

NIE 15-73

Yugoslavia After Tito

5 July 1973

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: MAY 2006

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# NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

## Yugoslavia after Tito

\*\* ACCOUNTABLE DOCUMENT \*\*  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

~~Secret~~

NIE 15-73  
5 July 1973  
No. 258

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YUGOSLAVIA AFTER TITO

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## YUGOSLAVIA AFTER TITO

## PRÉCIS

Yugoslavia is a divided and deeply troubled land and may become even more so when the aged and ailing Tito departs the scene. But this Estimate concludes that, even without Tito, the odds favor the survival of the Yugoslav federation and a hybrid, non-Soviet form of socialism. Impressive efforts are now being made to arrange an orderly succession to Tito, to build up Stane Dolanc as the heir apparent, and to transform the declining Yugoslav communist party into an effective national force.

The odds do not favor direct Soviet intervention in post-Tito Yugoslavia. Moscow lacks significant assets within Yugoslav society, understands that strong pressures against Belgrade are likely only to drive it westwards, and does not conceive of the restoration of Soviet dominance over Yugoslavia as a vital interest. Even in the event of serious disruptions in Yugoslavia, Moscow—at least so long as its policy of détente in the West persists—would be more likely to try to quarantine the trouble than to become directly involved in it. Finally, the costs and risks for the Soviets of a military campaign against Yugoslavia would be high and the stakes simply incommensurate.

These judgments cannot be made without qualifications, however, because the chances of post-Tito turmoil and the danger of subsequent Soviet intervention are not insignificant. No one *knows* what this peculiar Balkan state will look like once the unifying force of Tito's dominating presence has disappeared, and no one can predict the precise circumstances which might push or pull the Soviets into direct involvement. But Western reactions to the threat of that involvement would have much to do with whether or not it was carried out and, indeed, with the future course of Soviet-Western relations in general.

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## THE ESTIMATE

1. The "Yugoslav Experiment"—Tito's 25-year-old effort to maintain national independence and unity and to develop a new, pluralistic socialist system—can scarcely yet be viewed as an assured success. There are severe flaws and faults in Yugoslav society, and in Tito's grand design for it. And it has recently become clear that Tito himself, now an ailing 81, will from now on be able to play only a diminished role in the nation's political life.<sup>1</sup> Whether the "Yugoslav Experiment" can survive without him—whether, indeed, the Yugoslav state can survive as a single entity without his leadership—is now a real question. And this question faces not only Yugoslavia but other powers as well, the US and USSR conspicuously among them.

## INSIDE YUGOSLAVIA

## The Current Domestic Scene

2. The ethnic terrain of Yugoslavia is the most varied and complex in Europe. Few Yugoslavs are, in fact, Yugoslavs first; they

<sup>1</sup>Tito's primary medical problem is a chronic, slowly progressive, generalized cerebrovascular and cardiovascular atherosclerosis associated with high blood pressure. There is evidence that brief episodes of acute coronary insufficiency are precipitated by transient increase of his already elevated blood pressure and result in congestive heart failure and a period of marked reduction in physical competence.

are Serbs or Croats or Montenegrins and only secondarily Yugoslavs.<sup>2</sup> Antagonisms between these diverse nationalities have persisted for centuries and even now underlie most of the country's political and social problems and not a few of the economic ones as well.

3. For roughly 20 years, the Titoist notion of how best to deal with the forces of divisive nationalism and with the regional urges for greater independence was, in effect, to accommodate them. Emphasis was on decentralization—political, economic, even to some extent military. The Communist Party (the League of Communists of Yugoslavia—LCY) sought only diffidently to lead and became largely provincial in outlook, more often than not representing the republics in Belgrade rather than vice versa. At the same time, federal governmental structures retreated from active participation in many areas of national life, their political and economic powers either withering away or passing on to republican or regional governments, economic enterprises, and worker organizations.

<sup>2</sup>Of Yugoslavia's total population of about 21 million, about 40 percent are Serb, 22 percent Croat, 8½ percent Bosnian Muslim, 8 percent Slovene, 6 percent Macedonian, 6½ percent Albanian, 2½ percent Montenegrin, 2 percent Hungarian, and the remainder miscellaneous.

