Psychological Warfare, Japanese

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Japanese psychological warfare operations were modeled on campaigns conducted by the British in World War I and the Germans in World War II. The Germans established a branch of their propaganda ministry in Japan, which resulted in close psychological warfare collaboration between these two Axis powers. As a result, their propaganda themes, such as both nations having divine or semidivine rulers and being populated by super races whose destiny was to rule the world, were strikingly parallel.

Psychological warfare served four general goals of the Japanese war effort: to weaken and destroy the morale of the Western powers, to encourage the resistance of friendly forces in territories occupied by the Western powers, to promote dissenion between Western government/military forces and their home fronts and allies, and to keep neutrals neutral or to procure their active cooperation against the West. The Japanese conducted three general forms of psychological warfare, which were primarily coordinated by the Cabinet Information Board. However, the headquarters of the Japanese army remained autonomous and conducted its own psychological operations.

Strategic propaganda was directed against the home fronts, political leadership, and status of the Western powers in Asia. The Japanese had defied these Western powers by invading the Chinese territory of Manchuria in 1931 and, as a result, gained a powerful psychological advantage over them. They capitalized upon it with the slogan “Asia for the Asiatics.” Although most of the Japanese leadership, both political and military, seemed sincerely to believe in the slogan’s sentiments, it was nonetheless used as a pretext for Japan’s policy of military expansion. Japan’s intent was to be viewed as the liberator of the Asiatic peoples and to show that the rule of the Western powers in Asia was now over.

In the decade preceding their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese preyed upon the split in American public opinion between isolationists and interventionists to further their policies. Ambiguity, threats, and promises of goodwill were elevated to an art form. These made possible the continued provision of strategic resources such as fuel oil and scrap iron to the Japanese economy, as well as the secret fortification of the islands mandated to Japan by the League of Nations.

Operational and tactical propaganda were directed against the military forces of the Western powers. In this regard Pearl Harbor a master stroke at the operational level, but at the same time it was, was a strategic blunder that utterly destroyed ten years of psychological opera-

tions directed toward the United States. Their belief that the “decadent” Americans would crumple at the first blow and meekly turn over most of the Pacific to Japan shows that the Japanese were every bit as “racist” as the Americans.

Operational and tactical Japanese psychological warfare included the broadcasts made by Radio Tokyo, especially those of Tokyo Rose, and the dropping of propaganda leaflets. An example of the latter is the depiction of an Aussie soldier fighting in New Guinea while an American soldier takes liberties with an Australian girl back home. Japanese leaflets directed at U.S. troops invariably depicted the Americans clad in World War I-style uniforms, complete with “soup bowl” helmets, equipment not seen in that army since the fall of the Philippines. The iconography was usually Oriental and the “English” text fractured. American troops eagerly gathered such efforts and traded them like baseball or bubble-gum cards, not for their “political” content but for their graphic pornography and hilarious texts. Surrender appeals (“You will be treated in accordance with the principles of Bushido”) were unlikely to have much appeal to troops who knew about the Bataan death march and the torture-murders of captured Americans on Guadalcanal.

Allied naval personnel were amused by Tokyo Rose’s crocodile tears shed for “the poor boys on the ________, sunk last night by our brave submariners.” The “poor boys,” as likely as not, were enjoying the broadcast aboard the warship supposedly resting on the bottom. On the other hand, Radio Tokyo broadcasters, possibly borrowing a leaf from the Germans, did have the wit to broadcast the latest American popular music. Jazz, big band, bebop, jitterbug—the latest Tommy Dorsey or Glen Miller or Bing Crosby recordings—could be heard on Axis radio well before Allied broadcasts disseminated them. But U.S. sailors were so immune to the political blandishments of the likes of Tokyo Rose that such enemy broadcasts were actually piped through the public address systems of Pacific Fleet ships, both for the humor and for the sailors to catch up on the latest state-side hits. Japanese tactical psywar against Allied troops must be judged a complete failure. Nowhere has there been such great listenership with so little result.

