

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

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Peking story

- December 1954

Aide Memoire (conc. americans prisoners in China,
+ talks with Chou En-lai)

AIDE MEMOIRE

In discussions Friday 3 and Saturday 4 December 1954 I underscored strongly to the US representatives (Ambassadors Lodge and Wadsworth) that I was worried by their approach to the prisoners problem. I found that if they wanted the people out, they should not try and get a condemnation. What they really needed was negotiation, and negotiation and condemnation seemed to me to be contradictory. For that reason I asked them to tone down the condemnation part of a possible resolution in order to give the United Nations as good a chance as possible to get the result.

At this stage the American idea was that the request of the General Assembly for action should be directed to the President of the General Assembly. I pointed out that such a formula was inadequate because the President as such did not function after the end of the session, provided that we were not to stick to the formula used at the last two assemblies where the mandate of the President had been prolonged; that, however, would require that the General Assembly adjourned instead of ending, as would be the normal procedure.

Mr. van Kleffens, having in mind his possible responsibility, tried to get the services of some Dutch expert on the Far East: in fact, he had already at this time approached the Dutch Government in order to get this man. He had also drafted a message to Peking to be sent via the Hague if and when the Assembly reached a decision. The message asked Mr. Chou En-lai to accept negotiations with the Dutch representative and to nominate a representative for the Chinese Government.

In the morning of 6 December Mr. Lodge came to see me. He told me that over the week-end Washington had revised its plans. Before consulting France and England, he wanted to have my reaction to the new line as the Secretary-General would be involved personally. He said that they now wanted to request the Secretary-General to conduct the necessary negotiations. As a reason for the change they would invoke the fact that the President's mandate was limited but basically their reason was that there was greater likelihood that I would be able to manoeuvre the story personally. I replied that if it was the view of the governments and of the General Assembly that the Secretary-General under Article 98 should assume such a specific responsibility, I did not feel that the Secretary-General could say no.

In the evening the Foreign Policy Association gave a dinner for Mr. van Kleffens. Before the dinner I was informed that the British and French had accepted the new American line which made me use most of the time during the dinner for a consideration of possible lines of action. At the end of the dinner I asked Mr. Cordier to accompany me home and I then told him that

I had not got any further than to consider the possibility of getting a Swiss of the highest possible international standing as an intermediary. However, I was not satisfied because I did not believe in the possibility of getting anybody heavy enough to be interesting from Mr. Chou En-lai's viewpoint. On my return I gave a couple of hours to the problem and on the basis of further consideration arrived at the conclusion that the only possible way to success would be that I crashed the gate by asking for a personal interview in Peking. When Mr. Petrén at about 1.30 a.m. returned from another dinner, he was kept awake by a very thorough analysis of the whole new line of action.

On Tuesday morning I asked Nutting for an interview. He was a little bit taken aback by the proposal, but did not react negatively.

I was invited to lunch by Mr. Pearson and told him after the luncheon what was the idea. He said that he would like to talk it over more carefully with me and we agreed to meet after a dinner given by M. de Noüe the same evening. In the evening talk Pearson, after considerable discussion, said that he agreed fully with my conclusion. I showed him the draft of a couple of cables in which he suggested some amendments. In later talks I used the texts as amended by Pearson as a basis for my discussions.

On Wednesday morning in the course of the meeting of the First Committee, I gave the prepared texts to Hoppenot whose only comments were "Does this really mean that you would go?".

Later, before lunch, I went to see Mr. Cabot Lodge. I told Mr. Lodge that I had come, not in order to consult him, but in order to inform him about the situation on my side. I felt that before the discussion on the fliers issue started (after lunch) he and his Government should be informed about the interpretation I would give to the mandate if approved by the General Assembly. I did take this line in order to give the U.S. Government an opportunity to back down or to stop me by amendments to the text or by statements in the debate if they felt that they should do so. Lodge's reaction, however, was enthusiastic and he used very strong words of praise. I emphasized the fact that this step of mine indeed would take us very far into the field of China policy. Lodge tied his hands so strongly that I felt that it would be impossible for Washington to back down.

On Friday morning the 10th, Nutting and Dixon asked to see me. Nutting said that he had now received Eden's reaction to my plan. They felt that I might be right but that it would be imprudent to act without sounding out Mr. Chou En-lai's willingness to receive me. It was obvious that they meant that Mr. Trevelyan could be charged with such a job. I replied that I did not in any way overlook the great danger that I might score an immediate defeat by a flat no. On the other hand I must ask them if they felt, once the whole prestige of the United Nations was at stake, that it would be wise to approach Mr. Chou En-lai in an indirect way as it was more likely that I would have a no as a result of a sounding than as a result of a direct approach.

If I got such a no, the story would be ended from the United Nations point of view. I could not then proceed to a direct approach and I would not even be able to put on record such an indirect approach as an explanation for not having got anywhere. Although I appreciated the thoughtful warning and the kind offer, I did not feel that I could agree, and consequently I would go ahead with a direct approach to Mr. Chou En-lai the very same day unless something unexpected happened in the afternoon.

(Eden, when I saw him passing London on 31 December, said concerning this period that "this was all Tony's idea: he was prudent on your behalf. I myself felt from the very beginning that you were right".)

At the end of the debate on Friday the 10th, I asked Malik to see me. I informed him about the fact that the cables had been sent to Mr. Chou En-lai. Mr. Malik asked a few questions and said that I certainly could understand that he was not in a position to make any comments. However, at the end of the talk when he left he said: "You understand that I am sorry not to be in a position to tell you what I think about this move"; he left no doubt, in saying this, about his personal approval, although he did not find it possible to go on record.

After seeing Malik I saw Arthur Lall in order to ask him to transmit all the texts to Nehru and also my request for Dayal as political assistant.

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After our receipt of Mr. Chou En-lai's favourable reply both the Indian, the Russian and the Polish delegations all indicated that they had tried to get Peking to accept.

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From the journey to Peking the following should be put on record:

In London, Eden expressed his very strong approval of the move but at the same time his great concern about the outcome.

M. Mendès-France expressed himself in similar strongly positive terms.

Mr. Nehru explained at length his disapproval of the United Nations' resolution and his various reasons for feeling that India could render the best service by staying outside. In reply to that I said to him that I felt that if I managed in the course of the Peking talks to get anywhere at all, it would mean that the discussion of the fliers issue had been put on a new footing, and I ventured to express the hope that on that new basis - where the United Nations' resolution which had never been transmitted to Peking, had been pushed aside - India would find it possible to contribute or perhaps even to take over the ball.

AN
S.M.

BULLETIN (INS)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Senate Investigations Subcommittee today ordered a full-scale probe of the imprisonment of 15 U.S. airmen jailed by the Chinese Reds and said the primary objective will be to gain their release.

Chairman John L. McClellan (D.Ark.) summoned Air Force and State Department officials to a closed door meeting Monday to start the probe.

McClellan said the subcommittee's "primary objective at this time is the release of the imprisoned Americans captured during the Korean war." But he added that he expects to project the inquiries into a full fledged probe of Americans held by Russia and her satellites.

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