PREDICTION OF POLITICAL ACTION BY MEANS OF PROPAGANDA ANALYSIS

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The following is a paper which the author has prepared for publication in a forthcoming issue of the Public Opinion Quarterly.

Introduction

During World War II, a group of analysts in a now defunct unit of the Federal Communications Commission (F.C.C.) attempted to make inferences about Nazi propaganda strategy and underlying policy calculations from a close inspection of German radio and press communications. After the war, the work of the F.C.C. analysts was studied intensively by the writer in order to test the inferences and to reconstruct and codify methods of inference which had been successfully applied.[1]

Among the problems of the wartime content analysts was that of predicting the initiatives of an opponent through analysis of his propaganda. This is, however, only the most dramatic type of problem that was investigated. It is selected for discussion here for two reasons. First, the methodological approach to this problem went through an interesting development in the course of the war. Secondly, in addition to the obvious practical interest of this problem at the time, it has a certain theoretical interest as well, since it bears upon the general question of the relationship of communication and action in the relations between nations.

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1 This article is based on a study prepared by the author for The RAND Corporation. A full report is in preparation.

Early Approaches to the Problem

In early considerations of the problem, the possibility of predicting an opponent's initiatives was generally regarded as requiring discovery of a regular pattern, or relationship, in the opponent's past behavior, which would serve as a rule of inference in new instances.[2]

Regular relationships were sought between the opponent's intention to initiate a certain line of action and (1) some type of content characteristic in his propaganda; or (2) some type of propaganda strategy pursued by him prior to the initiative.

Neither of these two early approaches proved feasible. Inspection of Nazi communications behavior prior to earlier German initiatives failed to disclose regularly recurring relationships of either type. A common content characteristic or "pattern" could not be discovered in the propaganda which preceded earlier Nazi military initiatives. Similarly, the Nazis evidently had not pursued the same type of propaganda strategy prior to each of their initiatives.[3] Attempts to

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2 No adequate account of these early approaches has been published. The logic of these approaches is briefly indicated in H. D. Lasswell's unpublished memorandum, "Specimen Hypotheses about the Focus of Attention in World Politics," February, 1942, The Experimental Division for the Study of Wartime Communications, Library of Congress, p. 4.

3 For an authoritative description by a leading German propagandist of how some of the Nazi aggressions were prepared propagandistically, see Hans Fritzsche's affidavit submitted to the Nuremberg Tribunal: document number 3469-PS in Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. VI, pp. 184-190 (translation); this is summarized in Vol. II, pp. 1041-1046.

infer Nazi initiatives continued to be made throughout the war. But, perhaps because of disillusionment over the failure of the two earlier approaches, no further efforts were made to formulate systematic methods of inference for this purpose. Postwar appraisals of the value of content analysis for predicting the initiatives of an opponent were generally sober.[4]

The Indirect Method

These two early approaches, a full critique of which cannot be given here, were replaced in the course of the war by a different method of inference developed, in the Federal Communications Commission, by content analysts of the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service. The new approach was, at best, only implicit in the F.C.C. analysis. It has been articulated by the present writer in the course of a detailed study of the procedures and reasoning employed in F.C.C. analyses. The new approach is referred to here as the "indirect" method, because it comprises a series of interconnected causal imputations, or inferences. A brief characterization of the indirect method will suffice for present purposes.[5]

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4 See Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research, The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1952, pp. 84, 85-86. Somewhat less sober in their assessment were Ernst Kris and Hans Speier, German Radio Propaganda, Oxford University Press, 1944, pp. 289-291, 292-325. There is implicit recognition in the latter work that some modification would be necessary in the early assumption that the ability to predict Nazi initiatives rested upon the discovery of a single, regularly recurring relationship of intended action with propaganda strategy.

5 A brief account of the indirect method appears in the Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 782-784; and in B. Berelson, op. cit., pp. 193-195.

