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RUMORS OF A SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE ON A KOREAN TRUCE

There is no good evidence to support rumors, persistent for the past year, of a substantial difference of view between Moscow and Peiping in regard to the prosecution of the Korean war or the terms for settling it. They appear to be in agreement in wishing to conclude an armistice on favorable terms. There is fragmentary evidence that Peiping may have been and may still be more willing than Moscow to compromise on the prisoner of war issue, but there is no evidence that any such difference between them is great.

There have been many reports alleging that one of the parties forced the other to seek a Korean truce. Coercion could in fact be applied by either, as Peiping is in control of its "volunteers" in Korea and Moscow controls the supply of almost all necessary materiel for the war. It is most improbable, however, that either party would jeopardize the Sino-Soviet alliance by forcing the other to come to terms in the Korean war.

More conservative reports of a dispute speak not of force but of persuasion. For example, some sources assert that Moscow does not wish to risk an expansion of the Korean war, with the disagreeable alternatives of either greater involvement in the war or a forfeit on the Soviet commitment to China's defense in the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1950. Other sources assert that it is Peiping, as the party more likely to suffer directly, which does not wish to accept the risk of expanded war. Similarly, some argue that Moscow does not wish to supply materiel for the Korean war and simultaneously to support China's economic development program, while others contend that China does not wish to prosecute the Korean war while attempting at the same time to pursue its economic goals.

On balance, however, reports of a substantial difference between Moscow and Peiping on such grounds appear improbable. The position is approximately the same for both parties. Both are committed to the world Communist program, which is currently in a "peace offensive" phase. Both would face a major risk in the event of expanded hostilities. Both seek the development of a strong China in the Soviet bloc. It is thus

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reasonable to believe that both parties desire a Korean truce on favorable terms. There is as yet no evidence that either party is prepared, in the present military and political circumstances, to conclude a truce on unfavorable terms.

Moscow and Peiping have maintained a common front in their public positions on Korean truce proposals, and their private remarks have not been in serious conflict. During October and November of last year, when the Soviet bloc was insisting publicly on total repatriation of prisoners, both Soviet and Chinese Communist officials hinted privately at a possible compromise. The Indian truce proposal of 17 November, a compromise which India thought might be acceptable, was denounced publicly by Vyshinsky and rejected privately by Chou En-lai on the same day, 24 November. From early December 1952 to late March 1953 there was no modification of the public position of either Moscow or Peiping on the POW issue, and in this period there were no reported overtures by Soviet or Chinese officials hinting at a possible compromise. On 30 and 31 March, immediately following Chou En-lai's 30 March proposal to solve "the entire question of POW's," Soviet officials privately assured Western diplomats that Chou's proposal was sincere and that only details remained to be worked out.

This coordination of Chinese and Soviet action supports the estimate that Moscow and Peiping have been in substantial accord on Korean truce issues and that minor differences in their views have been reconciled without serious friction. There have been certain differences, however, in the timing of Soviet and Chinese public statements, between Soviet and Chinese propaganda treatment of truce proposals, and between Chinese public and private statements. These differences permit the speculation that Peiping may have been and may still be somewhat more inclined to compromise on the critical issue of prisoners of war than Moscow was or is.

This speculation derives from the following developments:

(1) In June 1952 when the Communists were public insistent on total repatriation of prisoners, Chou En-lai reportedly expressed strong interest in a proposal by the Indian ambassador, presented in private conversation, for releasing from UN control and then interviewing prisoners who did not wish to be repatriated;

(2) On 31 October, two weeks after Poland had introduced in the UN a proposal for total repatriation and two days after Vyshinsky had insisted on total repatriation in a UN speech,

Chou summoned the Indian ambassador, reaffirmed his interest in a plan for interviewing the unwilling POW's, expressed confidence that almost all of them could be induced to return, and stated that some of them (described as "special agents") need not return;

(3) Although Peiping privately rejected on 24 November the Indian resolution of 17 November, Peiping's early comment on the plan was circumspect, Chou En-lai's public statement on 28 November endorsing Vyshinsky's statement of 24 November did not even mention the Indian plan, and Chinese press comment on the Indian plan until mid-December was much milder than Moscow's. Moreover, a few days after rejecting the Indian resolution, Chou privately told [REDACTED] the same things that he told the Indian ambassador in October;

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(4) The 30 March proposal to solve "the entire question of POW's" came from Chou En-lai, has been presented to the world primarily by Radio Peiping, and has boiled down to something very similar to the original Indian resolution of last November.

