

May 23, 1952

Despatch No. 652, American Consulate, Calcutta, India, to the Department of State, Washington, 'Transmitting Memorandum of Conversation between Consular Office and Prince Peter of Greece regarding Tibet'

Citation:

"Despatch No. 652, American Consulate, Calcutta, India, to the Department of State, Washington, 'Transmitting Memorandum of Conversation between Consular Office and Prince Peter of Greece regarding Tibet'", May 23, 1952, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Record Group 59, Central Decimal Files, 1950-1954, Box 4227, 793B.00/5-2353, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Obtained by Charles Kraus. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/176385>

Summary:

US Consular Office William Gibson and Prince Peter of Greece discuss developments in Tibet and Indo-Tibetan trade. Princess Irene offers unflattering views on a group of White Russian refugees who exited Xinjiang via Kalimpong and later immigrated to the United States. In a cover note, Evan M. Wilson dismisses Irene's comments but notes that Prince Peter's information was 'quite accurate.'

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan
Transcript - English

DECLASSIFIED Authority NND 822710

CONFIDENTIAL SECURITY INFORMATION (Security Classification)

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMCONSUL, CALCUTTA, INDIA 652 DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

May 23, 1952 DATE

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REF :

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OFFICE OF CHINESE AFFAIRS JUN 5 1951 DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SUBJECT:

Transmitting Memorandum of Conversation Between Consular Officer and Prince Peter of Greece Regarding Tibet.

There is attached a memorandum prepared by Vice Consul W. G. Gibson covering a conversation which he had with Prince Peter of Greece and the latter's wife, Princess Irene, during a recent visit to Kalimpong. This conversation related principally to developments in Tibet, although there was also some mention of the 23 White Russian refugees who recently went to the United States from Calcutta and of whom the Princess appears to be very suspicious. In this connection, the Consulate General is of the opinion that too much reliance should not be placed on the Princess's remarks as she becomes very emotional at times. The Consulate General believes, however, that the information furnished by Prince Peter regarding Tibet is on the whole quite accurate.

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Evan M. Wilson American Consulate General

Enclosure: Memorandum of Conversation

Copy to New Delhi

(Department please pass copy to London.)

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Desp. No. 652
From Calcutta, India

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: HRH Prince Peter of Greece,
HRH Princess Irene of Greece,
Vice Consul William G. Gibson.

PLACE: Prince Peter's residence, Kalimpong, West Bengal

DATE: May 10, 1952.

While in Darjeeling recently I went over to Kalimpong for the day. While there I called Prince Peter from the Himalayan Hotel and he asked me to lunch with him and the Princess Irene.

Prince Peter told me that he and the French Consul General, Pierre Landy, were planning to go on a trek for ten days or two weeks in Sikkim, if possible up to the Tibetan border. He said that his permit had not yet arrived and he seemed dubious as to the possibility of getting permission to go so near Tibet.

The Prince said that he had been talking to a Tibetan trader that morning and that this man had reported that the shooting in Lhasa recently reported in the press had been very serious with "bodies lying about in the street". Prince Peter said he thought there were about 20,000 Chinese troops scattered about Tibet, and that the necessity for feeding them had imposed a very severe strain on the precariously balanced economy of the country. It was this hardship which was being resented by the Tibetans. Prince Peter said that he did not know whether the Tibetan nobles were being very ingenuous and cowardly in collaborating so eagerly with the Chinese Communists or whether they were playing a double game and encouraging the common people to resist the aggression. In any case he said the nobles had turned over their houses to Chinese Communist officials and collaborated in many other ways (for instance, Mary-La Tering, the wife of Jigme, was teaching the Chinese Communists Tibetan). By contrast the common Tibetans were putting up a very brave fight in rebelling against the discipline imposed by the Chinese Communist invaders and were making it necessary for the Chinese to deprive them of their arms, a very serious thing in Tibet where everyone is traditionally armed, and to maintain a very strict guard over all important points.

I asked Prince Peter what trade there was between India and Tibet at the moment. He said that the Himalayan Syndicate * was sending quantities of shovels, pick-axes and boots into Tibet.

*Controlled by Yangpel Pangdatshang.

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 From Calcutta, India

He was sure that no gasoline or lubricating oil was moving into Tibet, but did say that a Tibetan official had succeeded in getting across the border with five Land Rovers which had been dis-assembled in Gangtok and which reportedly would be re-assembled in Phari Dzong after crossing the pass. Prince Peter said that the Government of India had interposed certain objections to this export of Land Rovers previously imported into India but that it had been unable to stop the shipment for some reason. He thought that the Government of India would not permit any more such shipments.

Prince Peter said that Tibetan wool was still coming to Kalimpong in fairly significant quantities, the reason being that the Kalimpong buyers had advanced the wool traders money and goods against future deliveries and the wool traders were now repaying this by bringing in the wool even though Kalimpong buyers were not very anxious to increase their stocks. Furthermore, since there is practically no other commodity with which to load the mules moving southward, it is just about as cheap to bring in the wool as it is to bring the mules down empty. This might indicate that there is no demand in Tibet for wool and not sufficient Chinese demand to justify overland transport to China.

Princess Irene then joined us and began talking about the White Russian refugees (See Consulate General's despatch No. 51 dated August 2, 1951). She said that the United States had better be careful since these people were by no means anti-Communist. For instance, she said that the woman who had stayed with her had worked for the Soviet Consulate in Urumchi for several months. She also said that some of the White Russians had criminal records and she thought that most of them were not the kind of people who would be welcome in the States. She said it was a pity that they had not gone to Australia. Prince Peter agreed with his wife that these White Russians were not very politically-minded and could not be considered strong enemies of Communism. He and his wife both dwelt at some length on the loss of their horse while the Russian family was staying with them which they believe was a robbery arranged with the Russians' collusion. Princess Irene said that she was going to write to her friends, General William J. Donovan and Katya Tolstoy, warning them against placing too much confidence in the 23 White Russian refugees. However, it appeared to be that she was being somewhat over emotional about this subject as she complained more about the Russians' table manners and personal habits than about anything fundamental. She hinted that the Russians at one time survived by eating those members of the party who had perished.

Princess Irene also said that the Russians would not hesitate to divulge any of the information they had and that they knew all about the late Vice Consul Douglas Mackiernan and the operations in connection with the uranium mines (see secret portion of Consulate General's despatch No. 51 of August 2, 1951).

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From Calcutta, India

Prince Peter has staying with him Dr. Rene Nebesky de Wojkowitz, who is an anthropologist and who is being supported by Prince Peter in return for a certain amount of work which he does for him and for Princess Irene. Dr. de Wojkowitz is doing some work of his own.

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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH □□□ □□

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FROM: AMCONSUL [American Consulate], CALCUTTA, INDIA □□□ □□□ □□□

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TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. □□□ □□□ □□□

May 23, 1952

□□□[stamped: May 26, 1952] □□□

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[signature]

Evan M. Wilson Center
American Consulate General

Enclosure:

Memorandum of Conversation

Copy to New Delhi

(Department please pass copy to London.)

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[...]

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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PARTICIPANTS: □□□ □□□ □□□

HRH Prince Peter of Greece □□□

HRH Princess Irene of Greece □□□

Vice Consul William G. Gibson □□□

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PLACE: □□□ □□□ □□□

Prince Peter's residence, Kalimpong, West Bengal □□□

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