is so much more complete and the cultural differences between propagandist and audience are so much greater than in a domestic situation that in wartime these two difficulties stand out in bold relief.

The effectiveness of these two circumstances in producing a faulty appraisal of the listener’s cultural and situational frame of reference, and thus in defeating the purposes of war propaganda, is illustrated below by an analysis of Japan’s wartime English-language radio broadcasts to the United States. Certain basic assumptions about American listeners have been deduced from Japan’s more persistent propaganda themes. With each of these assumptions is presented a summary of the propaganda designed to exploit the supposed situation, together with a brief appraisal of the accuracy of the assumption and the appropriateness of the propaganda to achieve its purpose.

The summary of propaganda is founded on Japanese broadcasts monitored in the United States during the war. The appraisal of the American situation is largely based on general observation. While differences of opinion may well exist on particular points, it is believed that there will be sufficient agreement in most cases to support the main thesis of this article, namely, that Japan’s faulty knowledge and appraisal of the domestic situation in America, of American institutions, and American attitudes were factors in the production of propaganda that was often wide of its mark.

The Japanese assumptions may be grouped under four headings: lack of war aims, American decadence, American disunity, and distrust of Allies.

LACK OF WAR AIMS

The assumptions.—Tokyo believed that the Americans had been led into the war unwillingly by their leaders, that they had no positive war aims of which they would approve, and that they could be persuaded that the real aims of their leaders were not in harmony with American ideals. Some rec-
ognition of the negative motivation was provided by the Pearl Harbor attack, but the Japanese appear to have believed that this would not last, that in the absence of clear long-range objectives the American people would be open to persuasion that Japan had acted defensively, and that a long and costly war could not be justified by Pearl Harbor alone.

The propaganda.—Japanese propaganda to exploit this assumed situation may be stated as follows:

Americans do not know why they are at war. Said Tokyo:

Not a few of your compatriots feel bewildered at why America is at war, America who could in tranquillity have enjoyed peace and prosperity, menaced as she was by none at all. The United States who has continually posed as the champion of liberty now opposes by force the liberation of the people of East Asia. ... There is reason to believe the majority of your people are sympathetic to this rising tide of movement for liberty in East Asia [7-4-43].

The real aims of Allied leaders are inconsistent with American ideals:

The irony of it is that American men, American arms, American money, are being employed this very minute to rob the people of Asia of their right to live as free men. ... Americans, who fought the Civil War to liberate the slaves and who think they are fighting this war to free the enslaved people of the world, must find it painful to reflect upon the sad course over which their president is now taking the country [11-9-43].

The Atlantic Charter is a “false front for Anglo-American imperialism.” The vigor of the Japanese attack on the Charter and on Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” suggested a genuine fear that they might serve as articulate expressions of American war aims. Hence, there was a consistent effort to persuade us that our leaders were not sincere and that the ideals of the Charter would not and could not be achieved:

The Charter says that people should have the right to choose their form of government. The leaders of India believed that and are now in jail. As Churchill said, he did not become prime minister to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire [8-15-43].

We were constantly reminded that none of the colonial powers had made any promises to relinquish control of their colonies after the war and told that the colonial system was not in harmony with the Charter principles. Abandonment of those principles was likewise seen in the partition of Poland and in the “invasion” of North Africa. When Roosevelt revealed to newsmen that the Charter had not been a specific, signed document, Tokyo heralded this admission as conclusive proof of the fraudulent nature of the document and of the amazingly low level to which Anglo-American leaders descend to gain their evil ends [12-4-44].

Japan’s aims were represented as being truly in the American tradition:

Japan is fighting for the things for which you think you entered the war, and you are fighting against the very things for which you believed you were fighting [7-6-43].

Japan is a crusader, fighting valiantly and unselshly to accord to the Asiatic peoples the rights and privileges given them by God [2-7-43].

Japan’s ideal is a living, working one. ... Japan is bringing about independence and freedom for the peoples of Asia.

As evidence of her high purpose, Japan pointed to a series of achievements—relinquishment of extra-territoriality in China and the return to China of the Shanghai international settlement; the granting of independence to Burma, the Philippines, and parts of Malaya and Indo-China; a new treaty recognizing full sovereignty for the
Nanking government of China; the adoption of an impressive "charter of liberties" by the Greater East Asia Conference of November, 1943, and much alleged peace and prosperity in the "Co-prosperity Sphere."

