

Memo to DCI

Yugoslav Reaction to the US-UK
Decision on Trieste

13 October 1953

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: APR 2006

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 October 1953

MEMORANDUM TO DCI

SUBJECT: Yugoslav Reaction to the US-UK Decision on Trieste

1. The Yugoslav reaction to the US-UK decision of 8 October to withdraw from the city of Trieste and Zone A and to turn the area over to Italian control has assumed an increasingly menacing tone in the last few days. Although the first official Yugoslav response, contained in a note of 9 October, appeared relatively mild and referred to action "on the basis of the United Nations Charter," the public demonstrations and particularly the speeches made by Tito on succeeding days have implied a Yugoslav intention to take military action to prevent Italian occupation of Zone A. In his speech on 10 October, Tito specifically threatened that Yugoslav troops would enter Zone A if Italian troops did so.

2. It was to be expected that Tito, in the interests of his domestic prestige, would feel it necessary to make a vigorous show of protest to the US-UK decision. As the head of a one-party state and a regime whose stability rests heavily on his personal stature as a protagonist of Yugoslav national interests, he probably felt that a very vigorous reaction was required if he and his regime were not to lose face with the Yugoslav people. The area of doubt arises over how far he will feel it necessary to go. He is not raising a Yugoslav claim to the whole of the Free Territory. Although the most recent Yugoslav proposal was for an internationalization of the area, in earlier negotiations and again in speeches of the last few days he has shown himself willing to concede the city of Trieste to Italy provided Yugoslavia obtained Zone B together with those portions of Zone A where Slovenes are numerous. Such a solution would isolate Trieste from Italian territory and it is not clear at this point whether Tito would agree to concede an Italian land corridor although the presumption is that he would in return for other concessions.

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3. We believe that Tito's intentions at this time are to force the US and UK to delay implementation of their decision to turn Zone A over to Italy and to bring about negotiations in which some concessions to Yugoslavia might be obtained. These might take the form of adjustments of the zonal boundary, guarantees by Italy for Slovene minority rights and for Yugoslav access to port facilities, and finally an Italian guarantee backed by the US and UK that such a settlement would be definitive and that no new Italian claims in the Istrian area would be raised at a later date. The latest Yugoslav move calling for a four-power conference (US, UK, Italy, Yugoslavia) sustains this estimate of Tito's intentions.

4. We do not believe, despite Tito's bellicose utterances of the last few days, that he would risk a clash with US-UK troops in Trieste. This would be tantamount to a willingness to sacrifice at one stroke his relationship of growing intimacy with the West which has brought him much needed economic and military support. It would throw Yugoslavia back into the isolation in which she found herself in 1948 at the time of the break with Stalin, and from which she has by persistent diplomatic effort regained a position which has enhanced not only her prestige but her security as well. The alternative of returning to the Soviet fold is almost certainly not one which Tito could realistically entertain. He could hardly ever again feel safe in the company of his former Moscow comrades, and in addition such a move would probably raise the most serious difficulties for his regime both in the Yugoslav Communist Party and in the country.

5. Assuming that US-UK plans to withdraw are carried out and Italian troops occupy Zone A, Tito, as a result of his utterances of the last few days, will have to choose between making good his threat to enter Zone A or of ultimately backing down. It seems unlikely, if even a token US-UK force is left in Trieste to guarantee the solution on which the two powers have decided, that he would risk the complications that would follow an attempt to carry out his threat in these circumstances. In a situation in which the Italians were left in sole occupation of Zone A, his behavior can be predicted with considerably less confidence. In the period of probably two to three months before this situation could be brought about other developments could intervene which could affect Tito's decision. We believe, however, that there would probably be great danger of a local Italian-Yugoslav clash if US-UK forces withdraw completely without further concessions to the Yugoslavs.

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6. Italian opinion has been calm thus far and has appeared satisfied to accept the US-UK decision as an adequate fulfillment of Italian claims at this time. The Italians have at once rejected the Yugoslav suggestion for a four-power discussion of the Trieste problem. It seems probable that if the crisis is protracted the Italians will also assume a more bellicose attitude and will make demands which they have put forward in previous negotiations and which have not been met by the US-UK decision to assign them Zone A.

7. Soviet intervention since the development of the new Trieste crisis has taken the form of a protest note to the US, Britain, and France denouncing the US-UK decision as a violation of the Italian peace treaty. The note apparently does not lend support to either the Yugoslav or Italian claims and presumably represents, thus far at least, only a Soviet attempt to capitalize propaganda-wise on the US-UK predicament. It is quite possible that in pursuit of these tactics the USSR will demand that the dispute be referred to the Security Council. The Yugoslavs themselves have already advised the UN that a "threat to peace" exists in the Trieste area.

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