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## ✓ SIHANOUK STILL HOPEFUL OF SOVIET RECOGNITION

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[Article by Ahmed Baba Miske: "Sihanouk Told Me..."]

[Excerpts] The overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the establishment in Phnom Penh of a pro-American government in the hands of the CIA, however things may look for the moment, can only lead to a serious American defeat. These two events were a princely gift--and that is indeed the proper term--to the Cambodian revolutionary forces. These events tossed Sihanouk over into their camp, and triggered a process inevitably leading to a widening of the Indochina war. In a word, they created a new Vietnam, and did it just when Washington was trying in every way to end the first one.

A man with a singularly fascinating personality is right in the middle of these events, and from now on he will serve as a living symbol of the failure of U.S. policy in Indochina. He is Prince Norodom Sihanouk. I talked with him in Paris while his old regime was living out its last days. What does he think of the new ones? Has he changed as a result of the extraordinary events that have occurred in the space of brief months in his own situation as well as that of his country?

When my old friend Chan Youran (former Cambodian ambassador to Dakar, Nouakchott, and Konakry, Minister of Education and Youth in the new government) gave me the Prince's invitation to meet with him, my decision was quickly made. I took the first plane for Peking. During my brief stay in the Chinese capital, I talked several times with the Cambodian Chief of State. We discussed a wide range of topics. This is the substance of those talks.

Question: Your Excellency, the policy you designed and implemented for 15 years was Cambodia's best guarantee of neutrality. Now that the Americans have egged on the Lon Nol clique to perpetrate its coup, they have yet another Vietnam on their hands. How do you explain their behaving with such consummate stupidity?

Answer: You think, as does everyone else, that this was madness. But they think it is just fine, and that it is going to "shorten the war." This is the old hawk line, which holds that the Viet Cong were unbeatable because they had, the hawks claimed, inviolable bases in Cambodia, what they called "sanctuaries," which must at all costs be destroyed to win the war and thus save lives ... American lives, of course, which are the only ones they care about.

Nixon has never been a dove, but was so happy over his election that during the early months of his administration he played the dove. Now, though, the mask has been ripped off. But long before Nixon's day, the hawks were calling for the invasion of Cambodia. First they got Johnson's permission to bomb our borders, then the "right" to cross them in hot pursuit. What they were really after, of course, was to tip Cambodia into their camp.

I have in my files, which are unfortunately back in Phnom Penh in the hands of the Lon Nol clique, precise details on the reports Johnson was getting from his hawkish advisers. To them, Cambodia, quite apart from the existence of alleged "sanctuaries," was a breach in their Asian strategy, in that new "wall" against China which they had built out of Rahman's Malaysia, Thailand, South Vietnam, South Korea, and the Philippines and the rest. They felt that Cambodia constituted a flaw in this strategy, and they also knew from having tried every trick in the book, that they could do nothing in Cambodia as long as I was there. They therefore concluded that Sihanouk had to be swept out. But this was not easy to do with all the people behind me. They looked for a breach, and that is how they found Sirik Matak. His dream was to give the throne back to the Sisowath, whose descendant he is. Sirik Matak used his visits to Tokyo and Manila (where I made him ambassador at his request) to denounce to the Americans what he called my policy of "collusion" with the communists, and to set up close ties with the CIA.

And it was Matak who was Lon Nol's evil spirit. Apparently Matak did not succeed in persuading Lon Nol to betray me until the beginning of this year.

To get back to the stupidity of the Americans, it has to be great indeed, because, for all their formidable intelligence machinery, they were sure that Cambodia could fall without a shot being fired, and that Cambodian resistance could be easily liquidated. They were almost the only ones who were surprised to find that this was not so.

Question: The Americans were at the bottom of still another victory for the revolutionary forces: the Summit Conference of the Indochinese peoples. How will the solidarity sealed at this conference be shown in practical matters?

Answer: You know, the resolutions of that conference are not just pious hopes, because, first of all, they reflect a solidarity that was already a practical reality, and which grew even stronger after the 18 March coup. It was there even before the coup and, as you know, people always accused me of being a "phony neutral." That was false, because Cambodia was really neutral in the sense that it did not directly participate in the war (except when forced to stave off American attacks, but even so, this was a limited response), neutral to the degree that it was not a belligerent.

Without overstepping the bounds of non-belligerency, within the limits compatible with its neutrality, it lent support, within the framework of Indochinese solidarity, to the just struggles of peoples beset by American imperialist aggression. How could we, after all, take the same attitude toward these peoples fighting in their own homeland to free themselves, to thrust out foreign aggression, and this imperialism that claims to lay down the law in other people's countries and sows death and destruction in Vietnam, Laos, and even in Cambodia? Every day we had casualties to mourn, and grave threats to face.

