

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

RFE Background Report/180
[Yugoslavia]
17 August 1978

HUA KUN-TSUNG IN YUGOSLAVIA, "DISTANT WATER" VISITING THE
BALKANS

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Summary: On August 21, China's supreme leader Hua Kuo-feng will begin his official visit to Yugoslavia, after having spent several days in Somalia. Hua is returning Tito's visit to China of 30 August to 8 September 1977. Chinese-Yugoslav relations have suffered badly because of Peking's staunch loyalty to Moscow from 1949 to 1961. The Chinese were stubbornly followed the Soviet anti-Titoist line and agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Belgrade in January 1955 only after Nikita Khrushchev persuaded them to do so. Later, however, after relations between Peking and Moscow deteriorated, the Chinese demonstrated their willingness to improve relations with Yugoslavia, culminating in Tito's 1977 triumphal visit to China. Still, Yugoslav communist leaders were a bit disappointed after the Chinese rejected official normalization of inter-party relations. Hua's visit to Yugoslavia is expected to lead to a full-fledged normalization of relations on both party and state levels.

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After visiting Romania (August 16-21) China's supreme leader, Mao Tse-tung, will pay a visit to Yugoslavia beginning on August 31, in return for Tito's visit to China last year (30 August-6 September 1971). Mao's visit to Belgrade will mark the final reconciliation, not only between China and Yugoslavia as states, but also between the Chinese and Yugoslav parties. The expected (and indirectly even announced) renewal of party relations between Belgrade and Peking during Tito's 1971 visit in China failed to take place. At the time, the Yugoslavs did not conceal their disappointment, particularly since the Yugoslav information media had spoken of an "ideological dialogue" between Tito and Mao in Peking. Still, the triumphal welcome accorded to Tito in China did indicate that Yugoslav-Chinese relations had entered upon a phase which, in the long run, had to lead to a renewal of party relations.

However satisfied they may be about Mao Tse-tung's impending visit, which would increase Yugoslavia's political image in the international arena, the Yugoslavs have been aware that the Chinese interest in the Balkans has been geared to counter Moscow's "hegemonic plans" in that part of Europe, rather than to any real help for the small nations living there. No doubt, this is one of the main reasons for Tito's anticipated visit to Moscow to see Brezhnev soon after Mao leaves Yugoslavia. China is far away, while the mighty Soviet Union is very close to Yugoslavia's borders. The Yugoslavs could hardly forget the most memorable utterance of China's late Prime Minister Chou En-lai, who told a Yugoslav journalist in 1971 that small communist countries in Europe (by implication, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Albania) could not expect anything more than great sympathy from Peking:

We will never betray our friends. We sympathize with small and medium-sized countries. . . . We sympathize with them, and we shall extend as much support to them as we can. However, we are far away from Europe and, as you know, one of our popular proverbs says: "Distant water cannot quench fire." (1)

Of course, it would have been unrealistic for Tito and his followers to expect anything more than sincere (although calculated) sympathy from Peking for their struggle against Moscow's hegemony. Nevertheless, Chou's August 1971 statement certainly gave them food for thought. In the first place, the relations between Belgrade and Peking suffered badly from two diametrically opposed consequences of the Chinese attitude toward the Soviet Union. In the era of the Moscow-Peking "honeymoon," the Chinese considered the Yugoslav communists, headed by Tito, as "dwarfs kneeling in the mud and trying with all their might to spit at a giant standing on a lofty mountain." (2) After Chinese-Soviet relations turned to open hostility, the Yugoslav communists became "dear friends."

(1) Vijesti (Belgrade), 28 August 1971.

(2) People's Daily (Peking), 26 June 1958.

Ups and Downs in Belgrade-Peking Relations

Both the relations between Moscow and Peking and those between Belgrade and Peking have not developed "normally," either in the positive, or in the negative sense of that word. It goes without saying that the relations between Moscow and Belgrade have also had numerous ups and downs since the reconciliation between Tito and Khrushchev in May 1955. However, unlike Peking's extreme sensitivity toward any political issue that concerns relations with the Soviet Union, the Russians and the Yugoslavs have never played their "Chinese card" too strongly in fighting each other, either bilaterally, or within the international communist movement. True, the Yugoslavs have been encouraged by the Chinese resistance to Soviet aggressiveness and "hegemonic plans," but they have never forgotten Chou's remark about "distant water" which "cannot quench fire," the more so since the Chinese -- unable to "quench fire" -- have begun showing interest in "inciting fire" in the relations between the individual communist countries and parties and the Soviet Union.

This is the main reason why the Yugoslav leaders, however happy they may be over their full-fledged rapprochement with China, have remained rather reserved, fearing a far-reaching conflict with Moscow over China. In their statements, the Yugoslav leaders and commentators usually emphasize the fact that they maintain good relations with both Moscow and Peking. Even so far as the latest deterioration in the relations between Peking and Tirana are concerned, the Yugoslav leaders have been trying to play it cool, undoubtedly afraid that a rapprochement between the Russians and the Albanians would weaken Yugoslavia's position in the Balkans, a position already affected by the Yugoslav-Bulgarian conflict over Macedonia. After all, the Chinese, in the past, have changed their minds several times.

Following Mao's assumption to power in October 1949, the Chinese leaders immediately rejected any contact with Belgrade and Tito, whom they considered a "heretic" involved in a merciless struggle with China's "dearest friends and allies," the Russians. On 3 October 1949, only four days after the Chinese People's Republic was proclaimed, Tito hurried to recognize the "People's Government of China," saying in the official statement that "the magnificent victory of the Chinese people means the realization of a really free and independent China." (3) The Chinese "ignored this recognition, because of their full agreement with the Cominform's policy against Yugoslavia," (4) i.e., with Moscow's anti-Titoist line. How loyal Mao was to Stalin is best seen from the fact that, between 1949 and 1954, the Chinese made great efforts to be recognized by any government in the world.