The new method is adapted to the highly instrumental character of propaganda. It recognizes, as the earlier approach did not, that propaganda can be used to further a forthcoming initiative in a variety of ways. Therefore, it does not expect to find a regularly recurring relationship between a type of elite intention and a type of propaganda strategy accompanying it.[6] Rather, the new method operates on the expectation that propaganda strategy may be varied from one instance of an elite initiative to another; accordingly, it attempts to identify <u>whatever</u> propaganda strategy the opponent may have adopted in order to further its forthcoming initiative.

As will be seen, the indirect method is applicable only to those intended actions of an opponent which involve some measure of deliberation and policy-planning on his part. It is a prerequisite of the method that the opponent use <u>preparatory</u> propaganda as a means of enhancing or exploiting

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6 The second of the two early approaches concerned itself with only one type of propaganda goal that an elite might pursue in connection with an intended initiative, namely that of <u>masking</u> the forthcoming action. It was evidently thought that, if the propagandist's technique of masking the initiative could be deciphered, the key to successful prediction would be obtained. Taken alone, this assumption was unobjectionable. When linked with the search for a regularly recurring pattern of masking, however, it grossly oversimplified the problem of predicting action in conflict situations when the actor is well aware that his present behavior (linguistic and otherwise) is being closely observed for clues as to his intentions and calculations. The expectation that <u>such</u> a regularity would be found, therefore, was unrealistic. It overlooked the likelihood that the opponent would deliberately vary the pattern for masking initiatives, if for no other reason than in order to maximize deception.

in some way his forthcoming action. Excluded from the possibility of inference by this method, therefore, are "spontaneous" and highly "reactive" elite actions, which are likely to be undertaken without the usual co-ordination of policy and action with propaganda.

Nonetheless, the range of elite actions to which the indirect method of inference can be applied is a broad one, not limited to prediction of military initiatives but encompassing political, diplomatic, and economic actions as well. The fact that the indirect method can be employed only if the opponent's initiative is preceded by preparatory propaganda is not as severe a limitation on its usefulness as might appear at first glance. For modern elites often find it to their advantage to "prepare" in advance some of those who will be affected by their major actions. Whatever form this preparation takes, its general purpose is simply to maximize the expected gains and to minimize the unfavorable consequences of the forthcoming action. Preparatory communications may be directed toward domestic audiences, groups in an opponent's camp, or groups in neutral states. The content analyst takes into account the possibility that preparatory communications may be directed to more than one audience, that the objective or intent of the preparation may be different for each of the specific audiences addressed, and that the objective may be implemented with considerable subtlety and indirection.

The possibility of predicting an elite's action from its preparatory effort depends, obviously, upon the elite's use of a communications channel that is also open to the content analyst's scrutiny. It is usually safe to assume that mass-media channels will be used when preparatory propaganda is directed toward relatively large audiences. Selected, specialized public media may be used in attempting to prepare smaller groups. However, there is no assurance that public channels will be used in every instance. Preparation may take place, for example, through confidential orders, private messages, word of mouth, and other channels of communication not readily accessible to the content analyst.

Another limitation on the use of this method for predicting actions is the possibility that the elite may decide to forego any preparation and employ propaganda to facilitate its action only at the time the action is taken or shortly thereafter. In such cases, the best that the indirect method can do is to aid in assessing the nature and objectives of the major action once it is taken, and to say something about the opponent's estimate of the prospects of its action. The value of such inferences to the policy-maker should not be underrated; in many cases they overshadow in importance the usefulness of having predicted the action before it occurred.

Types of Inferences of Policy Interest

It is useful to emphasize at this point that several aspects of an opponent's forthcoming actions or initiatives may be of interest to the policy-maker. There is, first, the question whether a certain action is actually being planned by the opponent, i.e., a question of his intentions. But equally interesting in many cases, and sometimes of greater value, are questions concerning the timing of the action, its precise nature and magnitude, its exact location, the objectives assigned to the action, the elite's expectations concerning its success, and the extent and nature of the opposition to that particular initiative within the elite group. Which of these questions has primary interest will vary from case to case. In some instances, there is little doubt but that a certain type of action (e.g., a military initiative) is being planned by the opponent; the interesting question, therefore, may be the precise timing and location of the initiative, or perhaps its magnitude and objectives. In other cases, the important question may have to do with the opponent's expectations concerning the success or failure of his contemplated action, or perhaps with his concern over some of the consequences of the action for certain groups. The case studies from the F.C.C.'s experience cited below will illustrate the range of problems of this type which can be investigated by means of content analysis.

