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SIHANOUK COMMENTS ON CHINA, USSR IN TRIBUNE DE GENEVE INTERVIEW

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[Text] Bloody fighting is going on this week in Cambodia. Meanwhile, from his asylum in Peking, Prince Norodom Sihanouk predicts that he will soon be returning to Phnom Penh. Here, in an interview the prince granted him in the Chinese capital, Alexandre Casella reports on the exiled Cambodian sovereign's view of the situation in Asia in general, the balance of forces and the power play, as well as the prospects for a possible restoration of his regime.

[Question] Your Royal Highness, how do you see the military situation in Cambodia today?

[Answer] First of all, I should like to cite the case of South Vietnam. The NFL has been fighting there for more than 10 years, and it still cannot manage to liberate Saigon and other cities. As for us, we have liberated five provinces, and we are everywhere. Our enemies are dug into a handful of towns where they can hold out only because of American air support. So I think that in 16 months we have achieved some fine results. Right now we control two thirds of Cambodia, but the Indochina war is a big war, and we shall need a few more years to free our country. We shall wait for the Americans to pull out, and then we shall gobble our enemies up in a single bite.

[Question] Your Royal Highness, let's talk about the movement you sponsor and direct, the National United Front of Cambodia. When you say "front," you imply that there are various factions involved. What factors unite--or divide--the members of your front?

[Answer] We are a united front of communists, royalists, Sihanoukists, and some socialists who are not communists, not to mention people of differing religious beliefs. Right now, these elements whose common goal is the liberation of the country form a very united front. But I believe, too, that these factions will stay united even after the liberation of the country. Actually, what does the [average] Cambodian want, whether he is red or pink? First of all, he wants the country's independence and neutrality. Even the communists want independence. They don't want to become satellites of China, or of the USSR, or of Vietnam. What we want first is independence, then real democracy, and social justice that comes not from the fusion of the classes, but from the equality of classes. Of course it may turn out that, after liberation, the communists will try to oust the others from power, as happened in Czechoslovakia with Masaryk. Obviously I can't tell you what the communists will do after liberation, but so far they tell me that they will respect the other political parties.

[Question] What kind of aid is China giving you?

[Answer] China is giving us all kinds of aid, which enables us to exist as a state. We have a national budget, the money for which comes from China as a long-term, no-interest loan. This budget enables us to maintain diplomatic relations, and 26 countries have already recognized us. Besides that, we have a government, an administration, and an army. We also get help from North Korea and from Cuba, which has just sent us several hundred weapons. Right now in Cambodia we have 50,000 purely Cambodian fighting men. Before, there were a great many Vietnamese units helping us, but now our units are overwhelmingly Cambodian, and we don't even have any more Vietnamese advisers or instructors. China would be helping us even more if it weren't for the transportation problem. Our weakness, I admit, is transportation difficulties. Our Vietnamese friends have their own needs to take care of, and as a consequence a great deal of China's material aid has not yet been brought into Cambodia. You have to reckon with

the American bombing along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, as well as the floods that recently ravaged North Vietnam. But in spite of this, we can say that, with China's help, we are going to win this war, because China is not like the 7th Fleet, that can weigh anchor and leave this part of the world. China will always be there to give us whatever we need. I will add that the military aid China is giving us is free. Chairman Mao Tse-tung told me so, and I like the way he put it: "We are not cannon salesmen. As for the money, we shall lend it to you, but as for the arms and ammunition, that is a gift from the Chinese people."

[Question] In a few months the American president will be a guest in Peking. Doesn't President Nixon's presence in the Chinese capital shock you?

[Answer] That doesn't shock me. I've been in China for more than a year, and Prime Minister Chou En-lai doesn't hide much from me. So I was already prepared for this development, and I can even say that I am glad Nixon is coming to Peking. Besides, Prime Minister Chou En-lai told me, "For our part, Taiwan can wait. We know that Taiwan will come back to us some day, but it can wait, because nobody is dying there, whereas the war in Indochina is causing tremendous suffering. So for us, the main thing is to help our Indochinese brothers and get this war over with as quickly as possible." As for us, as Cambodians, we demand the total, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of American forces from Indochina. We want to be let alone, and Chou En-lai will tell Nixon so. So we have nothing to lose by letting the Chinese have a conversation with the Americans. If Nixon won't agree, we shall keep fighting the war, and the Chinese will help us until we win. And if by chance China manages to hurry the American pullout from Indochina, that will be so much the better for us.

[Question] Your Royal Highness, where do you stand in your relations with Moscow? Do you still hope to get recognition from the Russians?

[Answer] We don't expect anything from the Russians any more. I think that those bridges have been pretty well burnt, even though we are fighting side by side with the socialist Vietnamese and the Lao leftists, who are both aided and recognized by the USSR. We should like to get the same favors from the Russians, but the USSR, I don't know why, wants nothing to do with us. Recently, a month ago, the USSR said to me, "Yes, we do so want something to do with you. We don't want to recognize your royal government, but we could recognize you as a front, and even give you economic and military aid." Well, we told the Russians that we don't travel that road. We don't want to be recognized as a front, but as a government. That is all we're asking you for. We are not asking for your aid, only that you recognize us as the Royal Government of Cambodia. And this is the point the Russians won't budge on. They offer to send us aid, but you see there is Chinese aid that still hasn't got to us in Cambodia. We have more aid than we know what to do with. We have more than we need. There is only one kind of aid we need, and that is to be recognized as the legitimate government of Cambodia. Anybody who will not make that gesture is no friend of ours.

