

Peking story (American prisoners in China) - correspondence, letters and ca...

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Peking story

22 Dec. 1954

a) Transcript of Secretary-General's Press Conference
U.N. Headquarters, N. York.

b) Health Precautions during Trip.
- Szeming Sze (U.N. Health Service) - 1 interoffice
memo to office of the Sec.-Gen.

TRANSCRIPT OF SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PRESS CONFERENCE

Headquarters, New York, 22 December 1954

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: There is really not very much that I can tell you. On the other hand, I felt that I should see you again now that I have returned. I guess that you may have questions to which I shall have no replies, but we will come to that point later.

In any case, I may start off from an angle which I hope you will understand. It is perhaps a somewhat unusual angle, but I think this is something that I should say at all events. It is very much the same as what I said to your colleagues in Stockholm. We must remember that this very serious -- in some respects, tragic -- matter, is one which does require from all of us, on this side of the desk and on your side, more restraint and more discretion than usual. By that, I do not in any way mean that there should be any kind of embargo on news. On the contrary, there should be news to all extent possible -- and I think that that is to a very full extent, indeed. I should, however, be sorry if we were to drift into speculation and rumour-making, because to do so could not but harm the operation as such; it could not but render things more difficult. If that were done, I suppose I should have to take it, but I think that we are all too much interested in getting somewhere and helping some people to run any risk, voluntarily, of complicating matters.

For that reason, I must be more guarded and restrained myself than usual. You will find me a more difficult object for your questioning than usual. On the other hand, I feel that you will see my point and that that will be reflected on your side in the kind of restraint I have indicated -- that is, an abstention from vain, futile speculation.

You have already seen in the stories which came out of Stockholm that there is one point in particular on which there is nothing for me to say -- absolutely nothing. This matter is very much covered by what I said about speculation. Speculation about possibilities, outcomes, success, all that kind of thing: I do not think that that is of very great interest to the public, and it certainly is not of any help in this story.

(more)

I can only repeat what I said at Stockholm and during United Nations Day here. In fact, what I said then is more than ever true now. To succeed means to realize the possible. The possible has to be realized. I should just hate to see any development which would reduce our chances of realizing what was possible.

I guess that that, roughly, is what I should like to say, in general terms. I would repeat that I trust you will understand that, in preaching this little sermon, I have had no other reason except my very keen engagement in this story and in really making a success, in the sense I have indicated.

QUESTION: Could you just chart the map for us: London, New Delhi, and so forth?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I should indeed have been happy if I had had sufficient time since my return to go into the details, but I have not had. I must therefore still leave the questions of date and route open. Even, of course, if plans have been developed fairly far, I simply have not had the time myself to go into them, and for that reason I cannot reply to the question.

QUESTION: At the airport, you said that you had succeeded in Stockholm in doing exactly what you had wanted to do, that you had got done exactly what you had wanted to get done. Could you indicate anything to us about what you wanted to get done?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: As I said before I left, it was entirely within the very practical field of making the technical arrangements which must be made; that is to say, mapping out what can be mapped out without coming into anything with even the slightest political flavour.

QUESTION: There have been some press reports to the effect that India was instrumental in the Chinese acceptance of your trip to Peiping. Could you comment on that?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I think I shall leave it to the Indian Government to reply for itself.

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QUESTION: I notice that you have used the phrase "practical arrangements" in connexion with your meeting with the Chinese Ambassador. Could you expand on that? What "practical arrangements" were made?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Let us begin at the very beginning: possible routes; the possible time extension, as it were; the set-up of discussions, from a technical point of view; the kind of staff; and so forth.

QUESTION: Do your discussions concern the number of persons who will accompany you and the identity of those persons?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: We are tentatively indicating the size of the staff and how that fits in, practically, to the picture, and so on. If you were to sit down and try to figure out how you would plan such a journey, you would see at once that there are very many things upon which you would have to decide. There are quite a number of things, at least, that must be mentioned in talks over the desk; they have to be settled at some stage in some way, and it takes a lot of time to cable back and forth.

QUESTION: I wonder if it is possible at ~~the~~ time to say who may accompany you to Peiping.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I can only repeat what I have already said: that I think it should be a very restricted group, indeed. I think I could say this much: that, from my point of view, a couple of advisers -- specialized on the legal side and on the political side -- would be the bare minimum, but would also be sufficient, because I would not go without the bare minimum. Then, of course, there is the question of interpretation, public relations, and so forth. Let us say a group of five or six, or something like that.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate having any kind of a report ready for representatives by 31 December?