Mode of Reasoning

In attempting to apply the method of inference which has been briefly described, the content analyst makes use of existing generalizations about the types of situations and circumstances in which the elite under scrutiny tends to employ preparatory propaganda in support of its forthcoming actions. Such generalizations should cover the following interrelated questions:

(a) For what types of actions does the elite generally regard preparatory propaganda as desirable?

(b) What types of audiences does the elite consider it useful to prepare (for each type of action)?

(c) What types of goals does the elite consider it useful and feasible to pursue in preparatory propaganda (for different types of audiences in the case of different types of actions)?

(d) What communications channels, or types of communication, does the elite usually employ, or is it likely to employ, when attempting to achieve a certain type of goal in preparatory propaganda (for different types of audiences in the case of different types of actions)?

In attempting to solve any particular inferential problem, the content analyst does not rely solely upon available generalizations of this order. He employs them, rather, in conjunction with a logic of the situation assessment.[7] The content analyst keeps in mind that the elite, in considering whether to employ preparatory propaganda for a certain action, is guided not merely by its own past practice or by a rigid operational doctrine. Rather, the elite is presumed to make an assessment of the factors upon which the success of a contemplated action is likely to depend, and from this assessment it derives some estimate of the requirements, if any, for preparatory propaganda support. Finally, it is further assumed, the choice of a preparatory propaganda strategy is also influenced by considerations of the feasibility and probable effectiveness of available strategies and techniques.

For example, in one case total surprise may be deemed essential by the elite if the success of its intended action is to be assured or maximized. Consequently, the propaganda preparation in this case may consist exclusively in attempts

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7 The term "logic of the situation" is taken over from Karl R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, London, 2nd edition, revised, 1952, Vol. 2, pp. 96-97, 265.

to mask the forthcoming action. In another instance of the same type of action, however, the elite may consider it expedient to precede the action by a propaganda of bluffs and threats; and in such cases, not the masking goal but a war-of-nerves propaganda strategy will be adopted.

Since several deductive patterns enter into the strand of reasoning characteristic of the indirect method, it is difficult to characterize the analyst's reasoning processes in general terms. Any effort to do so risks giving a picture which is oversimplified or unduly standardized. There is, nonetheless, some value in attempting a general sketch of the pattern of reasoning or, rather, in suggesting it by formulating some of the questions an analyst must cope with in attempting to clarify the intentions of an opposing elite. In skeletal form, the analyst's reasoning is as follows: "The opposing propagandist would not adopt such propaganda goals for implementation through these media channels at this time and in this situation unless an action of the type being inferred were indeed planned or intended." Thus, the analyst's inference that a major action is or is not planned, and his inferences about its character and scope or about elite expectations concerning it, are the last steps in a sequence of inference. The analyst's reasoning may be likened to an effort to reconstruct the missing pieces in an action sequence. Certain parts of the mosaic of action are given or readily

assumed. Other pieces are missing. In effect, therefore, the analyst rehearses in his mind the different possible versions of a missing piece, trying to decide which version is more plausible, given the values of the pieces already known to him.[8]

Possible Goals of Preparatory Propaganda

A crucial step in the inferential chain is that of determining whether any propaganda goals are being implemented in current communications which are likely to be part of a preparation campaign preceding a major action. Of assistance to the analyst for this purpose would be a general framework of analysis which enables him to consider systematically whether any of the variety of possible preparatory propaganda goals are reflected in the communications under scrutiny.

