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The Tito–Stalin split: a reassessment in light of new evidence

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Abstract: This article reassesses the Tito-Stalin split of 1948 based on findings from former East-bloc archives. In particular, it shows that the version propagated in the official Yugoslav historiography, suggesting that the break with Moscow arose because of Yugoslavia's distinct path toward socialism, is incorrect. Instead, Josip Broz Tito's unwillingness to give up on his territorial and political ambitions in the Balkans, especially Albania, despite Moscow's objections is the main factor that ultimately sparked the conflict in 1948. Yugoslavia fell afoul of Moscow's policy of enforced Sovietization of the socialist camp, though not because of a long-term Soviet plan or because of particular animosity toward the Yugoslav leadership. Rather, Tito's independent foreign policy provided a welcome pretext to clamp down on Yugoslavia and thereby tighten Soviet control over the other East European states.

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The Tito-Stalin Split

A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence

❖ Jeronim Perović

Introduction

On 29 June 1948 the world learned with astonishment about the first schism within the Communist bloc. The Soviet press that day published a resolution titled “The Situation in the Yugoslav Communist Party” that had been adopted a few days earlier at a meeting in Romania of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). The resolution accused the Communist leaders in Belgrade of “having recently pursued in domestic and foreign affairs policies that fundamentally deviate from the Marxist-Leninist line” and “thereby placed themselves and Yugoslavia outside the family of fellow Communist parties, outside the united Communist front, and consequently outside the Cominform.”¹

This event was all the more surprising because Yugoslavia was generally considered Moscow’s most loyal ally among the newly established “people’s democracies” in Eastern Europe. The Yugoslav Communists were well-known for having pursued the establishment of socialism in their country more aggressively than their comrades elsewhere in the socialist camp. The Soviet Union seemed to have a strong interest in maintaining good relations with Yugoslavia. The Soviet leader, Josif Stalin, counted on Yugoslavia as a reliable ally that served as a model for the other people’s democracies in their internal development.

Well before the archives of the former Communist bloc became accessible, the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict of 1948 had been extensively discussed in Western Cold War historiography.² In 1983 a prominent German historian of

1. The resolution published in *Pravda* on 29 June 1948 can be found in Giuliano Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994), pp. 610–621.

2. A review of the publications which appeared in the West on the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict of 1948

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the Cold War, Jens Hacker, went so far as to claim that the background and causes of the rift between Stalin and Josip Broz Tito “have, thanks to authentic Yugoslav sources, long since been largely illuminated and explained.”³ The release of primary documents by the Belgrade authorities after the break in 1948, including the correspondence between Stalin and Tito in the spring of 1948,⁴ and the great number of Yugoslav publications about the conflict (many of them memoirs by high-ranking participants in the conflict such as Tito, Milovan Djilas, and Edvard Kardelj⁵) provided historians with a rich—albeit one-sided—base of information.⁶

This article reconsiders the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948 based on newly available documents from two Moscow archives: the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) and the former Central Party Archive, now known as the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI).

will be found in the bibliographies of Francine Friedman, ed., *Yugoslavia: A Comprehensive English-Language Bibliography* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1993), pp. 351–359; and John J. Horton, ed., *Yugoslavia* (Oxford, UK, and Santa Barbara, CA: Clio Press, 1990), pp. 45–48.

3. Jens Hacker, *Der Ostblock: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Struktur 1939–1980* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1983), p. 392.

4. The English version was published in 1948. See Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Dispute: Text of the Published Correspondence* (London: RIIA, 1948). An extended and annotated Russian version was published in serial form in L. Ya. Gibianskii, “Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948” [Part 1], *Voprosy istorii* (Moscow), No. 4–5 (1992), pp. 119–136; L. Ya. Gibianskii, “Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948” [Part 2], *Voprosy istorii* (Moscow), No. 6–7 (1992), pp. 158–172; and L. Ya. Gibianskii, “Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948” [Part 3], *Voprosy istorii* (Moscow), No. 10 (1992), pp. 141–160.