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4. The decline of Yugoslav federal power no doubt did help to appease certain nationalist appetites. But for most of this period, the principal national cement (other than Tito's own authority) was the elemental fear of Yugoslavs everywhere that they and their individual republics and their country as a whole were menaced by a hostile outside power, the USSR. But by mid or late 1971 jitters over a possible post-Czechoslovak Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia had faded and fears of general Soviet intentions had receded. This recession, coming at a time when the power of central party and state officials was at its nadir, allowed nationalists in Croatia to win wide support and in late 1971 to provoke the worst crisis of its kind in the postwar era. The subsequent inability of authorities in both Zagreb and Belgrade to control demonstrations and to impose discipline within ruling circles caught Tito and the top leadership almost completely off guard. The crisis was overcome only through (for Yugoslavia) a Draconian crackdown—some 800 functionaries were purged—and the direct personal intervention of Tito himself.

5. This crisis marked a turning point in Yugoslav domestic affairs. It began the current period of retrenchment, intended in the main to curtail the autonomy of the individual republics, to reassert the authority of the central organs of the LCY, and to do all this while the great national father figure, Tito, is still ultimately in command. Tito does not plan to abandon the fundamentals of the Yugoslav course: "pluralistic" socialism, international non-alignment, and national sovereignty. But he now feels that only a strong, reinvigorated national party can carry on in his absence—preserve the Titoist tradition, guard Yugoslav independence, and prevent federal disintegration.

6. Tito of course faces more problems than nationality conflicts in the body politic. The Yugoslav economy is still in trouble.<sup>3</sup> Inflation is running at about 20 percent this year and imports are still outracing exports. Many individual enterprises are still grossly inefficient by Western standards. A much heralded economic stabilization program introduced last December has already stimulated widespread dissatisfaction and is bogging down. The southern republics are still backward and the more prosperous northerners still resent having to help them out. And the rate of unemployment—especially in the underdeveloped south—remains high, despite the large-scale emigration of Yugoslav workers to Western Europe. (Remittances from these workers have become crucial to the balance of payments, offsetting a major share of the deficit in Yugoslavia's trade with the West and helping to meet repayments on an external debt now totaling almost \$3.6 billion.)

#### The Period of Succession

7. Until the crisis in Croatia, Tito's arrangements for the succession seemed in some respects more ritual than reality. The essential elements in his program included a devolution of his own enormous personal power to collective bodies composed of important republican leaders and the division of authority between various party, central government, parliamentary, provincial, and economic institutions. Emphasis was in large part placed on mechanical devices intended to prevent an excessive accumulation of power by one man or one region.

<sup>3</sup> With a per capita gross national product (GNP) estimated at about \$860 in 1970, Yugoslavia has one of the least developed European economies—about on a par with Greece, less than that of Bulgaria (\$1,300), and about one-half that of Italy. The per capita GNP in Slovenia, the richest republic, is about \$1,550—five times higher than that in the autonomous province of Kosovo, the most backward area.

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8. Since the Croatian crisis, however, Tito has decreed a more political and less mechanical approach. Purges have in Tito's view helped to remove from power the worst of the republican nationalists and LCY liberals. (The latter have also sought a weakening of central authority.) Further efforts have been made to improve the organization and functioning of party and state organs, with an eye to streamlining unwieldy structures. An energetic campaign is underway at all levels to reassert the party's dominance over other elements in society (including the military) and its control over all questions of national policy. Perhaps most important, one man, Stane Dolanc, has emerged in recent months as the number two party leader and as the most likely to succeed Tito in the number one spot. Dolanc not only enjoys Tito's confidence, he holds close ties with the military and with military counterintelligence; apparently does not inspire any particular antipathies within the LCY; and, as a Slovene, is not ethnically unacceptable to the other nationalities.

