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FAR EAST SURVEY
9 APRIL 1953

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THE KOREAN WAR

Although comment on other aspects of the war is fairly well sustained, the bulk of Chinese Communist and North Korean broadcast propaganda at the present time is directly related to the latest effort to achieve a peaceful settlement of the prisoner issue. The following elements characterize the present propaganda pattern:

1. The references to the latest proposals for a Korean truce remain noncommittal on the actual compromise involved.
2. Limited evidence seems to support the possibility that the Communists seek to reach a compromise on repatriation within the framework of the Geneva Convention by enlarging the scope of the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners.
3. A drop in atrocity charges prior to the resumption of the truce talks on 6 April and Peking and Pyongyang's failure to comment on Molotov's proposal for Chinese and Korean membership in the United Nations seem to indicate a desire to avoid comment which might hinder agreement on a Korean truce.
4. Increased comment on recent military operations, which appears to reflect the objective situation, may also stem from a desire to create the impression the Communists are negotiating from a position of strength.
5. Propagandistically, Peking seems to be setting the stage for a claim that their basic objectives in Korea have been attained.

PEOPLE'S DAILY Attempts to Justify Voluntary Repatriation: Broadcasts from Peking, Pyongyang and Moscow devote considerable attention to the latest opportunities for a peaceful settlement of the Korean question provided by the Chou En-lai, Kim Il Sung, and Molotov statements. This is the first time that such attention has been devoted to an amenability phase of the Korean war rather than to the denunciation of American aggression or bestiality. Peking carries the texts of all three major statements and devotes the bulk of its attention to reporting domestic and international reaction to these statements; Moscow concentrates almost exclusively on broadcasting the texts of the statements and virtually ignores all reaction. The difference between the two transmitters is more apparent than real, however, for Peking's reportage merely records the favorable reception accorded the proposals and remains noncommittal on the specific issues involved.

An exception to this avoidance of comment which might be construed as a clarification of the proposals appears in a PEOPLE'S DAILY editorial of 5 April which seems to coincide with Molotov's elaboration on the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners of war. Specific allusion is made to stipulations of Article 109 of the Geneva Convention containing reference to

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(1) the direct repatriation of sick and wounded prisoners, (2) the "accommodation in neutral countries" of sick and wounded prisoners, and (3) the direct repatriation or internment "in a neutral country of able-bodied prisoners of war who have undergone a long period of captivity." In addition, PEOPLE'S DAILY, in noting specifically that Article 109 of the Geneva Convention provides for the transfer of POW's to a non-belligerent "to protect prisoners from being returned to battle against their will," seems to be preparing for a future allegation that the delivery of prisoners to a third power under certain conditions is sanctioned by the Convention and represents no retreat from the Communist stand. The stress upon the Communists' desire to prevent the use of former POWs in subsequent military operations is reminiscent of the emphasis upon the need to insure that POWs "return home to live in peace" highlighted during the Communists' previous amenability period in July 1952. The pertinence of the editorial is enhanced by the fact that it is the only comment of an interpretative nature also broadcast by Moscow. Soviet broadcasts rarely feature editorials from other than Soviet journals.

Peking Eliminates Comment in Conflict with Amenability: A Communist desire to avoid belligerent comment during the period of negotiations may be reflected in Peking's apparently complete elimination of all atrocity comment after 4 April, just prior to the first meeting of liaison officers at Panmunjom on 6 April. Prior to that date Peking carried extensive reports concerning recent alleged incidents of bacterial warfare, the U.N. discussion of the BW charges, and continued atrocities against Communist prisoners of war.

Peking's failure to support its overt peace gestures by elimination of comment on prisoner atrocities was particularly evident in a widely broadcast commentary of 31 March concerning "sadistic outrages" committed by "U.S. Chiang agents" at the prison camps. This comment claimed that several recently captured agents confessed to using deception, brutality and even cannibalism against the Communist prisoners in an attempt to intimidate them into a refusal to return home. Peking's present avoidance of this comment, however, is perhaps intended to remove this propaganda obstacle to compromise on prisoner repatriation. Moscow, too, avoids all atrocity reports, and Pyongyang gives only brief mention to continued American bombing attacks on North Korean cities.

Further evidence of Peking's amenability is reflected in their failure to comment to date on Molotov's request that the United Nations admit China and Korea to membership so that the United Nations "could do more as regards an armistice in Korea." Acceptance of the principle of Chinese Communist membership in the United Nations was one of the original Chinese preconditions for the initiation of truce talks, but since the negotiations began in July 1951, Peking has avoided mention of this demand.

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Military Operations May Seek Extension of Control Area Prior to Truce:

The increased volume of battle reports, which reflect an objective situation--the quickened tempo of present military operations occasioned by the Communists' abandonment of the largely defensive operations of the last year, may also stem from a desire to present a facade of strength with relation to the talks. It is also possible that the present aggressive counteraction represents a maximum effort to extend the area of Communist control, without triggering a major U.N. reprisal, in anticipation of a truce and the establishment of definitive demarcation lines between the opposing forces on the then-prevailing lines of contact.

This latter possibility is supported by Overseas Chinese Commission member Tan Kah Kee's assertion that the Communists are not interested in the capture of cities or positions but in the "annihilation of enemy troops." The apparent contradiction between propagandistically voiced intentions and actual military operations having seemingly contrary goals may perhaps be resolved by considering that the Communists objectively wish to improve their strategic position by aggressive action in the field before an armistice is concluded, while at the same time they prepare for an armistice propagandistically by describing their objectives as primarily attritional, with a view to later claiming that the goals sought have been attained.

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