5. For an overview, see Lucien Karchmar, “The Tito-Stalin Split in Soviet and Yugoslav Historiography,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito-Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective* (New York: Social Science Monographs, 1982), pp. 253–271.

6. Soviet historiography treated the conflict with Yugoslavia in a polemical or propagandistic way, especially in 1948–1953 when Stalin presided over a fierce anti-Tito campaign. An exception was the short period from 1955 to 1960, when the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev brought up the issue in his de-Stalinization campaign. During a visit to Belgrade in May 1955, for instance, Khrushchev argued that the earlier Soviet indictment of Yugoslavia was a “fabrication by enemies of the people” and that Stalin was solely responsible for the conflict. “Khrushchev’s Speech at Belgrade Airport, 26 May 1955,” in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Key Soviet-Yugoslav Documents: A Reference Aid* (Washington, DC: National Foreign Assessment Center, 1980), pp. 9–10. No other worthwhile Soviet source was available until the full reconciliation between the two countries following Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit to Yugoslavia in March 1988. After the visit, the Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies within the Soviet Academy of Science organized a roundtable with prominent scholars from both countries to discuss the conflict of 1948. See “Sovetsko-yugoslavskiy konflikt 1948–1953 gg.: Prichiny, razvitiye, posledstviya i uroki (‘Kruglyi stol’),” *Rabochiy klass i sovremennyy mir* (Moscow), No. 3 (1989), pp. 98–121. Articles on the topic before the roundtable also appeared in the Soviet journals *Voprosy istorii* (No. 7, 1988) and *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya* (No. 4, 1988). Some previously unpublished correspondence between Moscow and Belgrade was made public in *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), pp. 53–63. The first monograph based on new archival documents is Yuri S. Girenko, *Stalin-Tito* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991). Although Girenko was granted access to materials from the archive of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, his book unfortunately lacks any reference to the exact location of these sources. The foremost expert on the history of Soviet-Yugoslav relations and the conflict of 1948 is Leonid Gibianskii, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies under the Russian Academy of Science. Over the past two decades, Gibianskii has published many articles on the subject.

The article discusses aspects of the conflict that were frequently mentioned in earlier Yugoslav writings—the role of ideology, the nature of Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, and the impact of Yugoslav’s policy toward its Balkan neighbors—and assesses their relevance in light of the new evidence from Russian archives.

Although all of these elements are relevant for understanding the conflict, some are more important than others. In particular, the version propagated in the official Yugoslav historiography under Tito needs to be reassessed. According to the Yugoslav literature, the break with Moscow arose because Yugoslavia was pursuing a separate path toward socialism that could not be reconciled with the hegemonic Soviet concept of the hierarchical organization of the socialist bloc.⁷ The Tito-era accounts suggest that Yugoslavia had been pursuing its own course toward socialism from the first days of the partisan resistance in 1941, not just since 1948. To varying degrees, this version has been accepted by many Western scholars writing about the Tito-Stalin split.⁸

The notion that the conflict stemmed from the resistance of Yugoslav leaders to Soviet hegemony is correct insofar as Stalin’s increasing ambition to control the socialist camp after World War II was bound to provoke tension between Moscow and individual states. From Soviet documents, however, it is not apparent that the roots of the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute derive from differing ideological views concerning the development of socialism. Nor do the sources contain any indication that the basically harmonious relationship between Moscow and Belgrade was seriously at risk at any time before the end of 1947.