The attack on Pearl Harbor was justified as defensive—an act forced upon Japan by the Allied leaders:

There can be no question but that war was forced on Japan by an arrogant and dangerous enemy who has no hesitancy in resorting to any trick of propaganda to attain his sinister ends. . . . At least by November 26, [1941] the United States . . . had for all practical purposes launched upon a state tantamount to war against Japan [11-26-42].

Finally, one use made of the numerous atrocity charges constantly made against American and British forces was to prove that our real behavior betrayed the falsity of our claims that we were champions of human rights and the Four Freedoms.

By these methods Tokyo sought to throw doubt on the justice of America's cause and the worthiness of our war aims, as well as to place the Japanese in the most favorable light possible—gallant, kind even to their enemies, defenders of freedom for the down-trodden peoples of Asia, and victims of the inhuman tactics of their enemies.

Validity of assumptions.—As to the major assumption that America lacked concrete, positive war aims, it seems to the writer that the Japanese, for a time at least, had a point. The American people were slow to accept the idea that they must again enter the European war; most of them hoped right up until the Pearl Harbor attack that war could be avoided in the Pacific. Public-opinion polls on American entry into war showed a consistent majority for neutrality even as late as October, 1941, when a Fortune survey showed only 37 per cent ready to call Japan to a halt, and in April of that year only 36 per cent were willing to send an American air force to Europe. This fact seems to sug-

3 See Fortune, Vol. XXV, Suppl. (January, 1942), for a summary of polls from 1935 to that date. They show a slow and reluctant growth of opinion favorable to American participation.

The Pearl Harbor attack, of course, turned the trick, and any question of positive war aims was swept aside by the indignation of the moment. But even when statements of positive war aims and postwar plans were made, they remained for a long time in broad general terms. Even after the Atlantic Charter and Roosevelt's statement of the Four Freedoms we were unable to apply their principles concretely to many of the peoples in Asia because the British, Dutch, and French had made no commitments regarding future colonial policy. Of inestimable aid to the Japanese propagandists was Churchill's forthright statement that he did not become prime minister to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire, and it was quoted and requoted many times by Japanese spokesmen. Neither could America make any application of the Charter principles to India. Aside, therefore, from the pledge to free the Philippines and to recognize the sovereignty of China and Thailand, America could talk only in generalities about war aims in the Pacific and Asia.

Tokyo perhaps rightly believed that this situation was somewhat less than satisfactory to those American idealists who looked upon the war as one for the literal achievement of the Four Freedoms, and the comments on this point in sections of the American press seemed to bear out the Japanese assumption.

Although one may grant some vulnerability in our position in regard to the long-run application of the Four Freedoms, this did not mean, as Tokyo may have assumed, that

3 The following titles of magazine articles in the American press listed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature suggest this criticism: "Atlantic Charter, a Menace to Peace" (August, 1943); "Atlantic Charter—Nobody Happy about It as It Fails To State America's Real War Aims" (April, 1944); "Eden Plants the Charter's Headstone" (March, 1944); "Roosevelt Sabotages the Charter" (January, 1945).
Americans could easily be persuaded to stop fighting. Japan greatly underestimated the depth and tenacity of the antagonism caused by the Pearl Harbor attack. It is doubtful if any but those strongly predisposed in Japan’s favor ever accepted the Japanese explanation of that act, and for many throughout the war it was in itself a sufficient war aim.

Nor does it seem probable that Japan’s benevolent aims in Greater East Asia or her complaints of martyrdom for a noble cause or charges of atrocities could be expected to arouse much American sympathy, for the Japanese invasion of China and other areas was too recent, and reports of Japanese atrocities were too frequent and too generally believed.

Thus, while Tokyo may have hit upon a point of dissatisfaction in the matter of long-run war aims, she was wholly unrealistic in supposing that this dissatisfaction could be turned to a positive identification with Japan’s aims, a justification of the Pearl Harbor attack, and a demand for the cessation of the war.

**AMERICAN DECADENCE**

*The assumptions.*—Japanese spokesmen made it plain that they considered the American people too materialistic and too much accustomed to luxuries to endure shortages and make the sacrifices necessary to carry through a long and costly war. They expected Americans to lose their enthusiasm as the sting of Pearl Harbor wore off, as their standard of living was cut, and as the cost of the war in men and materials became apparent to them. Then the lack of clear-cut war aims would be felt, and Americans would demand peace.