Propaganda directed toward conquered Asian peoples formed the basis for the creation of Japan’s envisioned Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. All traces of former Western rule were to be eliminated in the regions the Japanese occupied. The Japanese occupiers forbade listening to Allied broadcasts, introduced pro-Japanese textbooks, replaced European language courses with Jap-
anese courses, and trained local protégés for administrative positions. Toward the end of the war such propaganda shifted away from promoting Japanese language and culture to creating feelings of anticolonial nationalism, in an attempt to prevent the Western powers from taking back their former colonies.

The staged spectacle of the once lordly white rulers being forced by their Japanese conquerors to sweep the streets of Singapore was something not to be forgotten by Asian nationalists. The Japanese had staged what Communists termed "the propaganda of the deed"; they had completely outfought the British, the French, the Dutch, and the Americans in a fair fight, using the most modern weapons of Asian manufacture. Even the often bestial behavior of occupying Japanese troops could not obliterate such considerations. When the colonial powers returned in 1945, they found a changed Asia that would no longer tolerate foreign colonial overlordship. This was the one undoubted success of Japanese psychological warfare in World War II.

FURTHER READINGS
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SEE ALSO Psychological Warfare, U.S.; Tokyo Rose

Psychological Warfare, U.S.

Psychological warfare, as defined by the U.S. joint chiefs of staff during World War II, consisted of the integrated use of all means, moral and physical—other than those of recognized military actions—that would tend to destroy the will of the enemy and to damage his political and economic capacity; that also would tend to deprive the enemy of the support, assistance, or sympathy of his allies or associates or neutrals; or that would tend to maintain, increase, or acquire the support, assistance, and sympathy of neutrals. By 1944 the broader generic term "psychological warfare," and the older and more specific terms "combat propaganda" and "propaganda," had become virtually interchangeable. (There was also some feeling that "propaganda" had been in bad odor as a result of the work of the Nazi propaganda chief, Paul Joseph Goebbels, a man who could give lying a bad name.)

When properly applied, psychological warfare supposedly could bolster morale in one's own forces while so undermining an enemy's fighting spirit that collapse could occur within the first hours of hostilities. Psychological warfare could undermine the enemy's morale and destroy its will to resist, both on the main line of resistance and on the home front. It could destroy alliances, cause civil disorder, divide officers from the enlisted ranks and citizens from their leaders, and create chaos in the enemy's homeland. Psychological warfare required less in terms of personnel than did traditional armed forces, it could enhance the effectiveness of conventional weapons, and it could provide the final push to an already demoralized enemy. In short, its adherents claimed, psychological warfare could shorten wars, save both money and lives, and decrease the overall level of violence.

Psychological warfare was broadly divided into three interdependent classes during World War II: strategic, tactical, and consolidation. Strategic propaganda was directed to enemy and enemy-occupied countries, and had the double task of undermining the will to resist and sustaining the morale of those supporting the Allies over the long term. Tactical or combat propaganda was conducted against enemy forces in the forward areas and sought very specific, short-term goals. Consolidation propaganda was directed toward civilians in rear areas or areas recently occupied by Allied troops, to ensure their cooperation.

The weapons of psychological warfare were those of the civilian media in film, print, or audio form. During World War II, the armed forces relied primarily on the printed leaflet, newspaper, or news sheet. More than eight billion leaflets were dropped by aircraft or delivered by artillery shells worldwide by the Allied powers, the vast majority in Europe. In addition, the Allies used motion pictures and still photographs, and broadcast medium- and shortwave radio programs to the home fronts of their enemies. On the tactical level, U.S. military personnel conducted frontline radio propaganda programs and used loudspeakers and megaphones. Nearly every campaign in the Pacific and Asian theaters during World War II witnessed the use of some form of psychological warfare waged by either a civilian or a military agency.

In contrast to Europe, however, the Pacific war represented a vastly different world for Allied propagandists because of the number of operational theaters in the re-