PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY BOARD
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Subject: The Strategic Significance of Involuntary PW Repatriation in Korea

Origin: Taylor

Date: 19 Feb 52
February 19, 1952


to:  N - Mr. Mallory Brown

from: F - Harold Taylor

subject: The Strategic Significance of Involuntary PW Herd in Korea

ref: Your memorandum of 2/19/52 to the Director

I think that your draft discussion paper for the Board is generally excellent, and I concur heartily in your attached recommendations to the Director. I feel, however, that the paper for the Board could be usefully strengthened at one point in order to present our position more clearly and forcibly. I suggest that the last two sentences of paragraph 2 be deleted and replaced by the following:

"The PSB staff, however, is unable to accept this view and considers that if it were accepted as basis for US action, the entire posture of the US in the field of psychological operations would be irreparably damaged. For this reason, it is recommended that the entire problem of exchange of prisoners, as a matter of greatest urgency, be re-examined by the Psychological Strategy Board. Some considerations bearing on the problem are contained in the following paragraphs."

Attachments:

as f3 Mr Brown to the Director dd 2/19/52 re POW,

(see Brown's memo of 2/19/52 to the Director re POW)

F: Taylor
I think that your draft discussion paper for the Board is generally excellent, and I sincerely hope in your attached recommendations to the Director. I feel, however, that the paper for the Board could be usefully strengthened at one point in order to present our position more clearly and forcefully. I suggest that the last two sentences of paragraph 2 be deleted and replaced by the following:

"The FBI staff, however, is unable to accept this view and considers that if it were accepted as basis for US action, the entire posture of the US in the field of psychological operations would be irreparably damaged. For this reason, it is recommended that the entire problem of exchange of prisoners, as a matter of greatest urgency, be reconvened by the Psychological Strategy Board. Some considerations bearing on the problem are contained in the following paragraphs."
MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Strategic Significance of Involuntary Repatriation in Korea.

REFERENCE: FEB D-10, dated 22 October 1951, Same subject.

1. Attached herewith please find suggested notes for post-agenda discussion at the Psychological Strategy Board Meeting of 21 February 1952.

2. Attention is particularly invited to FEB D-10, wherein it is concluded that release or parole of prisoners is feasible prior to the cessation of hostilities. If reexamination of the problem is indicated, this action should therefore be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

Kally Grune
Assistant Director
Office of Evaluation and Review

Attachment: NOTES FOR POSSIBLE POST-AGENDA PSS DISCUSSION
The Strategic Significance of Involuntary Repatriation in Korea.

cc: Mr. Barnes
Mrs. Taylor
TOP SECRET

SUBJECT: The Strategic Significance of Involuntary POW Repatriation in Korea.

1. The OSS, on 22 October 1951, forwarded a staff study on the repatriation of prisoners of war to the National Security Council. It concluded in general that involuntary repatriation of prisoners of war was undesirable, that a means of releasing such prisoners was available under the terms of the Geneva Convention wherein they might be paroled or released unconditionally prior to the cessation of hostilities, and recommended that this course of action be adopted.

2. During the past several months there has been extensive official and press discussion of this matter and it appears from current instructions to General Ridgway that the US position on the subject may not have been taken. A recent official estimate concludes that involuntary repatriation as opposed to a renewal of open hostilities would not have a seriously adverse effect on the US psychological position with respect to defectors, etc. These estimates are open to considerable question. It is noted, however, that the decision with respect to involuntary repatriation can at the present time still be made in conjunction with other items and that question of a breakthrough in the cease-fire negotiations is not necessarily unilaterally connected with the POW issue but it appears that this is becoming more difficult daily.

3. At the present time there is no widespread active concern in the US on the question of possible failure on the part of the Chinese to return all American prisoners. But articles now beginning to appear in the press raise the question that the issue might be presented to the American public as an "exchange of Chinese lives for American lives". Should this develop, it is likely that the public outcry would obscure the basic moral issue and jeopardize the effectiveness of the US policy decision.

4. At the present time, it appears that the Department of State and the Department of Defense are engaged in the collection and careful analysis of the facts pertaining to this problem. Preliminary indications are that perhaps 1,000 Chinese and up to 10 percent of the North Korean POWs will fall within the category of those whose return to their homelands would result in their death, or who for other reasons do not wish to be repatriated.

5. There are additional complications (aside from the abstract moral issue) which are also under consideration. These include the not entirely desireable conditions in the POW camp and the adverse psychological effect of returning mistreated prisoners to their homeland; the unwillingness of the military commander in the field to release substantial numbers of prisoners beyond his legal powers; the serious likelihood that Chinese released in South Korea would themselves be unwelcome on Korean soil. It must also be seriously considered that the psychological effect of releasing such individuals without adequate provision for their welfare might have a more serious adverse psychological effect in the long term than the return to their homelands. The problem of disposal is therefore one of critical importance.

APPENDIX INFORMATION

FEB 27 1950
6. There is a serious possibility that the question of involuntary repatriation of prisoners may again become an issue in the future, both during the cold war, and in the event a general war should occur. Policy guidance in this problem is lacking since the individuals and principles involved do not fall entirely within US concepts of political asylum, or within the Geneva Convention. The solution of the issue in Korea, while of critical immediate importance, is also likely therefore to provide a mid-term or long-range strategic precedent.