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8 Thus, the mode of reasoning employed in the indirect method is a special application of the procedure of causal imputation in certain types of historical explanation. As in the latter, the propaganda analyst attempts to approximate the logic of experiment by means of a mental rehearsal of hypothetical outcomes. Changes in the value of one or more variables are postulated by the analyst in order to appraise the consequences, if any, for other variables. By means of such imaginative rehearsals, a hypothetical construction or inference of nonobservable causal determinants takes place. On this procedure in historical explanation, see Talcott Parsons' commentary on Max Weber, The Structure of Social Action, 2nd edition, 1949, pp. 610ff.

An effort has been made in this study to develop a list of the possible propaganda goals that an elite might pursue in preparing one or another audience for a forthcoming action. The goals are phrased in general and abstract terms so as to be applicable to as many types of actions, audiences, and channels as possible. It is important to keep in mind, however, that some of these preparatory goals, stated quite explicitly and plainly here, would be implemented in a subtle fashion by the propagandist in order to enhance the effectiveness of his communication.

The list of goals presented is probably not an exhaustive one. It undoubtedly reflects the preoccupation of the present study with the Nazi elite and with wartime propaganda. On the other hand, it would be surprising if this list of general goals were to be totally inapplicable to analyses of such preparatory propaganda efforts as other elites may engage in from time to time.

The list of goals is subdivided according to whether domestic audiences or groups in the opponent's camp are the target of the preparatory propaganda. It is also subdivided according to an expectation of the elite which can be assumed to exercise a major influence upon its selection of preparatory goals: namely, whether the forthcoming action is expected (by the elite) to have <u>deprivational</u> or <u>indulgent</u> effect upon the audience in question.[9]

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9 Additional subdivisions (for example, with respect to type of action and media channel) might be meaningful and might make the list even more useful. But it has been found unprofitable to elaborate the scheme more fully at this time.

Possible Goals of Propaganda Preparatory to Major Actions

I. Goals of propaganda directed at domestic or friendly neutral audiences:

A. In the case of major actions expected to have a deprivational effect on domestic audiences.[10]

Goals:

(1) Reduce the possibility of shock effect (as by hinting at the nature of the forthcoming action in gradually more explicit terms, combined with appropriate assurances).

(2) Manipulate "blame-responsibility" for the deprivation.

(3) Identify and reinforce the reaction pattern which the elite would like its own people to adopt when the prepared action takes place.

(4) Strengthen the public's predisposition to accept demands to be made upon it by the elite in connection with the intended action.

(5) Lay the basis for moral justification of the forthcoming action.

(6) Prepare for a better understanding of the necessity for the forthcoming action by prior disclosure of estimates and expectations upon which it is based -- either the real ones or ones chosen for their propagandistic value in achieving the desired public acceptance.

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10 For example, a declaration of war which shocks one's own people; use of an unconventional weapon against the enemy which violates the moral values of the domestic audiences; arrest and trial of one's own elite members for treason; announcement of severe measures against a segment of one's own population, etc.

B. In the case of major actions expected to have an indulging effect on the domestic audience.[11]

Goals:

(1) Control the degree and manner of expression of the public's expected rejoicing in order to prevent excesses which lower efficiency. (E.g., prevent wild outbursts of rejoicing, disruptions of work schedules and of labor discipline, etc.)

(2) Control public expectations aroused by the good news so as to prevent unrealistic hopes that might be disillusioned later on.

(3) Moderate the public's expectations as to the indulging character of the forthcoming action, in order to produce relatively greater satisfaction with the results of the action when it occurs.

(4) Increase the authority and prestige of the ruling elite by making appropriate claims of strength and foresight on its behalf which will be validated by the coming action.

(5) Alleviate currently prevailing low morale by forecasting the expected indulgence.

(6) Manipulate in politically desirable directions the gratitude and satisfaction that will be engendered by the forthcoming indulgence.

(7) Exploit the public's gratitude to create greater support for the regime's policies.

(8) Prepare the public for the possibility that the elite's forthcoming action will be followed by a strong and successful counteraction by the opposing elite.

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11 For example, the announcement of one's military or diplomatic offensive, the use of a new powerful weapon which does not violate the moral values of the domestic audience, a victorious battle, enemy diplomatic concessions, increase in food rations, etc.