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I am obliged to have a report ready by that time, but I am not telling you how much I can possibly put into such a report.

QUESTION: Has anything been envisaged, or have any plans been made, concerning press coverage during your trip?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: That is a rather complicated problem, and I really do not see how it could be arranged in any of the ways which would be normal in other situations. I really do not see how it could be arranged. It is, however, a problem which I have every intention of keeping in mind.

May I add here one observation which I think is appropriate. You should remember that it is not at all a question of talks of the kind usually covered by the press. It is not negotiation, and it is not a good-will mission. It is a question of taking up a matter which has arisen in the way which you all know about, and for that very reason the rules generally applying in this respect do not really apply to the present case. This is something which goes beyond the technical and practical considerations which usually apply. I just want to stress again that this is, of course, an operation of a slightly different kind. It comes much, much closer to diplomatic contact of the kind one may have in any capital, in a foreign office.

QUESTION: Yes, but there will be a spectacular aspect --

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Too spectacular.

QUESTION: This is a very important affair. People will receive you. There may be receptions -- very kind receptions, I think. There may be people who will acclaim you. Those are all matters in which the press is interested. How shall we be informed about them?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I shall certainly try to see to it -- this is a matter of course -- that the press, and, via the press, the public, are informed directly, as it were, from the United Nations mission, if I can put it in that way. Frankly, however, seeing the difficulties -- and I think that you must see them,

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too -- I must ask you to give me some more time to consider the matter. I have already mentioned that, at all events, I should bring and must bring what I called a "public relations" man. That is not a good term. It is really a question of a personal assistant. A personal assistant, for example, may be charged in some way with such a specific responsibility. Frankly, however, I would not care to go into that question any further.

QUESTION: I understand the situation perfectly, but you would have been astonished, I think, if we had not raised the question.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I see your point, but you must see mine.

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QUESTION: I hope you will not consider this question outside the boundaries outlined by you at the outset. Do you see your mission as a negotiating mission and, if so, is there likely to be some give and take?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: Why should we speculate? Anyhow again I must say what I said in Stockholm. I do not think we should in any way discuss what may happen or will happen. However, I promise you that to all the extent that it is in my power you will always know what has happened.

QUESTION: If I may go back to my question, when you are ready to select this group of five or six will you take into consideration the national background of the individuals?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: Certainly not in the sense you have in mind.

QUESTION: I understand that thirty one of the Chinese students who wish to return have addressed a letter to you asking that you do something on their behalf about returning to Peiping. Do you consider that letter as falling within the competence of the mission which the Assembly has set for you?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: It is a rather complicated question because practically all replies may be twisted into something which I do not mean in this case.

My obvious reply would be that I regard this as a démarche to the Secretary General. It is a completely independent matter which has to be studied on its merits. That is the reply that I would like to give to you. But you should also take it at its face value.

QUESTION: I have a two-part question. First, have you ever met Mr. Chou En lai? And secondly, do you expect, as is sometimes reported, to see Mr. Nehru?

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The SECRETARY GENERAL: I have never seen Mr. Chou En-lai, not even at a distance in Geneva. My reply to the other question would be an "if" - if I pass New Delhi. I certainly would be very happy to see Mr. Nehru.

QUESTION: May we enlarge this conference a little bit to take up one or two personnel matters? Is it contemplated that there will be any ceremony with regard to swearing-in the new Under-Secretaries around 1 January?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: No.

QUESTION: They will just take their office without any official notice of any kind?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: Yes. There will be a press release on it. There is one thing that I should like to mention now. We will make a formal statement on it, but I can use this opportunity to mention it all the same. As you certainly already know, Mr. Georges-Picot is leaving his post on 1 January to take up the post of French Ambassador to Mexico. As you know, I have all the time sought the rotation of the key posts as a matter of course and I think we should do so in the future. That will, of course, necessarily lead to situations where, with very much regret, I have to note that somebody who had served this organization very well indeed will leave us.