This view was expressed in a discussion entitled, “The True Nature of Our Enemies,” in the Japanese magazine *Hinode* (“Sunrise”) of May, 1943. Opinions of two Japanese are given, a Mr. Tsurumi and a Mr. Kudo, who, the article states, “have a deep insight into the domestic condition of each country.” Mr. Tsurumi asserted that American productive capacity would reach its limit by June, 1943, and that thereafter Americans would begin to suffer shortages:

> From July of this year there will be a further decrease in production, and . . . such a shortage will arise that the national life that has hitherto been maintained will become impossible. This will be manifest first in machinery which, though worn out, will have to be used without being replaced. Roads that have deteriorated will be left un repaired so that the holes in them will deepen. The standard of living must inevitably fall. When that happens, problems will arise. Grumbling and doubts about the war and disillusionment over the unexpected strength of Japan will occur. The Americans will have to do without fine food and cars and first-class schools for their children. Complaints about the shortage of clothing will follow. Dissatisfaction over war aims and general discontent will cause a slackening in the national solidarity. . . .

**REPORTER:** “It is said that Americans are so accustomed to luxuries that they will find it impossible to cut down their standard of living.”

**TSURUMI:** “Everybody’s living will be cut down, . . . but since to the Americans it is an aimless war they will ask why they are called upon to undergo hardships. . . . As conditions deteriorate inside America, discontent will arise and there will be outrages such as, ‘I don’t want my son to be killed.’ A rupture will certainly occur inside America. I would like the Japanese people to have a firm conviction on this point. I have studied America for thirty years.”

**KUDO:** “Americans and British attach such a high value to human life that if many of their troops are killed they will lose their fighting spirit. . . . Americans and British are individualistic. They are countries where the worth of the individual and the ideas of human rights flourish. . . . Their object in being born into the world is to eat, drink, and be merry. There is nothing after death. To be killed, therefore, presents a great problem to them. They consider death to be the greatest of losses, so we must kill off as many of them as possible.”

*The propaganda.*—Proceeding on the above assumptions, Japan’s propagandists set about to hasten the decline in America’s will to fight by stressing American weakness, the strength and superiority of the Japanese, the tremendous sacrifices we were enduring, and the much worse ones yet to come.
Much of the propaganda that seems to fall under this head is of a standard sort. The weakness of the enemy, the strength and superiority of one's own troops, the one-sided results of military engagements, also attempts to capitalize on conditions on the enemy's home front and the suffering of loved ones are parts of all war propaganda. Of special interest here are the specific Japanese assumptions that American materialistic civilization and the high living standard which it made possible were productive of physical and moral softness and that Americans could be persuaded that Japanese "spiritual" strength rendered them capable of almost superhuman achievements which made them unbeatable. The acceptance of these two propositions would indeed be conducive to defeatism.

Said a regular commentator:

In your country you have a national case of pink-toothbrush on a large scale and in many forms. The American way of living made most comfortable and easy by advanced science is not all it is cracked up to be. Survival of the fittest, remember. The time and place for frittering away the nation's strength is not before the battle. After twenty years of soft living the American soldiers are no match for the Japanese [2-11-43].

The fantastic exploits of the Japanese troops which were soberly reported as fact for American listeners are well illustrated by the following:

The dauntless activities of a Japanese scout unit on the New Guinea front are reported. . . . Corporal Takagi and nine other men . . . stealthily entered the enemy's camp on a moonlight night of October 15. . . . Locating the enemy soldiers, these ten fighting men immediately fell upon them, blasting two heavy artillery pieces, blowing up twenty-four [pieces of] enemy camp [equipment]. The enemy soldiers, completely taken by surprise, flung whatever they could lay their hands on, but these ten Japanese scouts soon made short work of the four hundred American soldiers and wiped them out. Miraculously enough, these ten Japanese soldiers did not suffer any wounds and returned to their base after gleaning all the information [11-30-43].

Such deeds of valor were attributed to the spiritual superiority of the Japanese:

The burning internal unity of the Japanese gives them a mental energy eternally beyond America's materialistic logic. This is worth all the money and factories in the world [2-23-43].

