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FAR EAST SURVEY
31 JULY 1952

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THE KOREAN WAR

Comment on Talks Shifts Emphasis

Communist broadcast propaganda on the Korean war since 10 July has undergone a series of changes, and now appears to be marking time after having been adjusted to the fluid situation at Panmunjom. Most comment on the truce negotiations emanates from Peking and is keyed to the daily developments in the talks. The most prominent characteristic of current comment is that it deals for the most part with the substantive issues involved in the POW problem. Discussion is framed in terms of the numbers of POWs subject to repatriation, detailed reviews of proposals, and argumentation concerning reclassification procedures. The propaganda is bellicose, but not highly emotional, and charges of American insincerity and desire to delay or even wreck the talks are prominent. However, while the increased bellicosity may well reflect a diminishing measure of Communist confidence in the imminent conclusion of an armistice, the extensive discussion of substantive topics and the closer integration of the propaganda with the actual course of truce talk developments suggest that the Communists are serious in their deliberations on a truce, are concerned over the progress of negotiations on the POW issue, and anticipate further developments in the bargaining on this point.

Course of Propaganda Developments: A major two-fold development was noted in the last issue of this SURVEY: (1) in June, Communist propaganda began to shift intransigence on the POW question from the relatively precise principle of "repatriation of all POWs" to the more ambiguous contention that "POWs must be allowed to return home and live in peace"; (2) on 3 July, there was a decided turn toward amenability, with Communist radios emphasizing that U.N. delegates expressed a willingness to negotiate, and that there was in fact no disagreement in principle on the solution of the POW problem, only the need to adjust the prisoner lists.

In the week following 10 July, two additional developments took place in Communist propaganda on the negotiations: (1) the amenable references to the U.N. delegates' desires for "reasonable" settlement and to their changed attitude on negotiating dropped from comment; (2) the occasion of the executive sessions was built-up as a climactic juncture in the truce negotiations. (Peking stated flatly that the executive sessions will "decide the success or failure of the Korean armistice negotiations.")

Since 17 July there has been an increasingly bellicose tone to the comment, with developments in Korea which were extrinsic to the negotiations (Pyongyang bombing, alleged strafing of POW camp in North Korea, etc.) being interpreted by the Communists as tending to discredit expressions by U.N. spokesmen of a desire to negotiate. The culmination of the secret sessions has ushered in the current propaganda phase which dwells on the facts and figures of proposals advanced at the secret sessions.

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Positive Indications: There is continued emphasis on the Communist desire to negotiate and conclude an armistice as well as sober argumentation for reaching a solution to the POW issue by proposals which to a reasonable degree meet the requirements of both sides. Despite the controversy over current proposals, the Communists still have not reintroduced comment which highlights their moral obligations to their captured comrades, nor has the Soviet role in the Korean War been accentuated in order to bolster Communist morale for continued armed struggle. The Korean War continues to be described as an accomplished victory of the Chinese and North Koreans, and as a defeat for the Americans. In recent weeks, an increased volume of battle reports describes the military successes of the Communists and serves to counter the effects of U.N. military pressure. SW remains a topic which shares the limelight with developments at Panmunjom, and in Moscow comment actually takes first place in discussion of the Korean War. This subject, however, remains outside the context of the negotiations and is never presented as an obstacle to the conclusion of an armistice.

Negative Indications: In contrast to these more favorable factors, earlier propaganda elements of a less hopeful nature continue to be present in current comment. First and foremost is the fact that the Communists have offered no revision of the 2 May proposal. Also, provocative remarks to the effect that U.N. intransigence endangers the fate of the negotiations are still being broadcast.

Shifting Elements: Certain elements in the propaganda continue to present a changing pattern which may indicate either indecision or uncertainty concerning the progress of the Panmunjom negotiations. A key element in recent Communist propaganda on the negotiations was the shifting of intransigence from the more or less specific principle of "repatriate all POWs" to the more ambiguous stand that "POWs must be allowed to return home and live in peace." Later, it was avowed that the differences between the Communist and U.N. positions were not matters of principle, but merely differences on adjusting prisoner lists. Current broadcasts, while retaining most of the positive elements resulting from that shift to a more amenable position, has reintroduced discussion on matters of principle, viz., "no forced repatriation," "repatriation of all POWs," (now modified to refer primarily to the Chinese Volunteers). This half-way position would seem to reflect a diminished confidence in the imminent solution of the POW issue, yet a reluctance to revert to propaganda liabilities which might obstruct further bargaining.

The matter of what prospects are in store for the negotiations is also treated in such fashion as to suggest uncertainty on the part of the Communists. That only one issue obstructs conclusion of an armistice is reiterated frequently; however, accompanying remarks highlighting past progress have disappeared. Comment, in general, depicts the current stage of the negotiations as being indeterminate. The possibility of an imminent truce is proffered with cautions that American tactics bode ill for its realization.