Instead, the documents indicate that the main reason for the conflict was Stalin’s dismay when Tito continued to pursue an expansionist foreign policy agenda toward Yugoslavia’s neighbors, especially Albania, against Moscow’s stern advice at a time when Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe as a whole was hardening.⁹ Soviet and Yugoslav interests collided once it became clear in

7. From the 1950s through the late 1980s, Western scholarly perceptions of the Soviet-Yugoslav split were heavily influenced by the publications of the Yugoslav historian Vladimir Dedijer, who had been a senior official until the mid-1950s. See, for example: Vladimir Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito: Prilozi za biografiju* (Zagreb: Kultura, 1953). On the 1948 split, Dedijer’s *Izgnubljena bitka J. V. Staljina* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1969), which was later published in English translation, has been particularly influential.

8. See the following two Western publications, which were published just before the archives in Eastern Europe and Russia became accessible: Bruno Heidlberger, *Jugoslawiens Auseinandersetzung mit dem Stalinismus: Historische Voraussetzungen und Konsequenzen* (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 1989); and Pierre Maurer, “The Tito-Stalin Split in Historical Perspective,” *Bradford Studies on Yugoslavia* No. 11, Postgraduate School of Yugoslav Studies, University of Bradford, 1987.

9. Stalin’s rejection of the Marshall plan was a major turning point in Soviet-Western relations and accelerated the process of Soviet-led bloc-building in Eastern Europe. See Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinsky, “New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports,” Working Paper No. 9, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, March 1994; and

February–March 1948 that Tito would not abandon his goals in the Balkans. Yugoslavia's status as the first victim of Moscow's policy of *Gleichschaltung* in the socialist camp cannot be ascribed to a long-term Soviet plan or a particular animosity on Stalin's part toward the Belgrade leaders. Rather Tito's policy in the Balkans provided an opportunity to clamp down on Yugoslavia and thereby tighten Soviet control over the whole socialist camp.

The first two sections of this article discuss the role of ideology and Soviet foreign policy in the Tito-Stalin split. The third and fourth sections look at Yugoslavia's ambitions in the Balkans and the implications for Soviet-Yugoslav relations. From Yugoslav sources, especially Milovan Djilas's famous *Conversations with Stalin*,¹⁰ historians have long known about the relevance of Tito's Balkan policy for the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, but the Soviet documents provide many intriguing new details about this topic. The fifth section describes the events leading up to the open confrontations, particularly the important Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav meeting of 10 February 1948. The final section explains the motivation for Tito's defiance of Stalin after the conflict came to a head in the spring of 1948 and shows how the Soviet-Yugoslav rift fits into the wider pattern of Moscow's bloc-building in Eastern Europe.

The Role of Ideology: The Claim of Yugoslavia's Own Path to Socialism

Because the leaders of all Soviet-bloc countries claimed their legitimacy from ideology, conflicts among them were essentially ideological or had to be presented as such. The Cominform resolution of 28 June 1948 accused the Yugoslavs of deviating from the Marxist-Leninist line. The published letters exchanged by Soviet and Yugoslav leaders from March through May 1948—letters that were merely a prelude to the Cominform resolution in June—were entirely ideological in tone. The Soviet letters attacked the Yugoslav system and accused Yugoslav leaders of going their own way in the building of socialism rather than adhering to the Soviet model.

In response, the Yugoslavs insisted that they were not in any way deviating from the Marxist-Leninist line. Not until later, when Tito sought to bolster domestic support for his leadership and to give the Yugoslav model a new

M. M. Narinskij, "SSSR i plan Marshalla: Po materialam Arkhiva Prezidenta RF," *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya* (Moscow), No. 2 (1993), pp. 11–19.

10. Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962). Djilas was originally one of Tito's closest confidants. He was excluded from the party in 1954 for remarks critical of the regime and later served a seven-year prison sentence. Djilas subsequently gained wide attention for another book, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1968). He died in 1995.

ideological justification, did he embrace the argument that the split occurred because of Yugoslavia's own path toward socialism. When Tito spoke with his biographer in the summer of 1952, he put forth the new line: "When did the dispute between our country and the Soviet leadership really start? If we consider the historical course of events, it is clear that by 1941, from the very start of our revolution, elements of frictions between us and them already existed."¹¹