By virtue of American decadence, Japanese spiritual strength, and the expected decline in American production, the war was sure to be long and costly if America persisted in her hopeless task:

Your troops landed in the Solomons a year ago. They are still there in the malaria-ridden jungles, a stone's throw from where they first landed. This despite an overwhelming numerical advantage in men and aircraft. Consider for a moment that the Japanese swept down the jungles and swamps of the Malay Peninsula, heavily fortified at strategic points, in seventy days . . . [8-25-43].

The American people were likewise thought to be unable to endure the thought of the suffering of their loved ones. Prisoner-of-war messages, a regular feature of Japanese programs, were a favorite vehicle for emotional appeals which preyed on this assumed weakness:

To you, mothers, sweethearts, sisters, relatives, and friends, in the name of the unknown soldier for whom you are weeping in cemeteries today, I ask: Why are you continuing to send your loved ones overseas to foreign countries to die for an unknown cause? . . . This war brings absolutely no profit to the American nation. . . . [It] positively brings misery and misfortune, to say nothing of the torture and death befalling innumerable American youths [P.O.W. messages 5-30-43 and 7-6-44].

Likewise, the American people were thought to be unable to endure privations on the home front, and Tokyo made it a point to keep such privations constantly before us by telling us of our own troubles and of the greater ones to come:

Better stock up with fifty years' supply of clothes. It's going to be a long war, and money won't do you any good when there is nothing to buy [6-4-43].

We were reminded constantly of dire shortages of food, of absenteeism in war
plants, of increasing juvenile delinquency,
of increasing taxes, of shortages in land and
sea transport, of the dangers of a postwar
depression, of the closing of racetracks—
termed the hardest blow of all. Special stress
was laid on the shortage of rubber, tin, oil,
and quinine for which we had relied heavily
on the areas we lost to Japan. Substitutes
for these were declared impractical, and
Japan's abundant supplies from the con-
quered areas were underlined.

Validity of assumptions.—It is an inter-
esting assumption that the American people
could be led to doubt the value of their high
living standards and the materialistic
achievements of their civilization and to
attribute their military reverses to the re-
sultant decadence. These are part of the
very ethos of American culture, and to
doubt their worth would be to abandon some
of our most deep-seated values. By contrast,
Japan's concept of spiritual strength seemed
like mumbo jumbo to most Americans.

It must be admitted, of course, that Ja-
pan's assumption that America would break
rather than endure a long war was never put
to the test. The American home front suf-
fered infinitely less hardship on account of
the war than that of any other major bel-
ligerent. It is not necessary to speculate on
what the American reaction would have
been to such conditions, for example, as the
Japanese themselves suffered. It is perhaps
sufficient to note that the Japanese greatly
overestimated the shortages and the sacri-
fices Americans were making. In the absence
of the conditions they assumed, their propa-
ganda of defeatism was at best premature.

The conclusion of their American "ex-
pert" that our war production would decline
after mid-1943 is a case in point. Recogn-
izable errors of fact appearing in their broad-
casts, even though perhaps not suffi-
ciently serious to invalidate the argument
logically, were sufficient to nullify the psy-
chological effect of the propaganda upon the
listener by convincing him that the com-
mentator did not know what he was talking
about.

The obvious gloating of the Japanese
spokesmen over our loss of sources of quin-
nine, rubber, tin, and other essential mate-
rials of the South Pacific and the inex-
haustible supply of them now held by Japan
was perhaps expected to create defeatism.
But they underestimated both the absolute
faith most Americans have that science can
do anything and the ability of American
scientists to fulfill that expectation. It is also
characteristically American that the result
of the many reminders of our losses and
Japan's gains in the southern regions had
the effect of increasing our determination
not to let them get away with it rather than
of creating the defeatism Tokyo hoped to
produce.

On the military side there was somewhat
more in Japan's favor, at least during the
first year of the war. America had, indeed,
underestimated Japanese strength, and
some were inclined, when it was revealed to
them, to swing to the opposite extreme and
attribute to the Japanese almost uncanny
and superhuman powers. But neither the
early reverses nor the Japanese propaganda
that capitalized on them ever convinced any
considerable fraction of the American public
that it was remotely possible for us to lose
the war.4

Exaggerated reports of American battle
losses and stories of the superiority of Japa-
nese troops and pilots were for the most part
so clumsily done as to produce a laugh rather
than to establish for the Japanese the re-
putation for invincibility which they sought to
build up.

