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Peking story

27 Dec. 1954

Aspects of the Peking information problem

From Matt Gadan to W. White

ASPECTS OF THE PEKING INFORMATION PROBLEM

This paper deals with the information problem of the Secretary-General's trip to Peking and return. There is an information aspect throughout, the going and return and for a time thereafter at Headquarters. How it is done may influence the success of the mission and certainly influence the public's concept of the United Nations.

Taking an indicated route with stops at London and New Delhi, the problem chronologically would appear to be as follows:

Announcement from Headquarters of final plans for the trip, including personnel, route to be followed, persons to be seen en route, etc. In this connection it may perhaps be of some importance to indicate that the staff was not screened by Peking. A final Headquarters statement by the Secretary-General may also be of importance, since there will of course be heavy pressure for newsreel and television statements at the airport and on the last day by Press and other media at Headquarters.

London

There should be an active information situation in London. Airport reception, etc. Following conference with Eden there is another obvious need for information or denial of it. Then airport departure.

New Delhi

Once again, the arrival in New Delhi should be an actively reported story. There is another obvious press, radio and photo situation there and a particularly active potential for speculative material, consequent upon the meeting with Prime Minister Nehru.

Peking

We come now to the main trouble spot. All along the route information or the lack of it may have potential for the mission in relations with Peking and with the rest of the world. The heat, in journalistic parlance, may be expected to increase as the mission gets closer to Peking. Once in Peking--the point has been made by newspapers and news agencies--reliance will be mainly on Peking radio and associated sources, unless something is done to rectify the situation. The news media have, of course, proposed that their correspondents be brought in to Peking, but alternatively some have suggested that at least some method be found so that total reliance would not be placed on Peking radio. This is of course also a problem for the United

Nations since Peking radio and associated sources may of course put out things which they regard as to their advantage. This could take the form of radio broadcasts, and information distributed by the "New China News Agency", or by Tass, Pravda, and representatives in Peking of East German news media, and of agencies in Poland, etc. and certain newspapers such as the Daily Worker in London. Another problem is the distribution of photos taken by Peking representatives and selected and distributed by them. These could be somewhat one-sided by selection too.

Should there be an absence of information, that could cause a bit of uneasiness too, particularly among the American news media.

Taking aside the question of correspondents, the following ideas emerge:

1. That the mission should send information directly to Headquarters; this can be done directly by filing in the clear from Peking to Headquarters. It has always been our practice on any mission sent anywhere. As a minimum this information would be used by the UN's own information media, which could hardly rely on Peking radio as a source. If it works out, material can be agreed upon between UN and Peking and stated for release at a specific time. It cannot be embargoed as such for advance distribution if China agencies are to use wireless which can be monitored. The idea here would be to set a specific time in the morning or evening for use of material because of the time differential of thirteen hours or so (morning in Peking is evening the day before here, and morning here is evening there) thus 12 noon or thereabouts is not a feasible time for them and 12 midnight is not feasible for us, so the message should be sent to Headquarters with a time of say three to four hours to allow for receipt here.

If material is unagreed, then of course the mission is free to send anything it wishes, and should do so steadily. It may be that it will be difficult to agree on exact wordings or terms of "communiques". In any event, a full information cable, consistent with the interests of the mission, and perhaps in direct furtherance of it.

It should be borne in mind that the variety of correspondents in Peking who have views favorable to the Peking regime may put out stuff "unofficially" which could get wide circulation despite "agreed" material.

Thus, it would also seem important that the mission be in position to know what news breaks or rumors are circulating outside. The mission should thus receive daily messages or whenever it warrants either straightforward in the clear if that is deemed advisable or if of private nature through the Swedish or perhaps Indian diplomatic channel.

There is stated to be direct telephone linkup between mainland China and the United States. A person recently there said that a year and a half ago he telephoned from Shanghai to New York with a few minutes delay. If this is so, then direct telephone communication between Peking and New York should be practical if necessary. The calls of course may be monitored in Peking but straight information could be given if necessary.

A request of the Chinese in Peking for telephone access may be made later or now.

It is also said by Indian sources that a telephone circuit between Peking and Delhi is imminent, and perhaps may be in operation by the time the mission gets to Peking.

The Press Trust of India man here says that the wireless circuit between Peking and Delhi is good. He says further that the Indian correspondents and the Peking government have been in a dispute about press rates but that it is possible that Indian correspondents or some may go in for the story, although, he says, Indian newspapers are not focussing on the fliers or prisoners but on the larger aspect of the visit of the Secretary-General to Peking.