9. It is possible of course that the recent changes and modifications in Yugoslav succession arrangements have come too late. The LCY is not likely again to become the kind of dedicated, disciplined, unifying force it once was. It will almost certainly not be able (or eager) to play a conventionally dictatorial communist role, in part because the concepts and practices of the whole Titoist political and economic system would have to be destroyed first—over the dead bodies of other important elements in Yugoslav society. The LCY will thus have to continue to accommodate itself to the often divisive pressures of a pluralist society. But the party seems to be the only all-national institution, other than the army, which is even potentially capable of binding the state together at home and enabling Yugoslavia to carry on a vigorously independent

policy abroad. And it can and probably will come to play a more effective role than it has in the recent past.

## THE WORLD WITHOUT: THE USSR

### Basic Soviet Considerations

10. Soviet-Yugoslav relations have followed a cyclical course since the death of Stalin in 1953, the quality of the relationship depending in the main on Moscow's willingness to accept Yugoslav independence or, conversely, its willingness to threaten that independence (as, for example, implicitly, in its actions elsewhere in Eastern Europe). The most recent low point was reached in the late 1960s after the USSR's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Relations have been on the mend for the past two years or so, however, largely as a consequence of Brezhnev's decision in mid-1971 to go to Yugoslavia, there to praise Tito, to endorse Yugoslav sovereignty, and to offer the country generous new amounts of economic assistance.<sup>4</sup>

11. The Brezhnev leadership seems to have been generally pleased by developments in Yugoslavia over the past year or so, particularly the crackdown on liberals, the reassertion of party power, and the decline in anti-Soviet propaganda. It also seems to have concluded that, if the USSR is to be in a good position to influence the course of events in Yugoslavia after Tito goes, then it must seek to establish cordial relations during the period preceding his departure. This approach is of course wholly consistent with, and perhaps a part of, the USSR's larger policy of détente in Europe and toward the US. At the very least, the requirements of this policy—including a general lack of tension on the continent—encourage restraint in the Soviet stance

<sup>4</sup> The credit actually extended totaled \$540 million, little of which has as yet been drawn (partly because of Soviet-Yugoslav disagreements concerning terms).

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vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. And so long as Moscow's desire for détente persists—which it is likely to do for quite some time to come<sup>5</sup>—Yugoslavia will remain an indirect beneficiary of it.

12. Still, there are a variety of reasons why Moscow would welcome Yugoslavia's reincorporation into the Soviet Bloc. Tito's break with the Cominform in 1948 is still remembered within the Soviet Communist Party as a painful ideological and political shock. Should post-Tito Yugoslavia re-embrace the USSR, the Soviets would see their view of the "socialist world" as reaffirmed. They would also see the Soviet position in Eastern Europe as strengthened, (especially in Romania), the Soviet strategic posture (particularly vis-à-vis Italy and the Mediterranean) as improved, and their long and frustrating quarrel with a major heretic as having ended in triumph.

13. But if there are reasons why the Soviets might wish for Yugoslavia's reincorporation, there are also many constraints on their willingness and ability to bring it about.

—What happens inside Yugoslavia and what Yugoslavia does for itself internationally are no longer (as they are, for example, in the case of Czechoslovakia) *vital* concerns of the USSR. There thus are major self-imposed restrictions on the risks the USSR would be willing to run and the costs it would be ready to pay.

—The political means available to the Soviets to further their objectives are in any case limited. Soviet influence inside Yugoslavia is not substantial (and may be less than that of the US and the West European states). Moscow does not seem to possess any particular assets within the Yugoslav establish-

<sup>5</sup> See NIE 11-9-73, "The Soviet Approach to Summit II," dated 1 June 1973, ~~SECRET~~, paragraphs 1-4.

ment and cannot count on any substantial body of opinion peculiarly sympathetic to the USSR or to the Soviet variety of communism.