There is, perhaps, always a susceptibility
to reports of actual sufferings of loved ones,
and Japanese reminders of the malarial
jungles, of shocked and broken battle casual-
ties, of prisoners of war killed by our "blind
bombing," may have been effective with
persons whose husbands and sons were
known to be directly affected. But the
prisoner-of-war messages lost much of their
potential value by being so obviously faked.

4 Carefully conducted morale studies during the
dark days of 1942 made for the Office of Facts and
Figures, on which the writer was employed, showed
virtual unanimity on this point.
And the assumption that the American people would be ready to sue for peace when they were told of battle casualties showed an exaggerated conception of American "decadence."

**INTERNAL CLEAVAGES EXIST IN AMERICA**

**Assumptions.**—Internal cleavages exist that can be exploited so as eventually to cause revolt against American leaders and against the war.

There was an evident hope that the American people could be turned against Roosevelt personally. The power of racial minorities, especially Negro and Mexican, to cause trouble must also have been assumed, to judge from the stress on that subject in broadcasts to America. And, finally, a class cleavage was evidently thought to exist between the "war profiteers," or businessmen, and the workers, or American masses.

**The propaganda.**—One of the heaviest and most persistent of lines was the personal attacks on President Roosevelt. He was depicted as a tyrant, a dictator over the American people. He falsified the war news to deceive the people. The war guilt was placed squarely on his shoulders. He planned war on Japan long before Pearl Harbor. He was termed "A Don Quixote of the present century living in his dreams," a tyrant lustful for world hegemony, a politician who fooled the American people and led them into war for political reasons. Tokyo frequently became abusive and sarcastic. He was called "a paralytic cripple" with a "warped brain."

One commentary was entitled "Is Roosevelt Sane?" and concluded in the negative (8-27-43). His pre-war promise to keep America out of the war and not to send draftees to fight on foreign soil was constantly reiterated.

At times these personal attacks seem bitter enough to constitute nothing more than ill-tempered jibes at the man whom they recognized as perhaps the most effective leader among their enemies. If they had any serious propaganda purpose, however, it could have been based only on the belief that Roosevelt had a potential opposition in America which could be aroused or encouraged by such methods.

Other Allied leaders were likewise attacked. MacArthur, for example, was accused of cowardice for fleeing the Philippines when the Japanese came in 1942. He was termed a "Braggart and Crybaby," a "would-be hero." Americans heard that when he fled Mindanao with his wife and son he had an American plane loaded with fresh pineapple for his own personal use (5-9-44). He was accused of falsifying war results and of "concocting victory news."

"A well-known New York daily states that MacArthur is such a seasoned general," Tokyo wisecracked, "we say he is a pickled one" (10-21-43).

The racial identification of the Japanese with other colored peoples was given much emphasis. The American treatment of colored peoples was kept continually before us. Every discriminatory practice in the armed forces, in defense industries, in social and economic relations, was seized upon. Statements from American spokesmen or from the press on any phase of the racial question were repeated and interpreted for the American audience. Discriminatory laws against Negroes, Orientals, and Mexicans were repeatedly cited, as well as imperialistic practices of the Western powers throughout the world. In contrast with the Allies, Japan was pictured as champion of all colored races, fighting to free them from white domination and enslavement. At times the vehemence of the accusations seemed to suggest that the Japanese spokesmen were determined to convince us of our own wickedness, to make us hang our heads in shame.

Granting the possibility that the tone of some broadcasts may have been colored by the emotional reaction of the commentators, a theme pursued with such consistency must have been inspired by a more rational motive. This would appear to lie in the hope of arousing these minorities to oppose the war, to withhold support, or to embarrass the government by demands for equality of treatment at once.
Japanese attempts to create or widen cleavages along class lines in America were simple. There were frequent charges that business leaders had led us into war for the sake of profits and to re-establish their imperialistic hold on the resources of the Far East. Japan charged also that American war taxes favored the wealthy and bore unduly on the poor.

On the other hand, there were attempts to frighten the conservative element in America at the growing power of labor and the radical tendencies of the administration. Roosevelt was called the “Communist candidate for 1944.” It was asserted that the Cripps appointment to the British cabinet proved England was turning communist and that America’s alliance with Russia and Britain, “two good Red friends,” would surely nourish the seeds of communism and anarchy in the United States (2-27-43). For the most part, however, Japanese propaganda made very limited use of the “Communist menace.” This sharp contrast with German propaganda was perhaps due to the Japanese fear of giving offense to the Soviet Union, whose neutrality in the Far Eastern war she appeared to desire ardently.

