

Situation Room Division
Office of Current Intelligence

Briefing, 7 March 1952

PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN IN KOREA - BW

1. The allegations that the UN troops have been using BW along the front are not a new factor of enemy propaganda. A similar campaign was launched in May 1951, and individual allegations have been made at various times since the outbreak of war in 1950. In the May 1951 campaign, Moscow used 56 items on BW in its propaganda, both internal and external. The State Department used ridicule in combatting the campaign, and the number of references dropped off after June of that year.

2. On 23 February, the North Korean Foreign Minister alleged once again that the UN was using BW and this charge was taken up also by the Chinese Premier, Chou En Lai, an indication of the high levels on which the campaign is being conducted. The charges stated that between 28 January and 17 February, the Americans dropped from aircraft various insects carrying the germs of such diseases as bubonic plague and cholera on many provinces of North Korea, and that in the ten days after 20 February they continued to drop "flies, fleas, lice, ticks, mosquitoes, spiders, ants and crickets" on five additional provinces, causing a danger of epidemics in these areas.

3. Since these allegations were first made, all countries of the Soviet Orbit have taken up the line. Moscow for instance has already carried 75 items beamed to China, North America and its Home Service. Peiping Radio has carried items which link this campaign to UN stalling tactics in the truce talks. They claim that the US is withholding support for a truce because it desires to test the BW weapons which it has developed, and that since it cannot penetrate the Communist 20-mile defense in depth in any other way, it is attempting to do it with germs. On 6 March, the Chinese charged that UN planes had extended the BW attacks to Manchuria, sending 448 flights over the Antung area between 29 February and 5 March to drop all forms of bacteria. This propaganda has been beamed to North American and European audiences. The Korean output has not been as heavy as that of China, has been largely internal, and has been concerned chiefly with positive counteractions to be taken against the outbreak of epidemics, such as the organization of anti-epidemic committees, the inoculations of members of the population, the setting up of quarantine stations at traffic points, the continuous guarding against aircraft and various weapons of sanitation.

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4. In typical Communist fashion the BW propaganda has been linked to other propaganda themes. For instance, various countries in the Orbit have sent protests to the UN and the International Red Cross, labor unions have protested to the WFTU, and peace committees to the Partisans of Peace. These organizations in turn have protested to the UN; the campaign fits in fortuitously with the announced arrival in Korea of an "international commission of jurists" to examine crimes committed by UN forces, a body reportedly including French, English, Belgian, Italian, Brazilian, Austrian and Polish jurists. The charges have been linked by Shanghai, and Hong Kong papers and by the Peiping radio to the use of bacteria by the Japanese against the Chinese population during the last war. The Hong Kong press carried an article accusing the US of readying BW attacks for other areas of the world. London Daily Worker correspondent, Allen Winnington, has said that the insects were placed in artillery shells and fired near the Imjin River front by the US 3rd Division on 26 February, an area dangerously close to the British Commonwealth Division, and that these germs were so near the front line that they could just as easily spread south as north. He even described the flies as having small heads, long narrow wings, and a more velvety texture than common flies, with bacteria, especially cholera bacteria, found in the abdomen and among the downy hairs. Ce Soir correspondent, Wilfred Burchett, states that not only may faulty UN pilots drop these germs over their own troops but that the 4,000-odd UN PW's will have to take their chances with the rest of the Korean population.

6. In assessing the reasons for this propaganda campaign, the first one which comes to mind is that there is an epidemic in Korea at present for which the Communists are trying to blame the US. Reports from the Far East, however, state that there is no evidence at the present time of a disease incidence sufficiently high to account for a campaign of this magnitude. Therefore, the following are possible reasons for the campaign:

a. The Communists may be preparing to break off the truce negotiations and may be preparing the way by means of accusing the US of inhuman methods of warfare. Although previous Chinese propaganda has not accused the US of desiring to break off the talks, a logical prelude to Communist moves to break off themselves, the fact that the radio report alleging our entry into Manchuria also reported for the first time that we had bombed and strafed targets in China may indicate that this is their eventual aim.

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b. The Communists may be making another effort to put the truce negotiations into the framework of the UN, as Vishinsky suggested on 3 January, rather than to leave them to the warring parties.

c. If the Communists are preparing to break off the talks or to force the US to break them off, they may be using this BW campaign to prepare their troops for a renewal of offensive action this spring by making them extremely angry with the US.

d. At the same time that they are raising the fighting morale of the troops, they may be using this campaign to scare them into taking proper precautions against epidemics which usually occur in the spring in Korea.

e. They may be attempting to inflame world opinion against the US and to drive a wedge between the US and the other UN allies. The emphasis placed on European audiences, on inaccurate pilots and on the closeness of other UN units to the front lines lend credence to this theory.

f. A much less likely reason is that the Communists are preparing to use BW themselves and are accusing the US to establish justification. Although the Airforce has speculated on this reason, it is doubtful that the USSR has the capability, any more than the US does. Even if they had this capability, it is doubtful that they would permit the Chinese and Koreans to undertake it at this time because of world consequences.

g. The probability is that the reason lies in a combination of some of the above. The Communists are probably hoping to embarrass the US, lay the groundwork for a possible breakoff of talks, raise the fighting morale of their forces for an offensive if this takes place, and to drive a wedge between the UN nations which would lessen their capability to withstand an attack.

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