—Although only 11 percent of Yugoslavia's total trade is with the Soviet Union (and less than a third with CEMA as a whole), the USSR could exert some economic leverage—it is a significant market for Yugoslav goods and is a major source of industrial credits for the more backward Yugoslav regions—especially important if the West were to turn its back on Yugoslavia in a post-Tito balance of payments crunch. The Soviets are, in addition, the major outside supplier of military hardware to the Yugoslav armed forces. Belgrade, however, is trying to diversify its sources of supply, and Soviet economic or military leverage would in any case almost certainly prove to be ineffective in a time of Soviet-Yugoslav tension, especially in view of a probable Western willingness to help out during such a period.

—The Soviets could of course apply military pressure against Yugoslavia, but the chances of backfire in this event would be considerable. The Yugoslavs would almost certainly unite in resisting such pressures, and they would, as before, turn to the West for political support and material aid. If the Soviets actually invaded Yugoslavia, they would have to allow for the probability of stiff initial resistance by the Yugoslav Army and prolonged opposition by sizable forces of well-armed irregulars (animated by the traditions of partisan warfare during World War II). Moscow would thus need to build an invasion force of some 30 divisions (or more), a task which would require a substantial mobilization within the USSR, a drawdown of units opposite NATO, or both.

—Even if Soviet military operations against Yugoslavia proceeded successfully, and without Western military reactions, an invasion

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of Yugoslavia would severely, perhaps irreparably, damage a wide variety of Soviet interests elsewhere. It would reverse the improvement in US-Soviet relations, hurt the Soviet image in the Third World, and risk a closer US-Chinese alignment.

—Moreover, it would instantly jeopardize, perhaps destroy, Moscow's large investment in its current policies in Europe—including its desire for expanded trade relations and imports of technology, and its efforts to reduce the US presence. West European hopes that the USSR was becoming a responsible power survived the invasion of Czechoslovakia, but in that case the Soviet campaign was rapidly executed and bloodless, and Moscow was acting within its own sphere of influence. An invasion of Yugoslavia would not be quick, would be bloody, and would take Soviet troops beyond the boundaries of Sovietized Europe.

#### Post-Tito Soviet Policies

14. Lacking any important assets within the LCY and as uncertain as any other outside capital about the probable course of events after Tito's departure, Moscow is initially more likely to react to specific events than to participate in them. But Moscow will seek as best it can to prevent a westward shift in Yugoslavia's post-Tito posture and, if possible, induce movement in the opposite direction.

15. The Soviet leaders might be tempted to add to any confusion in Belgrade in the hope that a fluid or deteriorating political situation would work to their advantage. And they might clandestinely encourage separatist forces in the republics for the same reason. Stability in Yugoslavia has not worked in their favor in the past, and their prospects for developing assets within the country would improve during a period of relative instability.

16. Nevertheless, there would be disadvantages for the Soviets if confusion in Belgrade became turmoil, and separatism elsewhere in Yugoslavia became the order of the day. Moscow would see dangers in either eventuality: in the first because a drift toward anarchy in Belgrade would eliminate or reduce the power of the central authorities and organs which the Soviets believe might someday prove susceptible to their influence, and might, in addition, eventually lead to a takeover by the essentially anti-Soviet military; in the second because the dismemberment of Yugoslavia along ethnic lines, aside from being ideologically repugnant to the Soviets, would preclude the eventual reincorporation of Yugoslavia, qua Yugoslavia, into the Bloc. Both possibilities would, moreover, increase the chances of civil war, a prospect that would force the Soviet leadership to choose between staying out (and missing whatever opportunities for advancing its interests the situation offered) or intervening (and running the risks and incurring the costs that this would necessarily involve). Such a choice could prove to be unsettling within the Soviet Politburo itself.

17. Assuming that the Yugoslav regime remains generally effective and carries on more or less in the Titoist tradition, Moscow is thus likely to turn a generally amiable face toward post-Tito Yugoslavia, offering economic assistance, military aid, and general cooperation, all at least nominally without strings. This is the approach which seems to hold the greatest promise of adding to Soviet prestige and influence in Belgrade and the one which holds the least danger of propelling Belgrade toward the West.