[Question] The Russians, like France, have interests in Southeast Asia. Don't you think that it is because of those interests that they refuse to recognize you?

[Answer] I think it is in their long-range interest to recognize us. But they do not see very far. I know, they are one of the great powers, and I do not mean to say that their governments are not intelligent, quite the contrary, I respect them. But insofar as Cambodia is concerned, I think I know the situation in my country better than they do, and I can tell you that these countries are going to lose their shirts if they bet on Lon Nol, because that horse will never get to the finish line. Well, betting on the wrong horse is the worst thing a government can do.

[Question] Then how do you explain the Soviet attitude?

[Answer] I think the Russians feel like whites, and they don't want the yellow people to get too strong. It would be hard for the USSR not to help North Vietnam, which is in the socialist camp. But I've seen what the Russians are giving Hanoi. The planes, the rockets, the radar--none of it is modern equipment. The Russians haven't given Hanoi a quarter of what they have given Egypt. Why? I'll tell you; it's because the Russians don't want Hanoi to win. They give the Vietnamese just enough to so they won't lose the war, but not enough to win it, even though they could do it. The Russians have a complex about the yellow peril, and by handicapping the Indochinese, they are really aiming at China. And besides, that's why the Americans intervened in Vietnam to start with; they were aiming at China. They wanted to keep China from growing too powerful, and they attacked the Vietnamese. With the Russians, it's the same thing. They refuse to help the Cambodians because they're afraid of the Chinese.

[Question] Would you agree to a negotiated settlement of the Cambodian problem? Would it be possible for the contending forces in Cambodia to meet in a conference along the lines of the Paris conference?

[Answer] No. There is no possibility of our doing what the Vietnamese have done. The people in Phnom Penh have stated that they will never sit down at a conference beside our government, and we feel the same about it.

[Question] You don't see any prospect, then, of a coalition government?

[Answer] That is absolutely out. We are the only legitimate government. If people want a coalition government, let the other factions come join us and participate in our government.

[Question] But you don't rule out taking back some of the elements from Lon Nol's government, do you?

[Answer] Of course, we welcome them if they want to join us. For example, if one fine day Mr Cheng Heng, who--illegally, for that matter--is taking my place in Phnom Penh as chief of state, were to join us, we could make him minister or something of the sort in our government. But if Sirik Matak were to leave Phnom Penh and come to Peking, we could make him, for example, one of the deputy prime ministers in our government. Or even Lon Nol, if he comes; we can take them all, even though they are war criminals who have caused a great many innocent people to die, and who have destroyed the country for dollars, we can pardon them if they come over to support the legitimate government. And so the way is still open for a political settlement, but on condition that the principle of our legitimacy is not violated.

[Question] Your Royal Highness, you have stated that you plan to retire when your forces have won victory. So whether you win or lose, the Sihanouk era is over. Under those conditions, why go on fighting?

[Answer] What, after all, I can't end my career with a sentence of death from Lon Nol! I shall have to rehabilitate myself in the eyes of history and of Cambodia. Rehabilitating Cambodia in its neutrality, in its independence, and its territorial integrity, is rehabilitating myself in the eyes of history. I want to end my life with a victory, then I shall have a good name in history. But if I go on as chief of state after victory, I run the risk of being pushed out the window by the communists, like Masaryk, or I might be imprisoned for revisionism or deviationism. When Cambodia won its independence, I was a national hero. Then the Lon Nol gang branded me a national traitor. So I shall become a national hero once again after the liberation, and I want to end my career then. Like some of the bicycle racers, like Jacques Anquetil, for example. Right now, you've got that Belgian, Merckx, who is winning all the races, but if he's smart he will end his career while he's still winning. It isn't that I lack physical or moral courage, but what I have to do is to rehabilitate myself and retire in beauty, in an exit that it is, if not triumphant, at least honorable. Obviously, it is possible that I might go on for a few years after liberation as chief of state. Even the communists have asked me to. During the reconstruction period, Cambodia may still need me to represent the nation, to accept credentials from ambassadors, to do public relations. But I shall have nothing to do with domestic politics. That has cost me too much already.

[Question] So your departure would mark the end of the Cambodian monarchy.

[Answer] Of course, of course. But after all, you have to move with the times. As King Farouk of Egypt used to say, pretty soon there will be only five kings left; the king of spades, the king of clubs, the king of hearts, the king of diamonds and the king of England. It's too bad, because I'd like Cambodia to be a kingdom, even without me. Besides, Cambodians are very deeply attached to the monarchy. My communists are doing everything they can to quench that flame in the hearts of my supporters. I don't blame them. All's fair in war. They're communists, and they're doing their duty. I let them do it. Why? Because I'm tired, and I'm disgusted with people. When you see people who owe you everything dirty you, drag you in the mud--taking over the government is nothing--but to be so unjust and unfair to me, that's what disgusts me. I am struggling for the liberation of my country. I have the strength to do that. But to fight to keep myself in power? No, I won't fight.