C. In the case of major actions, the expected success of which is indeterminate or difficult to foresee.[12]

Goals:

(1) Ensure that the domestic public's conception of the aims of the action remains within modest bounds. (This may entail countering enemy propagandists' efforts to commit you to more far-reaching aims than you can attain.)

II. Goals of propaganda directed at groups in the opponent's camp:

A. Regarding major actions expected to have an important deprivational effect upon groups in the opponent's camp. (Cf. examples under I, B above.)

Goals:

(1) When "surprise" is important to the magnitude of the deprivational effect achieved: mask the forthcoming action or veil its time, place, character, and scope.

(2) When advance demoralization of groups in the opponent's camp will facilitate success of the forthcoming action and reduce its costs, and when "surprise" is not essential: publicize the forthcoming action confidently and in detail in terms which emphasize the powerlessness of the opponent and the futility of resistance.

(3) Reduce the audience's confidence in the efficacy of possible countermeasures by its own leaders to the forthcoming action.

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12 For example, when the elite has relatively low confidence in the successful outcome of its action, as in the case of a military offensive against the enemy or a program for improved welfare at home.

(4) Strengthen predispositions which will increase the demoralizing impact of the action when it takes place.

(5) Anticipating the likelihood that the forthcoming deprivation may set into motion efforts within the opponent's camp to fix "blame" and "responsibility" for the setback, plan the forthcoming action in such a way and prepare the ground (a) to maximize disruptive effects of the action on relations among members of the opposing elite, on relations between elite and masses, and among members of opposing coalition; (b) to minimize the possibility that the action might unify the opponent's camp and strengthen his determination.

(6) Give prior moral justification for the forthcoming action, when necessary, to prevent strengthening of hatred against yourself on the part of the opponent and neutrals.

B. Regarding major actions expected to have an important indulging effect upon groups in the opponent's camp. (Cf. examples under I, A above.)

Goals:

(1) Encourage groups in the opponent's camp to form unrealistic and/or incorrect assessments of the advantages accruing to them from your action. ("Unrealistic" either in seriously under- or overestimating the potentialities of the new situation created by the action in question; "incorrect" in diverting the opponent's attention from feasible to unfeasible avenues of exploiting the new situation militarily, politically, or psychologically.)

(2) Encourage an initially overoptimistic reaction to the event which is bound to result in subsequent disillusionment.

From the standpoint of theory or a set of propositions which would encompass the relationship of propaganda to action, the above framework makes but a modest contribution.[13] It aims at no more than a systematic listing of possible preparatory propaganda goals which a political elite may adopt in support of its forthcoming actions. No attempt is made to specify the conditions under which one or another preparatory goal will be undertaken. But propositional formulations of this type may be facilitated by the systematic and relatively abstract character of the present list. And, more certainly, such a systematic listing should serve to sensitize analysts to the variety of ways in which elite actions can be instrumented by preparatory propaganda, thereby enabling them to spot more readily individual instances of preparatory propaganda.

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13 On structural frameworks for the empirical analysis of action see Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action, Glencoe, Illinois, 1949. A preliminary effort in the direction of codifying methodology in studies aiming at causal explanation of concrete actions is made in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Morris Rosenberg (eds.), The Language of Social Research, Glencoe, Illinois, 1955, Section V, "The Empirical Analysis of Action."

Case Studies

Several case studies drawn from wartime propaganda analyses will now be briefly summarized, in order to illustrate the way in which the indirect method was used for inferring something about an opponent's initiative.[14]

1. In one of the outstanding cases of propaganda analysis on record, British content analysts were able to infer that Nazi propaganda talk about the forthcoming use of a secret, unconventional air-bombardment weapon was no bluff. This inference was made in November, 1943, eight months before the inception of the V-1 "buzz-bomb" attacks.