It is true that Soviet-Yugoslav relations were never entirely smooth. Even during World War II, disagreements emerged between the two sides, most notably when Tito established a provisional government in Jajce on 29–30 November 1943, apparently against Stalin's will.¹² New frictions arose after the war because of Yugoslavia's policies toward its neighbors. In particular Belgrade's territorial claims on Italy's Trieste region brought Yugoslavia to the brink of war with Allied troops in early 1945 and were a frequent point of contention between Tito and Stalin, who was careful not to antagonize the Soviet Union's wartime allies.¹³ Tito also embarked on a series of international initiatives without first consulting Stalin. A prominent example was Tito's signature of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance on 1 August 1947 without prior notification to Moscow.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Tito's domestic and foreign policies did not seriously impair the extremely close bilateral relations that existed until only a few months before the open split. Tito waged war against the German occupying troops largely under the banner of Soviet-style Communism and Marxist-Leninist ideology.¹⁵ Perhaps Stalin did not approve of Tito's decision to form a government in November 1943 for fear of straining relations with the United States and Great Britain (although there is no clear archival evidence to sustain this interpretation), but all evidence suggests that Tito dutifully kept Soviet leaders informed about his intentions before the decision at Jajce was taken.¹⁶

11. Cited in Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito*, Vol. 1, p. 405.

12. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 12.

13. On the Trieste question in 1944–1945, see L. Ya. Gibianskii, "Tretskii vopros v kontse vtoroi mirovoi voiny (1944–1945)," *Slavyanovedenie* (Moscow), No. 3 (2001), pp. 3–26; and L. Ya. Gibianskii, "Tretskii vopros v kontse vtoroi mirovoi voiny (1944–1945)," *Slavyanovedenie* (Moscow), No. 4 (2001), pp. 3–30. For background, see Roberto G. Rabel, *Between East and West: Trieste, the United States, and the Cold War, 1941–1954* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988).

14. L. Ya. Gibianskii, "U nachala konflikta—Balkanskii uzul: Otkrytyi arkhiv—K istorii sovsotskoyugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg.," *Rabochii klass i sovremennyyi mir* (Moscow), No. 2 (1990), p. 173.

15. Tito scaled back his rhetoric in 1942–1943 but only for tactical reasons to allow his initially small Communist resistance movement to attract other groups and form a mass movement.

16. Initially, Yugoslav writers claimed that Tito's decision to form a provisional government at Jajce was taken without consulting Stalin, thus purportedly demonstrating Tito's willingness to go an inde-

By and large, the Yugoslav Communists intended to build socialism according to the Stalinist model. Yugoslavia scrupulously followed the Soviet model in establishing its economic planning organs, judicial system, state bureaucracy, health care and educational systems, and cultural and educational spheres. The Yugoslav constitution of 1946 was basically a copy of the Soviet constitution of 1936.¹⁷ To be sure, the leaders of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Kommunistička Partija Jugoslavije*—KPJ) were pragmatic enough to understand that not all aspects of the Soviet model suited Yugoslavia's particular circumstances. By the end of 1947, for example, senior KPJ officials came to believe that collectivization of agriculture in Yugoslavia should follow a different, less violent path than in the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Around the same time, party leaders also expressed doubts that Soviet educational and cultural models were the only appropriate solution for Yugoslavia.¹⁹

Yugoslav leaders' views of how to achieve the goal of a socialist (Communist) society may at times have diverged from those of Soviet leaders, but no one in Belgrade questioned the goal itself.²⁰ Indeed, the Yugoslav Communists pursued the "construction of socialism" more fanatically than did their comrades in the other Eastern European states.²¹ Even on agricultural policy, a point strongly criticized by the Soviet side in the letters of accusation in the

pendent way. More recent Yugoslav publications, however, acknowledge that Tito was in fact in close contact with Stalin. For example, Nikola Popović, a specialist on Soviet-Yugoslav relations during World War II, notes that Tito sent at least four telegrams to Moscow from 1 October to 26 November 1943 laying out in detail his plans to form a government. See Nikola B. Popović, *Jugoslavensko-sovjetski odnosi u drugom svetskom ratu (1941–1945)* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu Istoriju, 1988), p. 312.