In enlarging on that I should like to take this opportunity to say what a great service Mr. Georges-Picot has rendered to this Organization as head of one of the most important and most complicated operations the combined economic and social activities. I am sure that his successor will take the cue from him and that we will have splendid co-operation. But in a certain sense a period necessarily comes to an end. I should like very much to pay a tribute to Mr. Georges-Picot for the services which he rendered during that period. I am quite sure that we all can join you on your side just as much as we on the Secretariat side, in wishing him all luck in his new assignment.

QUESTION: I do not think this meeting would be complete without your telling us something about the honour that was conferred upon you in your country.

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: How can I do that?

QUESTION: I think that you are resourceful enough.

The SECRETARY GENERAL: To give you any kind of comment on that would require that I could assume that you had much more knowledge about the specific tradition of Sweden because that is really what gives it a kind of sense which is quite frankly precious to me. In order to see that in the proper light not as an honour, as you say, not as a kind of intellectual or academic distinction or decoration, you have to know more about the background. The background in this case really means that, if I try to interpret it, at all events I get tied into the body which carries on the Swedish cultural tradition both as a symbol and in the most active way. You can easily see that that is something which, from my point of view, is extremely valuable and I am happy to say also easily reconciled with the international job in the political sphere because it just means the strengthening of the spiritual roots in a sense which I feel also strengthens, if anything, the possibilities to act internationally. Does that give you some kind of an idea?

THE SAME QUESTIONER: Yes.

QUESTION: Many of us are not going to be able to start our holidays until you leave. Could you give us an idea when that will be?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: Well you will have somewhat of a delayed holiday definitely not Christmas but maybe you may have Christmas Day or New Year's Day -- by combining them.

QUESTION: I do not like to press that point, but is there anything except the necessary preparations for the trip and perhaps the work that you must clean up here first that governs the date that you will leave or is this a matter upon which there must be agreement with Peking?

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The SECRETARY-GENERAL: No there is no need for that. Within the time limits which are possible from my point of view there is no difficulty on the other side if I understand the situation correctly. There you have another point which comes under the general heading of practical points which you have raised before. I have a dual time limit because, first of all, things have to be arranged here, and secondly, I cannot delay for too long taking up the work in the Advisory Committee on the Atomic Energy Conference. In my view, I would have been happy if we had been able to hold it in December. That has not been possible. But we should hold it as early as possible in January so there is an obligation here to which I must attend.

QUESTION: Do you intend to see the press again before you leave?

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I would not promise you that especially in view of what Mr. Hamilton has just said. You can tell your editors that it is not very likely.

QUESTION: We expect that Chou En-lai will try to speak with you about his Government's membership. Would you be willing to talk to him about that?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: You have very many expectations indeed. I have no guesses and you have no foundation for your guesses.

QUESTION: Can you tell me in plain language that your mission is not that but that it is...

The SECRETARY GENERAL: You know very well what the item is on the agenda established by the General Assembly.

QUESTION: Do you have any plans to see either Mr. Lodge or Mr. Dulles before you leave?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: It may be practical. I do not know yet. but there is nothing calling for it. On the other hand, just as I maintain current contact with all the main delegations as much as I can, I should certainly like to do it in this case too.

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QUESTION: The resolution mentioned other United Nations personnel in addition to the airmen. Have you or will you collate figures to take with you about the personnel of Member countries still missing?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: There is considerable information available. However that is one of the points/^{on}which I do not think that it would in any way be called for for me to elaborate. There is considerable information available and I have it.

QUESTION: By undertaking this trip to Peiping under the instructions of the Assembly do you not feel that the head of the world Organization is now going to Peiping to kneel somehow before Mr. Chou En-lai for the release of the thirteen Americans?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: I do not get your point.

QUESTION: I mean do you not feel that there is a kind of humiliation for the United Nations which is a belligerent Organization with the Chinese to go to China to beg them or ask them to release the thirteen Americans?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: I am not going anywhere to beg anybody for anything. I am going to bring up a situation which in my view calls for mutual consideration with the background to which I can refer the General Assembly resolution.

QUESTION: I gather though that Mr. Chou En-lai replied that he wished to discuss pertinent questions.

The SECRETARY GENERAL: So do I.

QUESTION: Could you tell us whether you are willing to discuss other matters than the question of the prisoners which was specified by the resolution?

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The SECRETARY GENERAL: Well it all depends upon what you mean by the word "discuss". I feel that you put into that word exchanges of views coming very close to negotiation. And if that is what you put into the word "discuss", I can only point out to you that the Secretary-General in this context acts under a specific authorization which is limited to one set of problems.