Promises that Germany would have a new reprisal weapon, which began to appear in German propaganda as early as June, 1943, were obviously intended to bolster domestic morale, which had been badly shaken by increasingly heavy Allied raids to which Germany seemed to have no answer. If the propaganda objective of such promises was obvious enough, the question remained whether such talk was mere propaganda or whether a new reprisal weapon was actually being prepared for use on a

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14 Cases were selected for which some verification of the inferences was possible on the basis of historical materials.

militarily important scale in the near future. The British analyst answered this question affirmatively with considerable confidence. His inference rested upon the fundamental assumption, confirmed on many past occasions, that German propaganda never deliberately misled the German people in matters involving an increase of German power. In view of this, the analyst felt it necessary to accept at face value repeated statements in German home propaganda to the effect that Germany was preparing and expected to employ a new weapon of air reprisal.

The British propaganda analyst also inferred that the prolonged delay in the appearance of the new reprisal weapon -- after it had been repeatedly and authoritatively promised to the German people -- must have been due to delays in its timetable which were not anticipated when the propaganda commitment was made. This inference was supported by the observation that it was Goebbels' practice not to make an important propaganda commitment of this character too far ahead of the date when he expected it to be realized. Thereby, he avoided aggravating domestic morale, which would be quickly affected by resentment over false propaganda promises. The propaganda analyst even estimated the maximum period of time -- about three months -- that Goebbels would allow himself for propaganda anticipation of the event. Hence, when the promised

reprisal weapon was delayed appreciably beyond this estimated time period, the analyst concluded -- correctly -- that the scheduled operational employment of the new weapon must have been unexpectedly delayed. Further, he even identified the approximate dates on which something had happened to cause the delays.

The British analyst noted that references to air reprisal by means of new weapons suddenly dropped out of German propaganda for ten days beginning August 19 and, later, for seven days beginning September 11. He was then told of the British air raid of August 17 on the secret-weapons station at Peenemünde and the Allied air raids of September 7-8 on installations in the Boulogne-Calais area which were suspected of being launching platforms for a new type of German weapon. The analyst's problem, therefore, was to consider alternative explanations for the "gaps" noted in German reprisal propaganda. In so doing, he considered (a) the suddenness with which the gap began; (b) any change in quality of propaganda on retaliation and on new weapons after it was resumed following each "gap"; (c) the possible coincidence of the"gap" with other events or with changes in the war situation which might be expected to cut off the flow of reprisal propaganda; (d) the possible coincidence of the beginning of the "gaps" with events which may have been connected with retaliation and/or a new weapon.

He found that the "gaps" did not coincide with "other events" and, significantly, that the propaganda commitment on reprisal and new weapons was watered down when such propaganda was resumed after each "gap." The necessary explanation, then, was that something had happened just before each of the "gaps" which was connected with the preparation and scheduling of the new reprisal weapons. (An implicit assumption supporting this inference was that shifts toward increased ambiguity in propaganda time commitments regarding date of reprisal -- a shift which had in fact occurred after each "gap" -- reflected an official Nazi estimate of a further delay in D-day for the new weapon.) Since the analyst knew of the Allied raids of August 17 and September 7-8, his inferences provided additional confirmation of the significance of the targets (not fully certain at the time)[15]

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15 The British Air Ministry estimate was that the installations in northern France were launching sites for a new type of weapon. "But the missiles were so long in coming," writes Walter Bedell Smith, "that some of our officers -- highly placed, too -- advanced the theory that the platforms were a gigantic hoax, constructed by the Nazis with great cunning to divert our bombers from vital targets." ("Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions -- I. The Invasion Gamble," Saturday Evening Post, June 18, 1946, Vol. 218, No. 49, p. 106; cf. also Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, Garden City, N.Y., 1948, pp. 229-230, 259-260; H. Butcher, My Three Years with Eisenhower, New York, 1946, pp. 468, 492, 513; and R. V. Jones, "Scientific Intelligence: Some Aspects of Its Development from 1939-1945," Journal of Royal United Services Institution.)

and of the effectiveness of the raids in disrupting Nazi reprisal preparations.[16]

2. On April 21, 1943, Washington disclosed that the Japanese Government had executed some of the American airmen downed during the raid on Tokyo of April 18, 1942. This news came at a time when mounting Allied air raids on Germany posed a serious problem for German defenses. German propaganda gave considerable play to the news of the execution of American airmen in Japan. Most of it was along the lines of familiar German propaganda themes. But interspersed in it were innuendoes that could be interpreted as threats of similar German action against Allied fliers.