#### PROSPECTS AND CONTINGENCIES

##### The Likely Course in Yugoslavia

18. Given a little more time for emerging succession arrangements to take hold, it now

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seems likely that the immediate post-Tito period, though troubled, will be fairly orderly. Members of a collective of top party leaders, probably functioning under Dolanc as Secretary of the Executive Bureau (in effect, the Politburo), will initially prefer to face post-Tito uncertainties together. Top state officials and the federal bureaucracy will no doubt feel much the same way; they will not in any case be in a position to challenge the party authorities. The major republican leaders—none of whom seem now to represent *militant* nationality interests—will also serve in central bodies; this will at least for a time help to constrain those among them who might be inclined to strike off on republican tangents. Disaffected party personnel—e.g., those who were purged in the nation-wide wake of the Croatian crisis and those who seek an ever-expanding democratization of national life—will probably not be able to combine into an effective opposition force for quite some time after Tito's departure, if at all.<sup>6</sup>

19. All things considered, the odds would seem to be that the Yugoslavs, left to their own devices, will also be able over the longer term to persist with one form or another of self-managed muddling through. The Titoist heritage—30 or so years of Yugoslav survival in the face of war, cold war, and adversity—will no doubt remain a strong source of national pride. The single decentralized Yugoslav economy, with all its problems, will continue to offer a greater return than the individual and divided alternatives and thus will

<sup>6</sup> Other potential opposition forces—Cominformists, Maoists, militant students of various persuasions—are neither large nor capable of concerted action. Though they can be swayed by appeals to regional nationalism, and could be aroused to protests in the event of serious economic difficulties, the people at large do not otherwise appear to be supporters of alternatives to the present system.

be seen to provide the citizenry, the politicians, and even many of the regionalists with a heavy stake in federal survival. Finally, the concern that small individual successor states of the Yugoslav union could not by themselves be either prosperous or secure will continue to persuade many Yugoslavs that the unified state, in one form or another, should be preserved.

20. The Yugoslav National Army is an important deterrent to a national collapse. It is generally appreciated in Yugoslavia that, in the event that conflicts threatened to erupt into civil war or to move the country into anarchy, the military might step in to assert at least temporary control. The Army was for a time, and may still prove to be, the only all-national institutional force effectively functioning on the domestic scene. Though not without its own problems, the Army seems as a whole to be loyal to Tito, his system, and his concept of national integrity. It has, in fact, demonstrated this on more than one occasion, most recently during the Croatian crisis in 1971. Its loyalties after Tito is gone are likely to be to those who promote a strong, cohesive Yugoslavia.

#### Some Contingencies and Possible Soviet Reactions

21. Still, there can be no assurance that the actors in Belgrade will, over time, pull together and essentially in the same direction; that, even if they do, they will be able to pull the republics along behind them; or that the central authorities, as represented principally by party functionaries, will be effective at provincial and local levels and within individual economic enterprises. There is the possibility that Belgrade's authority, even if never directly challenged, might simply be ignored. There thus is a variety of conceivable contingencies which could take place within Yugoslavia and which would have important

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implications for Soviet (and Western) policies as well. Two contingencies—which are intended in broad outline to represent plausible possibilities, but which do not seek to cover all or even most conceivable alternatives—are examined below:

*Contingency A: A disintegrating Yugoslavia.* In this instance, we postulate a growth of nationality conflicts and economic difficulties under a weak central regime. There is a breakdown in many areas of federal influence and control, a divided leadership in Belgrade, and a general move away from national integrity on all fronts. Many of the functions of the center are assumed by the republics, which pursue their own economic policies and even begin to act in the area of foreign and defense policies. Most important of all—in terms of implications for the USSR—there is an irregular drift westwards, reflecting popular preferences, the inability of federal authorities to arrest such a drift, and the increasing decentralization of the economy.

In these circumstances, the Soviets would be likely to shift their policies away from cordiality and assistance—on the grounds that a faltering regime in Belgrade would be unable to respond appropriately even if it were inclined to do so—and back toward a much more austere, if not openly unfriendly, relationship. Efforts would be made at the same time to meddle in and to exploit Yugoslavia's internal difficulties, to cultivate elements in the republics and dissidents of one stripe or another, to intensify gray and black propaganda, and to stir up Yugoslavia's lingering territorial, ideological, and political differences with Western countries. It could be that the USSR would find itself gradually drawn into more and more direct involvement in the affairs of a part or all of the weakening or disintegrating federation.

