BELGRADE UPSET BY THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA

By Slobodan Stankovic

Summary: The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia has aroused great concern in Yugoslavia. On the one hand, both Cambodia and Vietnam are nonaligned countries and they are, in addition, communist-rulled. The fact that Vietnam has been supported by Moscow and Cambodia by Peking has led to a war between two ideological trends hostile to each other. The Yugoslavs are anxious that there might be a revival of the "Brezhnev Doctrine" and for this reason have vigorously protested against the invasion of foreign territories, regardless of what social system prevails in them.

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No doubt Yugoslavia is one among several countries in the world which have been extremely upset by Cambodia falling into the hands of the Vietnamese-backed Cambodian rebels who claim to have captured Phnom Penh. Yugoslav concern stems from two main factors: first, that two countries belonging to the nonaligned movement have been involved in a bloody war, with one country invading the other; and secondly, that two communist-ruled countries (Vietnam supported by Moscow and Cambodia by Peking) have been fighting each other for ideological reasons.

For the time being, the Yugoslavs are emphasizing the first point, namely the war between two nonaligned countries, while their much greater fear -- the revival of the so-called "Brezhnev Doctrine" justifying the subjugation of a communist country opposing Moscow-type "real socialism" -- can only be detected between the lines. In a recent commentary about the Vietnamese-Cambodian war a Zagreb daily said:

It is difficult to say precisely what has been happening in the relations between Cambodia and Vietnam, but one must say in principle that the invasion of foreign territories and the overthrow of the government of an independent and sovereign country (regardless of what has been said about that government abroad) cannot be accepted in contemporary international politics, especially if nonaligned countries are in question. The invasion should be condemned not only for this particular reason but rather as a precedent which might endanger the security of other countries. This is why one should again refer to the principles of peaceful solution of conflicts between nonaligned countries, not only on account of the countries involved in a war and of other nonaligned states, but also because of individual superpowers who have been using such conflicts for their own benefit. (1)

Generally speaking, the Yugoslav media have concentrated on reporting about the course of the war, but without concealing their pro-Cambodian attitude. The fact that UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim has postponed his trip to Cambodia met with criticism in Yugoslavia. Milika Sundic, a Radio Zagreb commentator, sharply criticized the UN Security Council, saying that it "has rarely reacted in good time to the appeal of whichever member country of the world organization has its national sovereignty and territorial integrity brought into question, and the case of Cambodia also confirms such practice." (2) Sundic also expressed his concern that two nonaligned countries had been involved in a mutual war, as was the

(1) Vecernji List (Zagreb), 6 and 7 January 1979.
(2) Radio Zagreb, 6 January 1979, 1500 hours.
case with Ethiopia and Somalia. Sundic said that "the United Nations' inability to react in good time is grist to the mill of the big powers in finding and imposing their own solutions which, as a rule, act to the detriment of the weaker countries."

Fear of "Brezhnev Doctrine"

Without mentioning the "Brezhnev Doctrine" by name, Sundic also stressed that "worst of all is the belief that occupation of foreign territory and the forcible overthrow of governments which are not to someone's taste can solve the problems which underlie armed conflicts." Sundic concluded by saying that "force has won the day over reason, which is too great a price in relation to everything that such a policy could bring to the peoples of Southeast Asia and to peace in the world as a whole."

Former Cambodian head of state Norodom Sihanouk, a great friend of Tito and of Yugoslavia, sent a letter from Beijing (Peking) to the Yugoslav president about the invasion of Cambodia. (3) Reporting from Beijing the Yugoslav media quoted the Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping) as saying that the "Vietnamese aggression" against democratic Cambodia "is bound to be a cause for concern to all nations interested in preserving world peace, security, and stability." China is more concerned about the situation than some other countries, Deng added, noting in explanation that "Vietnam persists in its provocations against China." In his view, the situation in Cambodia is not an "isolated incident" but rather part of a broader strategy. (4)

No doubt, this is a point over which Belgrade completely agrees with Beijing, although the Yugoslav leaders would want to avoid being too closely linked with China. In a series of articles which began on January 6 a Zagreb daily is attempting to explain to its readers the real reasons for the Vietnamese-Cambodian war. It is a fact that serious clashes on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border began just at the time a group of Yugoslav journalists was visiting Cambodia. The Cambodians did not conceal their anxiety about the Vietnamese attacks, while the Vietnamese explained to the Yugoslav journalists (who visited Hanoi after Phnom-Penh) that, it was possible "for a small country /like Cambodia/ with an army a tenth the size of the Vietnamese, to become the aggressor." The Vietnamese leaders said this was possible "because the Phnom-Penh rulers had been receiving great support from some 'big powers.'" These "big powers" were not mentioned by name, but -- the Yugoslav reporters noted -- it was clear that China was meant. (5)

In another report the same Zagreb daily described three groups among the Cambodian rulers:

(3) Tanjug, 7 January 1979.
(4) Ibid., 5 January 1979.
There was a group of very prominent leaders who could not accept a definite break with Hanoi; there was another group advocating closer relations with Peking; and finally the third group (the strongest one), which advocated reliance on one's own forces. This last group was supported by the army of the Khmer Rouge. With the victory of this group the period of mutual settling of accounts began, during which many prominent leaders of the Cambodian Communist Party disappeared, especially those who had not taken an active part during the war of liberation as members of the Khmer Rouge Army. (6)

In an article dealing with the nonaligned summit, scheduled to take place in Havana next September, the Yugoslav CC weekly Komunist (1 January 1979) said that the next eight months would be devoted "to efforts designed to prevent conflicts" among nonaligned countries. It added that "the advocates of the bloc division of the world have been continually trying to divide nonaligned countries and eliminate them from the international arena, regarding them as obstacles to the implementation of their own plans and alliances." After the fall of Cambodia Yugoslavia efforts to save the nonaligned movement are likely to be redoubled, since Yugoslavia's own future is now also at stake.

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(6) Ibid., 7 January 1979.