All of these developments, however, are consistent with the view that Moscow and Peiping have been in complete or nearly complete agreement on Korean truce issues and have simply had different roles to play, with the USSR taking the lead in public insistence on total repatriation and Peiping taking the lead in private conversations suggesting a compromise on the disposition of the prisoners. Thus, as regards the developments cited above:

(1) If the Indian plan of June 1952 had been suggested to Soviet officials, they might have expressed the same interest in it that Chou did;

(2) Moscow and Peiping may well have shared a favorable view of the Indian plan as originally conceived and as presented on 17 November, and an unfavorable view of the plan after 19 November, when the Indian delegate suggested the critical amendment for the return of prisoners to UN control if the political conference could not agree on their fate within 30 days;

(3) China's propaganda treatment of the Indian plan may be explained by some combination of these factors: a favorable Sino-Soviet view of the plan until 19 November; the Soviet responsibility for presenting the Communist case in the UN; Peiping's role as India's "friend" in the Soviet bloc; an interest in preserving Indian good-will for possible later use. Chou's conversation with the other Asian diplomat later may have been similarly motivated.

(4) Chou's 30 March proposal came only a few days after his return from Moscow, and in the early days of the Soviet "peace offensive," during which the USSR had already said and done several things to suggest a possible new approach to the Korean war. The leading Chinese role in presenting the current Communist proposals may derive simply from the fact that they are being discussed at Panmunjom.

In any case, even if it can be concluded that the Chinese have been and are somewhat more willing to compromise on the prisoner of war issue than Moscow was or is, there is no evidence in either public or private statements that the difference in their positions is sufficiently wide to be exploited by the West. All Communist proposals, whether from Moscow, Peiping or Pyongyang, and whether made in public or in private, have affirmed the principle of total repatriation, while leaving room for a possible compromise in fact. The precise degree of compromise acceptable to Peiping, as distinct from the degree acceptable to Moscow, is entirely a matter of conjecture.

There is as yet no indication that either Moscow or Peiping, in the present military and political circumstances, is prepared to conclude a Korean truce on unfavorable terms. The Communists at Panmunjom have repeatedly indicated that they will not agree to any arrangement which, in their view, would be likely to result in the nonrepatriation of a substantial number of prisoners. To avoid this, they have invariably put forward a combination of proposals seeking a friendly custodial body for the prisoners, a lengthy period for "explanations" to them, and a means of blocking the release of those prisoners who remain unwilling to be repatriated. It is possible that, faced with determination on the part of the UN, the Communists will reduce their proposed period for "explanations" and will propose some such arrangement as disposition of the unwilling by the five-nation commission. Should such compromises be forthcoming, it probably will still be impossible to judge whether they reflect any dispute, past or present, between Moscow and Peiping.

ANNEX: Chronology of Soviet and
Chinese Positions on Korean Truce

June 1952: Chou En-lai expresses interest in Indian proposal for releasing from UN control and then interviewing prisoners unwilling to be repatriated. Soviet official suggests privately that it might be desirable to initial truce agreement on basis of agreements already reached, truce to go into effect when POW issue settled.

July 1952: Communist negotiators at Panmunjom are unwilling to explore Indian plan, and Chou En-lai, approached again, states that he is no longer interested in it.

8 October: Communists at Panmunjom reject three variations of a UN proposal for voluntary repatriation of POW's.

8-15 October: Soviet official states privately Communists at Panmunjom had "accepted" one (unidentified) variation of the proposal rejected on 8 October, although Communists had some "amendments" to it.

16 October: In protesting UN Command's suspension of truce talks on 8 October, Communists for first time publicly state that repatriation procedure is open to discussion. Same date, Chou En-lai tells the Indian ambassador in Peiping the same thing.

17 October: Poland introduces resolution in UN calling for immediate cease-fire and total repatriation; Vyshinsky in UN endorses this proposal on 18 October.

29 October: Vyshinsky argues in UN that unconditional repatriation is the rule in international law, and proposes an 11-nation commission to settle POW problem.

31 October: Chou En-lai again summons Indian ambassador, states that release of POW's from "American" control would be an important step, expresses belief that almost all prisoners could eventually be induced to return, and states that "special agents" among them need not return.

10 November: Vyshinsky rejects Mexican proposal of asylum for POW's unwilling to return, declares USSR "will not budge" from its insistence on principle of total repatriation.

Mid-November: Soviet officials at UN privately express interest in compromise resolutions on POW issue being drafted by several states.

Mid-November: Polish official tells Indians Soviet bloc is "not entirely opposed" to proposal GOI is drafting.

17 November: India introduces resolution in UN calling for establishment of repatriation commission (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, with umpire appointed by commission or referred to UN), exchange of POW's willing to be repatriated, period of 90 days in which Communists would have access to POW's unwilling to return, and disposition by political conference (agreed to in draft armistice terms) of those POW's who remain unwilling to return.