*Contingency B: A disintegrated Yugoslavia.*

In this case, it is supposed that some or all of the republics in effect secede. Some (e.g., Croatia) turn to the West for help; others remain non-aligned. Remnants of the federal government and the majority of high military officers hope to restore the federation, by force if necessary, and are backed by some republican governments (e.g., Serbia). Civil war threatens, and the Western-oriented republics appeal for aid from the US and NATO. The Soviets are asked to provide open and direct military and political support by, say, the Serbs.

Reactions in Moscow to such a situation would be mixed and the subject of serious debate. Some leaders would argue that the situation offered the USSR a golden opportunity to reassert its control over much of Yugoslavia and that a failure to act would be tantamount to handing at least a part of the country over to the imperialists. Others, however, would be apprehensive about the possible eventual involvement of the Soviet Army in a Balkan civil war, would want to carefully weigh the risk of a confrontation with the West, and would advocate talks with the US and other Western countries. Especially in view of recent agreements with the US, the majority of the Soviet leadership would probably favor caution and a policy designed essentially to quarantine the trouble, at least for a time. But the leadership's ultimate decision would rest in large part on (a) the then-prevailing climate of relations between East and West in Europe; (b) the Soviet estimate of likely political and military reactions in the West; and (c) the state of unrest, if any, in Eastern Europe. And a decision to intervene would be most likely if (a) Soviet policies of détente had already been attenuated; (b) the West did not appear ready to respond forcefully; and (c) it looked as if the Yugoslav disruptions might unsettle matters elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

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### The Interests of the United States and Western Europe

22. Over the years, NATO members have in one way or another invested heavily in Yugoslavia, and it has become almost an article of faith in the West that the balance in Europe would be significantly altered if Belgrade were to readhere to the Soviet Bloc. It is recognized in Moscow that for this reason, among others, direct Soviet intervention in Yugoslavia would be viewed in the West as a matter of grave concern.<sup>7</sup>

23. It is generally agreed that while not ideal, Belgrade's position and policies are advantageous to Western interests. And most West European states would regard a threatened Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia as having important implications for their own security. They would not view an actual invasion, as they did the Soviet move into Czechoslovakia,

<sup>7</sup> NATO has in effect so warned. The Communiqué of the NATO Ministerial Meeting of November 1968 (following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia) urged the USSR to "refrain from using force and interfering in the affairs of other states," asserted that NATO members could not remain indifferent to "any development which endangers their security," and warned that "any Soviet intervention directly or indirectly affecting the situation in Europe or in the Mediterranean would create an international crisis with grave consequences." It was clear at the time that the US and others were addressing the problem of "gray" areas in Europe, and that they were concerned about the future security of Yugoslavia, among others.

as an unfortunate but essentially defensive move by Moscow to protect existing interests within the Bloc; on the contrary, they would see in it an unnecessary and provocative offensive move into non-Bloc territory, designed in the main to expand Soviet power rather than preserve it. And it would signal for most Westerners the end of the USSR's policies of détente in Europe as a whole. None of this, however, would be likely to persuade the European NATO members that an effective response could be made to the Soviet threat without full participation by the US. They thus would be inclined, among other things, to see in the Soviet threat a test of the US commitment to European security.

24. In order to forestall a threatened Soviet invasion, NATO (or the US and individual members of NATO, if there were no decisions by the alliance as such), would have to issue serious warnings and be prepared to back them up. It could, for example, make clear that it would provide direct military support to Yugoslavia in the event of Soviet military intervention, and it could begin to implement moves to carry this out. If, in this manner, the US and the major West European states together declared their vital concern for the integrity and independence of Yugoslavia, the Soviets would probably conclude that there was little that they could accomplish in Yugoslavia which would be commensurate with the risk.

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