Validity of assumptions.—The belief that America was disunited and that factions in it were ready with slight encouragement to fly at each other’s throats is perhaps a natural result of the inability of outsiders to understand the nature of our national unity. To persons acclimated to totalitarian regimes, there was ample evidence of disunity. The vocal opposition to government policy on the part of various pressure groups; the bitter debates in Congress, on the domestic radio, and in the press; the uninhibited utterances of office-seekers in American political campaigns; and the open struggle for advantage between labor and employer—these things, had they happened in Germany or Japan, would indeed have been cause for alarm. That they are classifiable as “normal” in America was known, perhaps, but not thoroughly comprehended by the Japane

ese. To them America was a fertile field for the sowing of seeds of dissension and revolt.

Thus, the vehement attacks on President Roosevelt personally may have been encouraged by the very vocal opposition to him and his New Deal during the pre-war years and by the criticism of his policy of aid to Britain in the early years of the war in Europe.

Tokyo was astute enough to draw upon American sources for many of her criticisms; and, of course, the American press with its editorial license, its Peglers, and its Hearsts, not to mention Congress with its Bilbos and Rankins, furnished Tokyo with ample material with which to attack the administration and the conduct of the war.

The same principle seems to apply to Tokyo’s appeal to America’s racial minorities. The existence of a considerable Negro population, which was denied many of the advantages of which democracy boasts, vocal in demands for equality, and supported in these demands by a considerable faction of the white population, appeared to be a natural point of attack for racial propaganda. The advocates of “white supremacy,” in Congress out, did yeoman service for the Japanese cause, perhaps more useful in convincing Asiatics of our racial intolerance than in fomenting revolt on the part of American minorities who are accustomed to them.

But if Tokyo hoped to produce open revolt or organized opposition to the war by racial minorities, she failed to reckon with the degree of accommodation which minority groups have achieved in American life. Moreover, the belief that their desire for fuller participation in American democracy and economic well-being could be turned into espousal of the Japanese cause seems to border on the fantastic.

The Tokyo charges that American capitalists led us into war for profits appealed to a long-standing popular distrust of big business running throughout our history at least since the “trust-busting” days of Theodore Roosevelt, and Tokyo was correct in recognizing an open struggle for power between
organized labor and organized employers. But here, again, the ability of a democratic society to accommodate itself to many internal stresses and strains without being in danger of bursting at the seams was probably not appreciated by the Japanese propagandists. They therefore appear to have greatly overestimated the possibility of fomenting effective disunity within America.

AMERICANS ARE SUSPICIOUS OF THEIR ALLIES

The assumptions.—Tokyo propagandists recognized the existence of considerable isolationist sentiment in America, the long-standing anti-British feeling in some quarters, and anti-Russian attitudes. In propaganda to America she sought to take advantage of these American biases to create disunity among the Allies and lessen thereby our ability to co-operate in the prosecution of the war. This propaganda to produce suspicion and disunity was likewise used, of course, to the other countries, and for the same purpose.

The propaganda.—The chief point of attack on the American beam was American-British co-operation. Britain and America were represented as fighting each for his own national interests rather than for the high ideals of the Atlantic Charter. Britain's aims were essentially to save the Empire and re-establish her control of her Asiatic colonies, but a future clash was seen with American interests in British plans to seize as much as possible of the postwar trade. Tokyo likewise told Americans that Britain was cleverly scheming to make America, as well as her other allies and colonies, bear the brunt of the war and turn all to her own advantage:

Britain is proving that Americans are the world's prize suckers. American troops are in England, India, Australia, Africa, and New Guinea. They're there to save the British Empire. . . . When the majority of the Americans finally realize how they are made suckers of by the British and the Soviet Union, they will decide that the time has come to stop pulling someone else's chestnuts out of the fire . . . [1-19-44].

Attempts to discredit the British in the eyes of American listeners also took the form of playing up charges of British atrocities, British imperialism and colonial policy, British racial discrimination, and reports of friction between American troops and those of Britain or her dominions.