Although we did not openly condemn American aggression, we took no part in the war against America, and our neutrality was recognized by the world, in the sense that we were not aligned on either side. Now Lon Nol and his American masters, instead of making Cambodia "more neutral," as they claim without really convincing anybody, have dragged it squarely into the midst of total war.

How can we stay neutral now? Neutral how? And with whom? We have no other choice but to fight against the American aggressors and their lackeys, like the other Indochinese peoples who were its victims before us, and to fight in close solidarity with them. Cambodia will nevertheless be neutral again--because that is what all Cambodians want--if the aggression against it ceases, but it will not abandon solidarity with the other struggling peoples.

They tell us, "But did you not create a united Indochina command?"

For us, there was never any question of a united command. We are three sovereign peoples. The DRV has separate a status. What we want, later on, is neutrality. So do the Laotians. Even during the war, we feel that everybody should have his own status and retain a degree of freedom of action and, as the joint statement of the conference puts it, we thoroughly respect the principle that the liberation of each country must be undertaken entirely by the people and government of that country. Hence, insofar as Cambodia is concerned, it is the defense minister, Chieu Samphan, it is the FUNK Government which direct operations now going on in Cambodia. If we need help from our Vietnamese or Lao brothers, that aid will be integrated into the Cambodian command in Cambodia. On the battleground in South Vietnam, it is the PRGHSV which has the last word. In Laos, it is Prince Souphanouvong and the Patriotic Front who command. There is mutual aid, but each keeps command on his own side of his borders.

Question: Shouldn't the CIA plot fomented against you be cause for concern to all governments not strictly committed to Washington, since even a neutral, nationalist regime which nobody suspected of communism can no longer feel safe from American attack? Do you hope, for this reason, that soon other countries will follow the 10 or so which have already recognized the FUNK Government, and which are almost all African or Asian?

Answer: I think you are correct insofar as the uneasiness of other countries is concerned, and you are not the only one to say so. Mr. Ali Bhutto, former Pakistani foreign minister, said just the other day: "But who is there to say that now that Cambodia has been invaded, it will not soon be somebody else's turn, one of ours? Now we all know that nobody is safe from American imperialism..."

Well, the only way to prevent other coups like this, the only way to discourage them, is to foil their criminal undertaking in Cambodia, to prove to the Americans that crime does not pay. There are two ways to do this: the first is to oppose them with armed force, and this is what our country, with the help of friendly nations, and particularly with the help of China, which is providing us with arms, is doing now. The second is to hand Lon Nol a political defeat and isolate the Americans by recognizing our government of national union. We hope that many more countries will do this. Those who are already convinced, our Asian, African, and Arab friends, as well as others, will work with us to convince others, and I think we can expect at least 10 more recognitions in the weeks ahead....

Question: While you were in Moscow, the Soviet Union denounced the coup at the outset, and seemed to recognize you as chief of state of Cambodia. How do you explain the fact that, despite of this early attitude, they have yet to recognize the government formed under your aegis?

Answer: My compatriots and I are not quite sure what to make of this delay. Some "speculators" believe the Soviet Union is angry with me for allegedly being too friendly with China. I do not deny that I am a loyal friend of China, but have always looked upon the Soviet Union as a great and good friend, and my friends in Moscow can vouch for that. Just recently, I stopped in Moscow to greet the Soviet leaders and talk with them. What I would like to emphasize here is that I never have--and never would--interfere in the affairs of my friends, because the Sino-Soviet quarrel is none of our business.

Having said that, I am still optimistic, because I do not believe that the Soviet Union can delay its decision on whether to back the Lon Nol clique or FUNK, which represents all the struggling Cambodian people. Why should it [hesitate], when it has the most cordial relations with our Vietnamese allies in the north and south, and when it was among the first to recognize the PRGRSV? After all, the Saigon puppets are certainly more representative and more independent (if one can use that word in relation to them) than those in Phnom Penh.

I have also consulted friends of both the Soviet Union and ourselves, Arab and African friends in particular, and all told me they were certain that the Soviet Union could not break faith with its reputation as a great anti-imperialist power, and that eventually it would recognize us. Besides, they have already made the first moves toward doing so. Listen to the answer of a Phnom Penh spokesman to American reporters who asked him if the Soviet Union would recognize the Sihanouk government: "Don't worry, the Russian won't dirty their hands as the Chinese are doing."

I do not believe that the Soviets are particularly happy at hearing these slaves of American imperialism flatter them, nor at having "clean hands" according to the standards of the executioners of the Cambodian people, the bloody fascist Phnom Penh clique. This means that further delay would be neither in the interests of the Soviets nor in the interests of the Indochinese people's liberation struggle.