Moscow Promoted the Belgrade-Peking Reconciliation

How unpredictable the relations among communist parties and countries have been can easily be grasped if one remembers that Mao

(3) Borba (Belgrade), 6 October 1949.

(4) Zvezdoverniki (Belgrade), No. 9, September 1961.

decided to establish state and party relations with Yugoslavia only after the Khrushchev-Nikoyev-Belgrade visit to Peking in October 1954. It was the Soviet leaders who presented Tito and his colleagues as 'good guys' who deserved the full trust of all communist countries and parties in the world. Less than three months later, on 30 January 1955, the Chinese and Yugoslav governments simultaneously published an announcement in Peking and Belgrade that diplomatic relations between the two countries had been arranged. (5) Good relations between Moscow and Belgrade between May 1955 and November 1956 led automatically to good (although not overwhelmingly warm) relations between Peking and Belgrade.

After another worsening of relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, following the Soviet military intervention in Hungary in November 1956, relations between China and Yugoslavia also worsened. Yet, no break in diplomatic relations followed, because the Russians, too, continued to maintain their party and state relations with Yugoslavia. The situation abruptly changed in April 1958, however, when Moscow expressed an exceptionally critical attitude to the Draft program of the Yugoslav party (published in March 1958), because of which both Moscow and Peking (joined by all other ruling communist parties) refused to send their party delegations to the Seventh Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, held in Ljubljana between 22 and 26 April 1958.

At the beginning of May 1958, the Chinese published a sharp attack against the Yugoslav party program under the title "Modern Revisionism Must be Criticized." (6) The Yugoslavs answered four days later in even sharper tone. (7) From that time on, increasingly sharp attacks and counterattacks ensued, leading to the previously mentioned accusation that Tito was "a dwarf kneeling in the mud" and trying "to spit at a giant standing on a lofty mountain." Encouraged by Peking, the Albanian leaders had tremendously increased their anti-Titoist attacks, happy to have both "giants" (the Soviet Union and China) on their side. Soon afterward, however, the "two giants" began "spitting" at each other behind the scenes, as the Yugoslavs made publicly known in January 1959. (8) However, the Yugoslav claims about the rift between the Russians and the Chinese proved to be correct only two years later, even though Tito could not yet profit from it, because Peking continued to demonstrate its anti-Yugoslav attitude, usually using Belgrade as a target when Moscow was really absent.

In the period between 1958 and 1970, Yugoslavia and China maintained their embassies in each other's capital, but they were headed by chargé d'affaires. This was a period during which Chinese-Yugoslav relations were on a very low level: all forms of interstate co-operation,

(5) Politika (Belgrade), 10 January 1955.

(6) People's Daily, 5 May 1958.

(7) Komunist (Belgrade), 9 May 1958.

(8) Borba, 30 January 1958.

Including cultural, scientific, and technical co-operation, interstate visits and contacts between sociopolitical organizations were completely frozen. On the other hand, this was a period during which Chinese-Albanian relations were blossoming. In the days of the Chinese "Cultural Revolution" (notably in 1967), anti-Yugoslav demonstrations were staged in Peking, but at that time Mao's objection to Tito stemmed from the Yugoslav leader's improving relations with Moscow. It should be recalled that, several years previously, anti-Yugoslav outbursts in Peking were voiced against Tito's anti-Soviet stances.

New Improvement in Yugoslav-Chinese Relations

After the *de facto* dismissal, in 1967, of Liu Shao-chi, formerly president of the Chinese PR, the Chinese adopted the practice (along with occasional anti-Titoist outbursts) of sending greetings on the occasion of Yugoslavia's Day of the Republic (November 29), while the Yugoslavs continued sending their best wishes on the occasion of the October 1 National Day in China. Even messages and expressions of sympathy were exchanged several times, usually in connection with natural disasters. The year 1969 brought gradual changes in the relations between China and Yugoslavia and an abatement of the attacks on Tito. At the beginning of that year, the Chinese increased the number of diplomatic and other staff at their embassy in Belgrade and invited a Yugoslav trade delegation to come to Peking to negotiate the promotion of trade between the two countries.

Finally, in the spring of 1970, the two governments signed an agreement on the exchange of ambassadors, and for the first time in that year, a November 29 reception in the Yugoslav Embassy in Peking was attended by many top-ranking Chinese officials. In June 1970 Yugoslavia's Foreign Minister Mirko Topovac (purged in 1953 as a "liberal") paid an official visit to Peking, while a Chinese trade delegation came to Yugoslavia in September 1971.

During the next six years, i.e., up to Tito's August-September 1972 visit to China, the relations between the two countries improved to such an extent that the Yugoslavs did not conceal their justified hope that party relations would also be reinstated. Before and during Tito's visit to China, the Yugoslav information media openly wrote about the forthcoming renewal of party relations. This did not take place, even though the pretext that Tito was visiting Peking solely in his capacity as the President of the Republic was dropped. The Chinese newspapers referred to him by his real title: President of the Yugoslav Republic and of the League of Communists. This meant that, after the ill-famed 1963 article in the *People's Daily* headlined "Is Yugoslavia a Socialist Country?", the enthusiastic reception accorded Tito in China indicated that, for Mao's successors, Yugoslavia has become not only a real, but also an extremely valuable socialist country. No doubt the main purpose of Hua Guo-feng's visit is to boost Yugoslavia's vigorously independent foreign policy, not only during Tito's lifetime, but also after he disappears from the political scene.