Attempts to discredit the Chunking regime took the form, for the most part, of reports of its weakness, its internal chaos, and impending collapse. Chiang Kai-shek was represented as willing to fight "to the last American dollar" and as ungrateful and dissatisfied with the aid he had received.

Though Japan made very limited use of the "Russian menace" in her war propaganda, presumably for fear of provoking a Russian attack, America was told on a number of occasions of the dangers inherent in her Russian alliance and reminded of the friction arising between Russia and the other Allies:

When President Roosevelt says there have never been any economic disagreements or danger of war with Russia, he is a hypocrite and doesn't believe his own propaganda [2-9-43].

The alliance between Britain and America and Russia was pictured as a marriage of convenience which could not last:

With the European war over [said Tokyo shortly after V-E Day], a greater source of headaches for the Anglo-Americans is the advance of the Soviet Union. . . . [The] war will still continue in Europe, the war of seizing what is left in Europe [5-7-45].

By methods such as these Tokyo sought to capitalize on American distrust of her allies and to convince us that they were imperialistic, selfish, and seeking to use America as a tool to achieve their own ends and that they were against many of the ideals for which we were told the war was being fought. On the other hand, there were said to be many advantages to collaboration with Japan:

The Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere does not mean closed doors. . . . This sphere is not to be a small, narrow group surrounded by high walls, but a family which is willing to work with the rest of the world . . . [5-28-43].
It is time not only to think seriously of but to talk peace. . . . America will do well to ponder a peace, co-operation with your neighbors . . . prosperity for your own people . . . the chance to save millions of lives . . . [6-29-43].

Validity of assumptions.—There seems little doubt in the writer’s mind that the assumptions of Allied disunity and suspicion were the most accurate of those made by the Japanese and their propaganda of disunity potentially the most dangerous. A certain suspicion or dislike of Britain among rank-and-file Americans is deep-seated and of long standing. Perhaps equally general, and in some quarters much more acute, was the fear and distrust of Russia. That to preserve unity and to make effective co-operation possible was one of the major problems of the Allies seems to have been recognized by Tokyo.

Americans were predisposed to be critical of British colonial policy, British “imperialism,” and schemes to monopolize world trade, for of these aims most Americans consider themselves innocent. As to charges of atrocities, racial discrimination, and the like—these were likewise leveled against us, and with no less justification, but this fact was perhaps no bar to our developing a righteous indignation against our allies over their acts.

The relatively greater accuracy of the Japanese assumptions regarding America’s international attitudes does not in the writer’s opinion invalidate the thesis of this study, for their assumptions on this point rested less on knowledge of American culture and internal conditions than on observation of international relations in which Japan, too, had been a participant.

The failure of this propaganda, and the identical German line, to achieve an actual rupture among the Allied powers was not because it was inappropriate but because of the effectiveness of our countermeasures, the obvious advantages of wartime collaboration, and the depth of the American antagonism toward Japan which made her proffered peace terms so generally unacceptable.

CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis shows just how difficult is the problem of the war propagandist in adapting his appeals to his enemy audience. It is evident that the Japanese assumptions were in some respects correct but in many others were wide of the mark, either through ignorance of necessary facts or through faulty analysis of American attitudes and the workings of the American social system. That American broadcasts to Japan would show up any better from the Japanese point of view is perhaps doubtful, though the straitened circumstances on the home front, the long series of military reverses which could not forever be concealed from the people, and the bombing which brought the reality of the war to the civilian population perhaps combined to create a situation more favorable to the growth of defeatism in Japan than ever existed in America.

The war propagandist in dealing with enemy peoples must attempt to modify the behavior of a hostile audience which he but imperfectly understands and the current condition of which he can judge only from incomplete and inadequate sources. Moreover, he is generally working against a system of domestic propaganda or “information” whose perpetrators have every one of the advantages he lacks. It therefore seems to be a safe hypothesis that he is powerless to achieve his objectives until or unless continued military defeats, severe domestic privations, or other circumstances generally beyond his control undermine the enemy’s morale, destroy confidence in enemy leadership, and thus create a receptive atmosphere for his suggestions. Under such favorable circumstances he may intensify doubts and discouragement, and he may, once credibility and a degree of leadership have been established, suggest modes of action. But those conditions under which he can be effective cannot be created by him; nor is he in a position to know precisely when the conditions obtain.