He gives as a suggestion that an inquiry be made of Arthur Lall, to ascertain the situation with regard to communications between Delhi and Peking at this time.

The problem of photos is difficult. The Peking government propaganda people may distribute photos actively to points where they could be radio-photoed or may mail pictures far and wide for pickup by various publications. Without a photographer along from our side, if photos are taken by the Peking publicity organisations, perhaps a joint selection can be made if feasible. That still would leave the outlets in Peking's hands. Perhaps the mission could get the pictures to the agencies in Tokyo where they have a radio photo set up, or to some other point. Should a check show that the Indian flights to Canton are on a more than once-a-week basis, then distribution may be made in New Delhi as well and given to the agencies there. The communication agencies should be able to move them from there on.

It may be practical to send material from the mission to New Delhi by wireless in the same way as it is sent to UN Headquarters, though Headquarters should be basis not only for all UN information media but perhaps for political juxtaposition as well.

Nevertheless using the same time differential information should perhaps go to New Delhi as well for issuance there, in case communications to New York are impeded.

New Delhi is a long way around to get to New York but could be used as a backstop and the major agencies are represented there. It may also be that the Delhi center could be used in a supporting role in some way for the mission.

When the mission comes out there may be some indication of progress or there may not, but in any event the reappearance of the mission in New Delhi should be an occasion of some "dramatic" interest as the press conveys it and there should be strong pressure upon the mission from press and photographers. The assumption is that the Secretary-General would see Nehru again. And if there is a meeting with the press in New Delhi on the way out every remark of the Secretary-General should be of lively interest.

If the Secretary-General has a press conference in New Delhi on his way back then material at that conference could be cabled back to Headquarters and the conference itself could be recorded and rebroadcast through Indian radio facilities to UN radio, and indeed American or British or Canadian networks. It may be that the Secretary-General will not want to have a full-dress conference in New Delhi but prefers to wait 'till he returns all the way to Headquarters. However, events in the form of Peking radio and associated sources may force some kind of reply to rumors and reports. In any event the pressure will be strong.

It may be that thoughts should be given to building up the personnel of the Delhi center to cope with this and the problem from Peking on a day-to-day basis. The first point out of mainland China could be a very important place.

The news problem will be with the party again if London is the next main stop.

Any late information from Headquarters could be transmitted to both these points for information of the mission. And cables should be sent on developments to Headquarters from the main stopping points enroute.

The return to Headquarters should again be a lively event at the airport. It will probably require a short statement from the Secretary-General to the newsreel and television and press media at Idlewild. Then the Secretary-General will probably be under strong pressure to meet the press at Headquarters upon his return, and could announce such a conference at the airport to be held later in the UN building. A big room will probably be required.

Depending on what Peking and associated sources put out, the mission should be in position to refute rumors which may crop up from time to time even after the return home, considering that a certain amount of information will also be available in Delhi and London if the route back is the same as going in. And the stories may fly.

This is preliminary. There will probably be more to add. But it is designed to cover the area of the whole trip as far as could be foreseen now.

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Per Lind

Date: 27 December 1954

THROUGH:

Personal

FILE NO.: _____

FROM: Wilder Foote

SUBJECT: The Press and Peking.

I thought it might be useful to put down on paper a few thoughts on the press side of the mission to Peking. Some are obvious, but are included to complete the picture. I also attach a "working paper", which Matt Gordon prepared, from which I have drawn for this.

Though the Secretary-General rightly conceives of his mission as a diplomatic contact without any of the trappings of a "visit of state", the fact remains that it is a very big story and will continue to be so regarded by all the mass media — press, radio, films, etc. — from beginning to end. Furthermore, the way in which the news comes out, during and afterward, will inevitably have an important influence upon the public's impression of the mission and upon public opinion about the United Nations itself. It may also influence the ultimate outcome of the mission one way or the other. These facts of life impose a framework from which there is no escape, but within which it is quite possible to find a reasonable meeting ground with public interest without departing in any substantive way from the Secretary-General's concept or damaging his prospects of success.