Question: In what way is Prime Minister Penh Nouth's government, formed under your auspices, a government of national union?

Answer: Well, the best proof of this is the fact that the Phnom Penh critics call it "heterogenous," which is false, because it is solidly united in its determination to fight imperialism, and to give that struggle first priority. But this means that it represents the mainstream of Cambodian opinion, in line with the FUNK program, whose only requirement for membership is a will to free Cambodia from the imperialists and their lackeys, whether those members be communists, anti-communists, or something else. We hope, furthermore, that this unity so deeply sealed, thanks to the Americans, will grow stronger in the struggle, and that when victory is ours, FUNK will be able to build a free and democratic Cambodia, cleaned of all parasites who hastened so eagerly to the side of Lon Nol and the Americans.

Question: Do you think France will recognize the FUNK government?

Answer: France is in a very difficult position, you know. It has tremendous "cultural interests" in Cambodia, plus economic interests of even greater importance. There are the French plantations, trading houses, all kinds of businesses and even mixed corporations (with the state owning part) such as the oil refinery, the Angkor Hotel (300 rooms) that has just been completed, and more. And there are also French people living in Cambodia--this is very important--some 5,000, who want to stay there, who consider it their home, and who cannot imagine being uprooted to France.

As a matter of fact, some of these Frenchmen are up in arms against Mr Maurice Schumann because he praised me, and condemned the French Government for not openly taking a position in favor of Lon Nol. It is not that they have anything against me particularly, but come what may, they want Lon Nol to let them stay in Cambodia, trade freely, etc. This is why it is hard to imagine the French Government coming out against Lon Nol. But getting along with Lon Nol is not easy either, for several reasons. First, intelligent Frenchmen know that Lon Nol has no future, and that the Americans, who boast so loudly today, will not be sticking out their chests so far one day. If it is not in 1970 or 1971, it will be in 1972 or 1973, and in the end they will have to go home. And so it is better to work for the future, the Cambodian people, the FUNK. That is the long-range plan. But even now, the French are caught between the hammer and anvil, because Lon Nol is not the only one and if they side too much with him, if they stand up for him, they risk a clash with the revolutionary forces that hold the provinces and against which Lon Nol's protection will not do much good. Yet, siding with FUNK would mean leaving themselves open to reprisals from the Lon Nol clique, that gang of unscrupulous bandits who would fall like vultures on the defenseless French residents.

Another factor is that the French feel uneasy about the Americans. The United States has already taken over France's place in Vietnam and Laos, and now it is Cambodia's turn. Here, you know, the French had a really privileged position until now. Already the opportunists in Phnom Penh are beginning to turn their backs on the French, who are already out of style, because they are awaiting the greatest dispenser of manna, Uncle Sam. With everything to lose by making a decision, and everything to lose, maybe, if they make no decision, I think the French will choose to let things go along as they are. They will perhaps allow the two sides to argue, even in Paris, on the political and propaganda level, and will wait to make any clear-cut decision until there is no possible doubt as to the battle's outcome . . . probably until after the rainy season and above all after the Americans have withdrawn.

Cambodia's future attitude, of course, will depend on how France behaves toward us. As for the FUNK, it is determined to respect the interests of the French if they respect us. I have already said as much, in the name of the FUNK, to Ambassador Manach.

Question: Your Excellency, won't the new government and the FUNK have some problems operating normally on the financial level?

Answer: I am glad you asked that question because we like to make things quite clear. China has generously offered us hospitality, but we are determined not to "sponge off" China. We think too much of our dignity and independence to do that. This is why we have come to an agreement on something that suits us completely: China will give us a friendly loan, without interest (as it will for all third world friendly peoples), to be repaid after victory. This loan will enable us to run our government, whose needs are actually very modest. All of us, as FUNK members, have agreed to work without compensation, receiving only the barest living expenses. The only relatively sizable expenses we shall incur will be the cost of travel to make our cause known.

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As for our needs inside the country, our fighting men live in total symbiosis with the people, and, as the FUNK organizes the liberated regions, our administration will have regular resources there allowing it to operate in the service of the people. That leaves the problem of arms. But in this area our Chinese friends have told us not to worry.

Question: Do you mean that arms supplies will be free?

Answer: Absolutely. Chairman Mao Tse-tung, who was kind enough to receive me the other day, told me: "We shall lend you money for the business of your state. But as for arms, we are not in the habit of selling them, we are not traffickers in arms. We cannot sell you weapons, we can only give them to you."

As for transporting them, that is free, too. Shipped first by China, the arms are then forwarded by our Vietnamese or Lao allies.