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Across The Table At Pan Mun Jom

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In July 1951 the writer, then an Army legal officer stationed in Tokyo, was suddenly ordered to an undisclosed destination in Korea, for an undisclosed purpose, for about two weeks. In view of what was being discussed at great length over the radio and in the press, it was not difficult to conclude that the assigned mission was to help negotiate with the North Korean and Chinese Communists for an armistice to end fighting in Korea. One year later the writer was the last of the original staff to return to Tokyo, and there still was no agreement with the Communists on such an armistice. In fact, that agreement was not reached until July, 1953, two years rather than two weeks after the opening of the talks!

To write with purported authority on the basis of experiences which occurred more than a decade ago would be presumptuous in most areas of human conduct. Not so with respect to the negotiating techniques employed by the Communists. In this regard they all wear the same old school tie, whether they are Russian or Chinese, Bulgarian or North Korean. A perusal of both official and unofficial reports concerning negotiations with Communists conducted yesterday, a year ago, or a decade ago, will quickly reveal the use of some or all of the definitely non-diplomatic methods early adopted by Soviet negotiators. Subsequently they have been developed and refined until they have become standard operating procedure for any self-respecting Communist who is given the task of negotiating with representatives of a "decadent" capitalistic system.

Without attempting to be a psychiatrist, it is safe to say that one of the first things which impressed the United Nations Command (UNC) personnel at the armistice negotiations was that, without exception, every Communist representative, from senior delegate to substitute interpreter, suffered from an inferiority complex. This "chip-on-the-shoulder," "I'm-as-good-as-you-are" attitude is undoubtedly one of the many things which makes negotiations with Communists so difficult. Perhaps Soviet successes in space and Chinese nuclear successes will mitigate this, but psychiatrists will probably agree that a complete

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change in this mental attitude will require many more successes and a considerable period of time.

The publicly expressed Communist opposition to the use of helicopters by the UNC representatives was unquestionably motivated by their inability to provide a helicopter lift for their own personnel. When the UNC put in gravel walks around its side of the conference area at Pan Mun Jom, the Communists immediately put in gravel walks on their side. When the UNC lined the sides of its walks with rocks, they lined the sides of their walks with bricks and painted them white. When the UNC planted small fir trees in its area, they planted big ones in theirs. When the UNC installed green sentry boxes to protect its military police from the weather, they countered with sentry boxes for their guards which were painted like barber poles—until jokes by the Western correspondents caused them to reconsider and repaint. Similarly, it was undoubtedly this inferiority complex which caused the almost hysterical demands that the UNC negotiators stop referring to the Communist side as “North Korean Communists” and “Chinese Communists” and give them their “rightful” names, “Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea” and “Chinese Peoples’ Volunteers.”

Another characteristic which appears to be endemic among Communists is a complete lack of a sense of humor and an accompanying marked inability to be on the receiving end of a joke. The incident of the sentry boxes which has just been mentioned was one example of this. Another involved a ten-year-old Korean boy who one day followed the UNC convoy into the neutral zone. He was arrested by the Communists who claimed that he was a spy for the United Nations Command. The UNC liaison officers demanded and obtained his return and the Western press treated the whole thing as a huge joke, making numerous references to the ten-year-old “master spy.” There were no further attempts by the Communists, except behind the bamboo curtain, to capitalize on that particular incident. Similarly, when a small anti-epidemic team of the Republic of Korea Army inadvertently drove its truck into the neutral zone the Communists, in returning the men to the UNC liaison officers, labeled the incident a “very serious violation” of the agreement creating the neutral zone. The Western press wrote humorous stories about the “invasion of the neutral zone by soldiers armed to the teeth with DDT spray guns,” and nothing further was heard about the matter from the Communists.

When the meetings began at Kaesong, the Communists did everything possible to create the impression that they were the hosts and that the UNC personnel were the visiting suppliants. Communist guards armed with sub-machine guns swarmed around the entire conference area. Packages of Chinese cigarettes and decanters of Chinese wine were on the conference table. And the Communists attempted to dictate who could be included in the UNC party and refused to pass a UNC convoy which included news correspondents.

Within twenty-four hours General Matthew B. Ridgway, the UNC Commander, ordered the conferences halted and laid down the terms upon which he would permit them to be resumed. The Communists quickly agreed. This was the first of a number of occasions upon which an immediate display of a firm and irrevocable intent brought quick acquiescence from the Communists. Not only the armed guards but the cigarettes and wine disappeared. It is perhaps appropriate to add that none of the UNC personnel had ever availed themselves of the Communist "hospitality" and that when, more or less intentionally, American cigarettes were left overnight on the conference table, they would be found untouched the following day.

Until the advent of the Communist era, the agenda was something upon which agreement was normally reached during the first few minutes of a diplomatic conference if not before hand. Now, reaching an agreement on the agenda sometimes has become harder than reaching agreement on substantive matters. This is primarily because of the Communists' attempt to trick the other side into concessions by means of the wording on agenda items.

For example, both sides were agreed at the very outset that there should be an item concerned with the selection of a military demarcation line, a dividing line between the opposing military forces once the cease-fire became effective. The UNC delegation proposed that this subject be included under the rubric "Establishment of a military demarcation line." The Communists refused to accept this proposed terminology, submitting as a counter-proposal the phrase "Establishment of the thirty-eighth parallel as a military demarcation line." Obviously, after agreement on such wording for the agenda item, there would have been little need for substantive discussions. Any attempt to discuss locating the military demarcation line at a point other than at the thirty-eighth parallel would have met with an immediate complaint by the Communists that the discussion was not within the framework of the mutually accepted agenda and with absolute refusal to take part in negotiations which would "violate" the now sacrosanct agenda. Here, again, the UNC refused to make any concession and the Communists eventually accepted the UNC-proposed terminology which thus permitted the substantive discussions to cover a whole range of suggested demarcation lines with the battle line finally being agreed upon for that purpose. Parenthetically, it is interesting to recall that while it took many months to get the Communists to abandon the thirty-eighth parallel, some months thereafter, when the UNC suggested using that line for determining which civilian refugees would be entitled to be sent to the other side, the Communists asserted that the UNC was attempting to revive the "obsolete" thirty-eighth parallel.