QUESTION: One set of problems that is the prisoner problem?

The SECRETARY GENERAL: The two points mentioned -- the eleven plus the four plus those remaining.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

FILE NO. _____

DATE 22 December 1954

TO: Mr. William Ranallo, Office of the Secretary-General

FROM: Szeming Sze, M.D., Acting Director, Health Service *Szeming Sze*SUBJECT: Health Precautions during Trip

I am handing over to your charge two medical kits which can be used, if necessary, by the members of your party. A printed list of the contents, together with directions, may be found inside each kit.

A few words on the contents of this kit may be helpful. There are the usual first-aid requisites, viz. bandages and band-aids, merthiolate swabs (for general wounds), special gauze dressings (for burns), thermometers, aspirin, aromatic spirits of ammonia (for fainting) and salt tablets (for perspiration). Besides these, you will find bismuth of subcarbonate and entero-vioform (for diarrhea), sulfa tablets (for diarrhea if accompanied by fever), creamolin tablets (for indigestion and stomach upsets), calamine ointment (for skin irritations), and desenex ointment (for athlete's foot).

Not mentioned on this list but added by us to the kit are some bonamine pills (for air-sickness) and seconal tablets (for insomnia). Please be careful to follow the directions on these bottles.

The following are some simple rules and health hints which you might find helpful:

As regards food, on long exhausting trips such as yours, small, regular and frequent meals and "snacks" would be more sustaining than large meals at long intervals. Avoid all foods and non-alcoholic drinks which are cold; hot tea and hot coffee are the best drinks. Halazone tablets for purifying water are included in the kit, but should not be used except in an emergency because they still do not sufficiently protect against such diseases as amoebic dysentery. If you must have plain water, drink either bottled water of an established brand, or water which has been properly boiled. Remember that you should not eat fruit unless you have peeled or skinned such yourself.

.../...

You will no doubt be attending numerous feasts and you will be pressed, particularly at Chinese feasts, to eat large quantities of food, much of which is richer and more oily than western foods; you should eat sparingly of the richer foods and preferably none of the cold dishes. While it is often necessary at Chinese feasts to accept all food offered to you, it is quite in order to leave most of the food uneaten on your plate. Chinese wine is drunk warm and, being in general mild, can be taken in moderately large amounts and serves as a fairly good antiseptic at feasts!

As regards clothing, you will need different types of clothing for very hot weather in certain parts of the Middle East and India, for very pleasant, temperate weather in south China and very cold weather in north China. It would be best to wear clothing which can protect you as much as possible from the bites of insects, particularly mosquitoes; when sleeping under mosquito nets, be sure to kill any mosquitoes inside the net before dropping off to sleep.

On a trip such as yours, when you will be passing rapidly through several different countries and climates, you will find it difficult to acclimatize yourself readily. Therefore, it would be well to remember that the easiest adjustment will be by following the rule of moderation in all things, including moderation and regularity as regards food, alcohol, working hours, exercise and sleep.

Perhaps you will be good enough to show the contents of this note, or give copies of it, to the other members of your party.

CLIMATE

New Delhi

This is the dry, pleasant, summer time of the year. It is sunny, there is practically no rain and the daytime temperature is somewhere about 75 to 80 degrees. The evenings are cool, down to 60 degrees. Normal light weight clothing would be comfortable, no tropical suits really necessary, but a heavy winter suit, even of the New York type, would tend to be uncomfortable. Good sleeping weather. No unusual climatic conditions need be expected, except that occasionally there are dust storms from the interior, but these, like the rains, at this time of the year are only occasional and do not last.

Peking

At this time of the year the weather is very cold, ranging around the zero line, but it is dry, sunny and invigorating. There is a possibility of snow from moderate to heavy, and also the possibility of dust storms from the interior. The wind is icy. Heavy winter clothes are recommended, fur cap if available but not absolutely necessary, heavy undergarments and some extra sweaters. The Chinese practice of heating interiors falls somewhere between the English and the American, in other words, it is moderately pleasant. The usual practice in Chinese government offices is to have individual stoves in every room, which means that the part facing the stove is very hot and the rest is very cold. Hotels have central heating. Naturally, nothing is known of the availability of fuel.

Dr. Sze has prepared a memorandum on health precautions during the trip, together with a medical kit containing medicines. A copy

..... of the memorandum is attached. It gives some useful information.