Post-Truce Issues Avoided: References to post-truce problems and/or the post-truce political talks previously observed in Soviet broadcasts on the meeting of the World Peace Council in Berlin are now absent in Communist

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propaganda. Even the Peking radio makes no reference to the nature of the work being done by the staff officers at Panmunjom. Chinese audiences are merely informed that the current meetings are concerned with the rewording of the draft armistice agreement. The expressed concern of the Chinese delegate with the paragraphs relating to the post-armistice political talks is as yet ignored in Communist propaganda. This avoidance also suggests Communist uncertainty as to the future path of the negotiations. Thus, while Communist negotiators at Panmunjom concern themselves with a matter subsequent in time to the conclusion of an armistice, Communist propaganda organs fail to exploit this propaganda subject which has implications concerning the outcome of the negotiations.

In sum, the disposition of the general propaganda indicators in Communist comment points to diminished confidence on the part of the Communists in the imminent conclusion of a truce, however, there is also suggested serious concern over the resolving of the prisoner issue and an intention to continue the present bargaining.

Two Issues: Repatriation Figure; Military Pressure: Comment on the armistice negotiations appears to originate almost exclusively with Peking. Pyongyang at the moment is modeling its comment on the Peking line, while Moscow continues to avoid the subject of the negotiations. Typically, the comment breaks down into two major areas of concern: the number of Chinese and Korean prisoners to be repatriated, and the implications of military pressure on the outcome of the meetings. The residual impact of the propaganda is that: (1) the number of POWs to be repatriated must come closer to 116,000 than to 83,000 and that all or most of the Chinese prisoners must be included in the figure; (2) the policy of applying military pressure against the Communists is provocative, fraught with dangerous implications for the negotiations, and in any event, as ineffective as similar crude attempts of the past.

U.N. Refused to Negotiate: Peking propaganda attributes the failure of the executive sessions to the refusal of U.N. delegates to negotiate. Prominent in most comment is the criticism that U.N. negotiators relented in their promises to seek a solution which to a "reasonable degree meets the requirements of both sides." Specifically, it is reported that U.N. proposals have contained the figure 83,000, of which 76,500 are North Koreans with residence in Communist-held territory, and 6,400 Chinese prisoners. Basically, criticism of this proposal seems to be that: (1) it is based on the unacceptable 76,000 figure, rather than a figure approaching 116,000; (2) the failure to include all Chinese prisoners is a violation of the Geneva Conventions. During the past few days the number of prisoners is discussed in terms of percentages. Criticism of the U.N. proposal now centers on the charge that the proposed 83,000 figure includes but 80 percent of the U.N.-held Korean prisoners who reside in North Korea and only 32 percent of the Chinese prisoners. And broadcasts assert that even the "percentage ratio" is inconsistent.

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A "Realistic" Repatriation Figure Must "Approach" 116,000: Solution to the whole problem is said to lie in a reclassification of the prisoner lists (which the Communists demand) to effect a "realistic" repatriation figure that approaches 116,000. The figures of 100,000 and 15,000 (the total number of prisoners and number of Chinese prisoners respectively that the U.N. is charged with detaining, and which are based on the 170,000 figure) still appear frequently in comment, while the 96,000 North Korean and 20,000 Chinese component figures of the 116,000 demanded by the Communists are more rare. This play with figures in Communist propaganda continues to suggest that a total repatriation figure in the neighborhood of 100,000, including approximately 12,000 Chinese may be conceived of by the Communists as a compromise figure.

Military Pressure Presents a Problem of Face: In addition to the actual bargaining on the POW question, the Communists are evidencing great concern with recent U.N. attempts to apply military pressure in order to speed up the progress of the negotiations. Nearly every commentary on the Korean war, whether it be a battle report, atrocity story, or discussion of the truce talks, alludes to the provocative actions taken by the U.N. Command designed to "intimidate" the Communists at Panmunjon. That this concern is a matter of saving face is expressed in their annoyance that Americans couple statements about an imminent peace in Korea with the contention that the Communists want peace because they are suffering such heavy blows. The sensitive reactions to U.N. military pressures have evolved to a point where London DAILY WORKER correspondent Alan Winnington now declares that predictions of imminent peace in Korea which are predicated on the assumption that military pressure will cow the Communists are designed to dupe those with short memories. Winnington asserts that the Americans have driven the talks into the most serious crisis since their inception.

Another matter of face confronting the Communists appears to be the possible disposition of non-repatriated Communist prisoners to Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek forces. Peking, in charging U.S. intentions of forcing retained POWs into ROK and Nationalist forces, asserts that such an action is obviously in contravention of the principle of allowing prisoners to return home and live in peace. The Communists may be more concerned over potential adverse propaganda deriving from a situation where their former troops switched allegiance to enlist in the enemy's ranks rather than with the danger resulting from the actual manpower addition to enemy forces. The reference to allowing prisoners to return home and live in peace in this context might indicate a desire for U.N. assurance that POWs will not be given to the ranks of Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek.

In sum, comment on the current developments in the negotiations seems to indicate that the Communists are weighing the problems of compromise on POW figures against a loss of face which would surely be connected with U.N. military pressure as well as the appearance of another anti-Communist propaganda force in Asia--non-repatriated Communist prisoners.