It is comparatively simple to trace the continuity over the years of the use of the agenda technique by the Communists. The problem of China has, of course, plagued the United Nations since early in 1950. The difference between the

traditional approach to the establishment of an agenda item and the Communist approach is well illustrated by the two items inscribed on the agenda of the Sixteenth Session of the General Assembly in 1961. The item proposed by New Zealand, worded so as to permit complete discussion of all aspects of the problem, was: "Question of the representation of China in the United Nations." The item proposed by the USSR (which was then still acting as Communist China's sponsor in the United Nations), was: "Restoration of the lawful rights of the Peoples' Republic of China."

The use of tactful language in international negotiations is merely evidence of bourgeois decadence in so far as the Communists are concerned. (Khrushchev's shoe-pounding performance at the 1960 meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, which so astounded most non-Communist representatives, was probably considered to be quite normal by the representatives of the satellite nations.) Any proposal that they made was invariably labeled "fair and reasonable." Just as invariably, any proposal made by the UNC was labeled "absurd and arrogant." Libelous statements about the United States, the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China were the Communist order of the day. Every UNC action was characterized as "barbarous" and "criminal" and every UNC statement as "deceitful" and a "fabrication." It was obvious that all of this was part of a strategy aimed at making the UNC negotiators lose their tempers, the theory probably being that when emotionally disturbed, unintended statements might be inadvertently made. But whatever the theory, the plan failed to work as the UNC representatives, naive as some of them may have been when the negotiations began, quickly came to appreciate what was being attempted and had no difficulty in avoiding the pitfall which had been so carefully prepared for them. In fact, the Communists soon found it necessary to completely reverse their tactics and to attempt to induce reciprocity by purported loss of temper on their side, loss of temper which could be turned on and off like water from a faucet. After a few polite but patently amused requests that they stop yelling across the table, this tactic was more or less abandoned, especially when one of the UNC staff officers pointed out that yelling in Chinese or Korean served no useful purpose since it was in a language he did not understand.

Major General (later General) Henry I. Hodes, one of the original members of the United Nations Command Delegation and the senior member of the first UNC sub-delegation (the other was Rear Admiral Arleigh. A. Burke, later an Admiral and Chief of Naval Operations), had a faculty for rubbing his Communist counterpart, Chinese Major General Hsieh Fang, the wrong way. The informal sub-delegation meetings on the military demarcation line had come to a complete halt. After both sides had maneuvered for some time with no perceptible progress being made, General Hodes suggested that a coin be

tossed to determine who would “break the ice.” Hsieh Fang indicated great astonishment that General Hodes would be willing to let such an important matter be determined by the toss of a coin. To him the negotiatory technique employed was a matter of the utmost importance. General Hodes was just interested in getting the discussions moving. On another occasion, Hsieh Fang attempted to indicate his low regard for the United Nations Command Delegation by referring to Admiral Joy (almost a Chinese name) as “your Senior Delegate, whose name I do not recall.” General Hodes answered him by referring to the Communist Senior Delegate and adding the phrase “whose name I trust you do recall.” That ended that interchange very quickly.

When the UNC negotiators had no objection to something proposed by the Communists they would unhesitatingly so state. Not so the Communists. They would concede that their views were generally the same as those expressed by the UNC representative, or that they could see no reason why agreement should not be reached on the matter under discussion. It was just plain impossible to get them to say a simple “yes.” Naturally, there was much speculation on the UNC side that this difficulty arose because the Communist representatives were not permitted on their own initiative to agree on even a minor administrative matter. No such difficulty was encountered when it came to getting them to say “no.”

Over the course of time both sides became very reticent about the manner in which they proposed compromises. The UNC negotiators soon found that if they offered a compromise position somewhere between the announced positions of the two sides, the Communists would reject it out of hand, but that for all subsequent negotiations the two extremes were the original Communist position and the UNC compromise proposal. The UNC negotiators evened the score when the Communists made a proposal calling for agreement to a demand made by UNC on one matter in return for UNC agreement to a Communist demand on an entirely unrelated matter. The UNC accepted the Communist concession on its demand and declined to agree to the Communist demand on the other matter. It worked—but only once.

The Communists were either amazingly unimaginative or severely restricted when it came to administrative matters. Every suggestion without exception for expediting the progress of the negotiations was made by the UNC representatives. And that wasn't because they jumped the gun, either. On a number of occasions the UNC representatives would ask the Communists for a suggestion as to how some administrative matter should be handled. The Communists would come right back and ask for the UNC opinion. It would be given to them, and the next day they would agree to it, usually with some minor and unimportant modification made just to show that they had had a hand in reaching the decision. Incidentally, Navy Lieutenant Horace G.

Underwood, the senior UNC interpreter, stated that he had found it necessary to adopt the policy of intentionally inserting at least one fairly obvious error in all interpretations on which agreement was required, because then the Communists would be satisfied when they corrected the error, whereas, if there was no error, they invariably proposed some change in substance. More inferiority complex?

If any reader of this article should ever have the necessary but exhausting chore of negotiating with representatives of a Communist nation, he undoubtedly will encounter many of the techniques discussed here. For it is safe to say that Communist negotiating techniques are as immutable as the laws of nature.