How seriously were these veiled threats to be taken? The F.C.C. analyst predicted that the Germans were not planning to emulate the Japanese in this respect. The inference was based on knowledge of German propaganda practices. If the Nazis

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16 The details of the analysis are too complex for fuller presentation here. Partial verification for the inference appears in Goebbels' account of information given to him personally by Hitler to the effect that English air raids on Peenemünde and on V-1 launching sites (August 17 and September 7-8, 1943) had thrown back preparations four to eight weeks. (L. Lochner, [ed.], The Goebbels Diary, New York, 1948, entry for September 10, 1943, pp. 435-436.)

intended such an extreme action of dubious legality, reasoned the analyst, one would expect them to prepare it carefully by a propaganda campaign designed to achieve prior moral justification. However, the few hints of such action in German propaganda did not evince such a purpose and could not be considered as constituting such a propaganda campaign. The analyst was reasonably confident, therefore, in concluding that no such German action was being planned for the time being.[17]

3. In 1941 and 1942 the German Army had launched powerful summer offensives against Soviet forces on the eastern front. After the disaster of Stalingrad in January, 1943, however, it was uncertain whether the German command would have the capability for another large-scale offensive on the eastern front in 1943 or would want, in any event, to engage its forces in such an enterprise. During the months following Stalingrad, the F.C.C. analysts carefully watched German propaganda on this subject for indications of German military intentions.

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17 Some verification of the inference can be found in Goebbels' diary entry for May 10, 1943: "The Führer has no intention of following the Japanese procedure of court-martialing aviators shot down over German soil and having them executed.... I must see to it that, while we let our press mention the strong language employed by the Japanese and also more recently by the Italians, we do not suggest to the German public that we should indulge in similar practices." (Op. cit., p. 367.)

Promises of another German offensive against the Russians were made in Nazi propaganda in the weeks following Stalingrad. Such promises appeared in the context of the highly publicized "total mobilization" measures, launched concurrently with the announcement of the Stalingrad defeat, which had as their avowed aim the restoration of "the fighting efficiency" of German manpower and arms. At the beginning of March, 1943, however, references to a forthcoming German offensive in the East were dropped altogether. The F.C.C. analyst noted this abrupt change but felt that a clear-cut interpretation of it was not possible. The sudden propaganda silence on a forthcoming offensive might mean either (a) that no offensive was contemplated, or (b) that an offensive, though contemplated, was not talked about for other reasons -- e.g., in order to camouflage the intention to attack again in the East, or in order not to interfere with the possibility of arranging a truce or a separate peace with the Russians.

In order to choose between these alternative explanations, the F.C.C. analyst had to bring additional considerations into his reasoning. It was only several months later, at the beginning of June, that he was able to say with a degree of confidence that a German offensive was not likely. This inference was possible because the analyst interpreted

propaganda behavior on the subject of a possible German offensive in the context of German domestic morale considerations. His reasoning may be summarized as follows:

(a) In the past, Nazi propaganda had characteristically extolled the virtues of the initiative and had claimed that Germany held and would continue to hold the initiative.

(b) Because of the state of depressed morale in Germany, the traditional assertion of German initiative was almost obligatory upon German propagandists as a morale measure.

(c) General, vague predictions of a forthcoming German offensive in the East would hardly tip off the Russians, since in any event the only elements of a modern land offensive of this type that could be camouflaged were its exact time and place.

(d) Instead, however, German propaganda had recently begun to extol the merits of the "defensive."