The chronology of press contacts should be about as follows:

- 1) Press statement issued at Headquarters on members of mission, time of departure, route, stops on route, etc. The more complete this is, the less pressure there will be afterward for more details. Presumably this can be issued Tuesday afternoon.
- 2) One paragraph statement by Secretary-General for press and news-reels on departure from New York. This can be released at Headquarters and recorded for radio and news-reels there also. I recommend this and have prepared a draft. At the airport there need be only silent films and photos of the Secretary-General boarding the plane.
- 3) London. On arrival it may be advisable for the Secretary-General to say a few words. This will depend on how much pressure develops. George Ivan Smith will have sized it up when you arrive. There will be interest in the Eden meeting and something innocuous can be said as from the press spokesman afterward. There may be strong pressure for a press conference. If sufficiently strong, an approximate repeat of the Stockholm and New York performances would do no harm and might be good public relations for the United

Nations. Once again, George Ivan's judgment can be depended on. On departure for New Delhi, a few minutes will probably be necessary for more pictures at the airport. George Ivan Smith should be fully briefed on our line during the course of your stay so that he can follow through with his contacts afterward as and when it may be needed.

4) New Delhi. At intermediate fueling stops on the way, it may be advisable for the Secretary-General to appear for pictures, if photographers are on hand at airports. On arrival at New Delhi, it is likely that the Secretary-General should again say a few words. Jim Orrick will be on hand to help and advise you. The Nehru meeting can probably be dealt with as in London with Eden. Again, as in London, the question of a press conference on the Stockholm model will have to be judged on the spot. On departure for Canton and Peking, the Secretary-General should probably make a one paragraph statement, if he has not had a press conference.

5) Peking. There will probably be a full dress reception on arrival, with cameras grinding, etc. Although unlikely, there might be a request for recording a few words, perhaps in response to a greeting. At all events, one should be prepared. Thereafter:

a) I hope agreement can be reached for joint official communiques on the conversations, to be released, on a regular time schedule specified in advance, simultaneously in Peking and New York. Our Information Centre in New Delhi should also receive these communiques for issuance there at the specified hours. With two outlets we have insurance against transmission delays. I would strongly advise daily communiques, even though they may often include little more than recitals of when meetings took place or will take place and who the participants were. Peking time is plus 13 hours on New York, so it will not be easy to find mutually convenient release times. Europe is easier, but American interest is highest in the story. From the New York point of view, the following release time appears reasonable: 10 a.m. New York -- 11 p.m. Peking. Since you should file the communique to New York (and New Delhi) three to four hours before the agreed release time each day, to allow for transmission delays, and the text would be agreed on before that, this would mean completing your end of this work at about 7 p.m. each day, Peking time.

b) We should also like to have from you another daily cable of informal "color" -- giving the comings and goings of the Secretary-General and other members of his mission, social engagements, etc. (No matter how inconsequential, such information will be useful in supplementing the communiques.) This daily "color" cable should be filed either at the same time as the communique or as soon thereafter as possible.

c) I would strongly advise against the Secretary-General holding a press conference in Peking, for obvious reasons.

d) Communications. You know the cable route to New York. I have been told that it is also possible to telephone to New York. You might wish to explore this alternative possibility for daily open communication with Headquarters.

e) Press Reactions. We will ask our Information Centres to cable each day to Headquarters highlights and trends of press coverage and comment while you are away. We will cable you in Peking a daily summary of these "en clair" unless other means seem advisable in special circumstances. We shall also furnish you with a good short-wave receiver and time schedules of important news broadcasts from the outside world.

f) Formal Dinner with Toasts. If there should be one of these, there should, of course, be a firm agreement that anything given out should be textually agreed by both parties and subject to the same plan of simultaneous release as suggested for official communiques.

g) Pictures and Films. These present a real problem. It will not be possible to prevent radio-photos from reaching the outside world courtesy of Peking's agencies. But I hope you can arrange locally for films and prints, by courtesy or purchase, which you can air-pouch to our Information Centre in New Delhi, for release from there, and later from New York. Let us know when you dispatch them. Pictorial coverage of the Mission is important for DPI both now and later.

h) I think you will find your opposite numbers on the press side of the People's Government Foreign Office thoroughly familiar with all Western (including American) techniques and practices in press matters. You may even find yourself dealing with Mr. Pu-Shan, who came to Lake Success with General Wu in 1950, was in Geneva last spring, and studied at Columbia and Michigan. He knows his way around.

i) A press statement may be necessary on departure from Peking. Please have it cabled to New York and New Delhi.

6) Return to New Delhi. There will be tremendous interest at this first stop on the return journey. Photographs at the airport and some sort of statement by the Secretary-General, after he has been informed of latest outside developments, should be made. It may seem advisable to hold a press conference.

7) Return via London to New York. There will be pressure wherever he stops, but nothing new need be said. On his return to Headquarters, a brief statement would be advisable, followed by a press conference as soon as it is fitting -- in relation to the Delegations -- to hold one.

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