19 November: Indian delegate, before Political and Security Committee, suggests amending his resolution to provide for return of POW's to UN control if political conference cannot decide their fate in 30 days.

23 November: USSR in UN calls for immediate cease-fire and transfer of POW issue to 11-nation commission on which four Communist states would have veto power.

24 November: Chou En-lai tells Indian ambassador that Peiping intends to reject the Indian resolution on the grounds that it provides for voluntary repatriation; same day, a few hours later, Vyshinsky in UN violently denounces Indian plan and reaffirms proposal for 11-nation commission.

28 November: Chou En-lai issues public statement supporting Vyshinsky's position of 24 November, but does not mention Indian plan.

24 November - 4 December: Chou En-lai tells [REDACTED] on some date in this period, the same things that he told the Indian ambassador on 31 October.

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3 December: UNGA approves Indian plan with critical amendment suggested on 19 November included.

7 December: First independent Chinese Communist comment on Indian plan appears in back pages of Peiping newspapers.

14 December: Chou En-lai formally rejects Indian plan in long cable to UN, denouncing the plan and endorsing Soviet proposal for 11-nation commission to decide POW issue.

24 December: Stalin, in replying to N. Y. Times questions, declares "the USSR is interested in ending the war in Korea."

4 February 1953: Chou En-lai, in political report to Chinese people, reaffirms position taken on 28 November and 14 December.

17 February: Stalin, in interview with Indian ambassador in Moscow, shows little interest in Indian resolution of past November.

2 March: Vyshinsky states that only way to end the Korean war is to "accept the Communist terms for an armistice."

9 March: At Stalin's funeral, Malenkov comments on "defensive" character of Korean war, as compared with Stalin's description of it in 1951 as "struggle for liberation."

15 March: Malenkov states that there is no problem which cannot be settled "in a peaceful way on the basis of mutual agreement."

18 March: Moscow makes first of three agreements to use Soviet good offices to secure release of British, French and American civilians interned in North Korea; releases follow, 3-30 April.

28 March: Communists finally accept UN proposal, after repeated rejections, to exchange sick and wounded prisoners; exchange follows, with Communists meeting UN lists on a percentage basis of about one to ten.

30 March: Chou En-lai, a few days after returning from Moscow, proposes settling "entire questions of POW's"; immediate repatriation of prisoners willing to return, turnover of unwilling to neutral state, where they would be given "explanations."

30 March: [REDACTED] informs Western diplomat that Chou En-lai's statement was the "real thing" and that only "technicalities" remain. 25X1X

31 March: [REDACTED] tells a Western official that Chou's statement was "serious and sincere" and that "only details" remain. 25X1X

1 April: Molotov, in statement employing Chou's terminology, pledges "full assistance" to bring about a Korean armistice.

9 April: Vyshinsky in UN repeats standard assertion that Geneva Convention requires return of all POW's; on same day, however, Polish foreign minister eliminates from his 17 October 1952 resolution stipulation all POW's must be returned.

10-15 April: Soviet officials in various parts of world seek out Western diplomats to assure them privately of Soviet sincerity in wishing to obtain Korean settlement.

20 April: Two Soviet leaders, in conversation with US ambassador in Moscow; do not comment on ambassador's statement that US could never accept forcible repatriation.

26 April: Nam Il proposes repatriation within two months of armistice of POW's willing to return, subsequent transfer of unwilling to neutral state for six months of "explanations," disposition by political conference of those who remain unwilling after "explanations." Similar to Indian plan of 17 November, but critically different from UN-endorsed plan of 3 December, which included amendment returning the unwilling to UN control if political conference could not agree in 30 days.

7 May: Communists propose 5-nation custodial commission (the four states named in the Indian plan, plus India), withdraw demand for physical transfer of POW's to neutral state (provided 5-nation commission is accepted), suggest four months for "explanations," reaffirm demand that political conference decide fate of prisoners who remain unwilling to return. These proposals differ from the original Indian plan, on major points, only in adding India to the custodial commission in place of umpire and in adding one month to the period for "explanations." They remain critically different from UN-endorsed plan of 3 December.

14 May: Communists at Panmunjom flatly reject UN proposal to release, as soon as armistice is signed, Korean prisoners unwilling to be repatriated, and to release Chinese prisoners who remain unwilling after 60 days of Communist access to them.

16 May: Peiping Radio states that UN proposal on the Korean prisoners "can never be accepted." Broadcast objects to other points in UN plan but suggests willingness to compromise on some of them.