(e) If the lack of predictions of a German offensive was the result of security considerations or a desire to mask the intention to attack again, then it was most unlikely that German propaganda

would be simultaneously preparing the domestic public to accept the unpopular idea that Germany would henceforth play a defensive role in the war. For such a propaganda line, implying German weakness and a turning point in the war, aggravated the serious domestic morale problem.

(f) Therefore, German propaganda behavior could be explained most plausibly on the assumption that it was based upon knowledge of the fact that no major German offensive was being planned. For, if such an offensive were intended, then German propaganda would not have further depressed domestic morale by attempting to popularize the virtues of the defensive.

This prediction, based on propaganda analysis, was reasonably accurate. Documentary evidence subsequently available indicates that Hitler, while refusing advice to go over to a purely defensive strategy in the East, planned only in terms of a limited, "spoiling" attack.[18]

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18 Operations Order No. 5, issued by Hitler on March 13, 1943, to German Armies in Russia, spoke only in terms of taking the initiative at certain sectors of the front, if possible before the Russians did, in order

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4. In June, 1942, the question arose whether the German Government might change its official diplomatic policy toward Brazil. Relations between the two countries had for some time been critical, amounting in mid-1942 to a virtual state of undeclared hostilities. However, Berlin broadcasts to Brazil had maintained the tone of "injured friend." During the last week of June the tone of these broadcasts became more belligerent. Sharp accusations and emphatic threats were made in the matter of treatment of German nationals within Brazil.

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18 to dictate their actions at least at one sector. See also B. H. Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk, New York, 1948, p. 212; J.F.C. Fuller, The Second World War, New York, 1949, pp. 276-277. In his diary entry for May 7, 1943, Goebbels stated: "In the East the Führer will soon start a limited offensive in the direction of Kursk. He may, however, delay it to see whether the Bolsheviks want to beat us to it. That might offer us an even more favorable chance than if we took the initiative...." (Op. cit., p. 352; see also pp. 391-392.) Hitler apparently tired of waiting for the Russians to start matters, for he launched the limited offensive on the Kursk salient on July 5. There was in 1943, however, no major German offensive in the East comparable to that of the preceding two summers. That this was not an easy matter for Allied intelligence to establish is suggested by Harry Butcher (My Three Years with Eisenhower, New York, 1946, p. 314), who reports that in late May, 1943, Walter Bedell Smith returned to Eisenhower's Headquarters, after attending joint British-American conferences in Washington, with the following "Washington" appraisal: The Germans were prepared to attack shortly on the Russian front on a "monstrous" scale in an effort to knock Russia out of the war or to paralyze the Red Army.

Was this threat a mere bluff, or was the German Government prepared to take some forceful action? The F.C.C. analyst reasoned that such threats and accusations, if no more than bluff, were extremely unsound propaganda. "Behind-the-scenes pressure and muscle-flexing may privately impress certain key officials in Latin American countries. But publicly calling a nation to account and threatening it is something to which no Latin American nation could or would permit itself to bow, short of the blackest necessity." Therefore, because he assumed that Latin American psychology was not lost upon the Germans, the F.C.C. analyst suggested that these open threats were not a matter of unskillful propaganda but indicated, rather, that Berlin was ready to drop its earlier role of "injured friend."[19]

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19 The precise relation between the change in German broadcasts to Brazil, noted above, and German plans for action against Brazil has not been directly verified. However, there is some indirect evidence that the change in propaganda tone and content may have been co-ordinated with military plans. Thus, in a Führer conference on May 14, 1942, a memorandum entitled "The Opening of Hostilities against Brazil" and naval plans for a "powerful blow" were discussed, and Hitler authorized a strong U-boat attack in Brazilian waters for the beginning of August. The "powerful blow" planned in May was struck on August 15, 1942, when five Brazilian ships, including a troopship, were torpedoed off the Brazilian coast. Another Brazilian ship was sunk on August 19. Thereupon, on August 22, Brazil declared war on Germany and Italy. (For additional details on implementation of the decision to take action against Brazil, see Admiral Raeder's testimony at Nuremberg in International Military Tribunal, Trial of the Major War Criminals, Vol. 14, pp. 122-125.)