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Dec. 4, 1942

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Memorandum to Dr. Rogers

From: R. H. Knapp

By: _____ Date: _____

Subject: Rumor as an Instrument of Psychological Warfare.

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PER E.O. 11958
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Date: 4/14/00
APPROVED FOR RELEASE

Although rumor is already a recognized instrument of enemy propaganda, its use by American Psychological Warfare Agencies has not apparently been fully exploited. There are many reasons why this neglect should be remedied, perhaps the most important being the peculiar susceptibility of the enemy to attack by this weapon. Below, under five headings, are considered several aspects of the problem of employing rumor against the enemy.

1. The advantages of rumor as an instrument of Psychological Warfare.

Rumor as a device for disseminating ideas or sentiments has several unique merits which other devices do not enjoy. The following are several of its unique merits:

a. Of all methods of communication, rumor is the most difficult to control. While the press may be muzzled, and radio stations jammed, the dissemination of rumors is peculiarly unsusceptible to authoritarian restraint. (As a matter of fact, efforts to curtail rumor-

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mongering.)

b. Unlike most other devices for disseminating propaganda, rumor employs the enemy's communications system against himself, for rumors once started must be checked and taken note of. In this process, they are often even more widely disseminated.

c. Rumors are rarely detectable as enemy propaganda. If skillfully designed, they are disseminated in enemy territory with nothing about them to indicate their true source. For this reason they are most adaptable to the operations of "black propaganda".

d. If rumors are skillfully designed, they serve to divert the enemies psychological forces against himself. Thus, his fears, hopes, and aggression which if properly controlled, make for high morale, may be redirected in such a manner as to precipitate unwarranted optimism, panic, defeatism, or internal dissensions.

2. The Vulnerability of the Enemy to attack by Rumor

All existing evidence indicates that the enemy is most susceptible to attack by rumor. Within the last six weeks both Goering and Mussolini have spoken specifically against rumor-mongering at considerable length. Reports emanating from occupied territories as well as from both Italy and Germany indicate that the "grapevine"

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is well developed in these areas. This is to be expected, in view of conditions prevailing in these territories. Several of these are noted below.

a. In all occupied territories as well as in enemy territories there prevails acute social unrest, shifting of populations, and disorganization of the normal social life of the community. This leads, among other things, to a disruption of the normal communication system and the consequent increased reliance upon rumor.

b. The peoples of these areas are subject to great emotional duress. They share in common wishes, fears, hostilities and suspicions. This commonality of emotional needs is the father of rumors which arise to express and justify these underlying emotions.

c. The people of these areas share intense interests in common, but lack access to information which will satisfy their interests. This is because official enemy information is either lacking or distrusted. In the absence of reliable sources of information, the peoples of these territories are compelled to develop and rely upon the grapevine -- to grasp at straws in an effort to understand their circumstances.

d. Monotony, enforced inactivity, and personal disorganization is the fate of many individuals in these territories.

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This leads to increased credulity and the impulse to share emotional feelings with others, one aspect of which is the impulse to spread and attend to rumors.

e. The fabric of enemy society, resting as it does upon intense personal rivalries and admitted irrationalism, makes a peculiarly fertile field for rumor mongering.

f. The avowed policy of enemy propaganda to their own people, and their history of broken promises, false claims, etc., have thoroughly disillusioned most of their populace; thus they are in a poor position to discredit rumors. The result is that they will probably be unable to control rumors except by force. As already noted, the use of force to control rumor may well increase rather than decrease rumor-mongering.

3. The Designing of Rumors for Enemy Propaganda.

If rumors are to be appealing to enemy or conquered populations, they must be "tailor made" to suit their interests, motives, and situation. It is of the utmost importance that care and skill be taken to frame the propaganda rumor, for lacking proper precautions, the rumor may back-fire or may fail to take root. The following are a number of criteria which should be kept in mind in designing a rumor for enemy consumption.

a. It should be brief, preferably concrete, and a "good story". If possible, it should incorporate a slogan,

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stereotyped phrase, or witticism.

b. It should concern contemporary happenings or situations.

c. It should be made to appear as "inside information" which has leaked.

d. It should meet the conscious and unconscious emotional needs of the enemy populace. It should justify their more undisciplined fears, confirm latent suspicions, etc.

e. It should be neither too plausible nor too implausible. If too plausible, it might seem trite; if too implausible, it might appear ~~ridiculous~~ ridiculous.

f. It should be incapable of direct verification.

g. It should exploit stereotyped plots, precedents, and traditions in the history and folklore of the group.

4. The Strategies to which Rumor is adapted.

Rumor as a weapon of propaganda is adaptable to a number of strategies.

a. To affect enemy morale.

1. Rumors playing upon the wishes and hopes of the enemy population may be employed (a) to encourage complaisance (b) to magnify the impact of subsequent defeats.

2. Rumors exploiting the fears and anxieties of the enemy populace may engender pessimism,

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defeatism and panic.

3. Rumors playing upon the internal hatreds, rivalries, and suspicions may be employed to divide the enemy within himself.

4. Rumors of atrocities committed by the enemy may be planted among the enemy populace to foster feelings of guilt.

b. Rumor may be used as a device for misleading the intelligence of the enemy. By planting false reports, permitting apparently unwitting leaks to occur, the enemy may be misled as to our plans.

c. Cleverly designed rumors may force the enemy to release publicly, information desired by our intelligence. In the process of discrediting rumors, facts must be released, and these facts may be to our advantage.

5. Methods of planting rumors.

The Germans have used almost all devices, open and clandestine, for planting rumors. Among the most promising are the following:

a. Black Radio disseminating rumors allegedly already current in ~~many~~ enemy or occupied territory.

b. Neutral Press, i.e. Sweden, Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, etc.

c. Agents in neutral, occupied or enemy territory.

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d. Leaflets and pamphlets. These may be employed very effectively to disseminate poems, witticisms, or factual information with a propagandic purpose.

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