17. See L. Ya. Gibianskii, *Sovetskii Soyuz i novaya Jugoslaviya 1941–1947 gg.* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1987), pp. 144–146.

18. KPJ leaders decided in late 1947 not to force peasants into Soviet-style collective farms and instead to form "agricultural cooperatives" that would encompass all peasants. The cooperatives linked the independent producer to the state, which would then gradually promote rationalization of production. Only in a later stage would the state force peasants to surrender all their land. See Melissa K. Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941–1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), pp. 76–78.

19. Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944–1953* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), pp. 137–160.

20. This is best expressed in Tito's letter of 12 April 1948 to Stalin and Molotov where he responds to Soviet criticism. Tito makes clear that the KPJ takes the Soviet Union as its example to follow. At the same time, he writes that in some areas (like the agrarian question) the KPJ has to take into account the specific conditions of Yugoslavia and has to look for the most suitable ways to build socialism. Tito's letter was first published in *Pisma ZK KPJ i pisma ZK SKP (b)* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1948), pp. 18–27.

21. See Leonid Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi družby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be: Model' 'sotsialisticheskogo lagera' i sovjetsko-yugoslavskii konflikt 1948 g.," in *U istokov 'sotsialisticheskogo sodružestva': SSSR i vostochnoevropskie strany v 1944–1949 gg.* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1995), pp. 176–208; Wolfgang Höpken, "Die orthodoxe Abweichung: Jugoslawien zum Vergleich," in Hans Lemberg et al., eds., *Sowjetisches Modell und nationale Prägung: Kontinuität und Wandel in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Marburg und Lahn, Germany: J. G. Herder Institut, 1991), pp. 125–142.

spring of 1948,²² Yugoslavia had moved further toward full collectivization than the other Eastern European states had. Croatian historian Ivo Banac points out that by early 1948 “no East European country, except perhaps Bulgaria, stood closer than Yugoslavia at the threshold of total agricultural collectivization.”²³

The KPJ also crushed the opposition more ruthlessly than did the Communist parties in the other Eastern European states.²⁴ Assessing the possibility of armed resistance against Tito’s regime in mid-February 1946, the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade, Ivan Sadchikov, reported to Moscow that

according to Milovan Djilas, 200,000 people collaborating with the occupying forces . . . were liquidated after the liberation of Yugoslavia. . . . According to [Yugoslav] Minister of Interior, [Aleksandar-Marko] Ranković, 11,000 members of armed formations were destroyed, and all the relevant commanders serving under [Četnik commander] Draža Mihajlović were either arrested or shot.²⁵

Sadchikov believed that these figures, if anything, were understated, and he concluded that Tito had a firm grip on power and was not threatened domestically.²⁶ A report prepared in August–September 1947 by the foreign policy commission of the Central Committee (CC) of the Soviet Communist Party—which was then formally known as the All-Union Party of Communists-Bolsheviks, or VKP(b)—noted that all “reactionary and bourgeois forces” in Yugoslavia had been eliminated and that the “roots of inner and outer capitalism [in Yugoslavia] had been wiped out more thoroughly than in the other [East European] states.”²⁷

Because Yugoslavia was the first of the East European countries to establish a Communist polity, Tito regarded himself as Moscow’s staunchest ally. His territorial claims on his neighbors were not meant as a challenge to the Soviet Union. On the contrary, he was acting on the basis of specific national

22. Earlier, in a report “On the International Situation of the Soviet Union,” which was prepared sometime in August–September 1947 by the foreign policy section of the CC CPSU and served as basis for Andrei Zhdanov’s speech at the Cominform meeting of September 1947, the KPJ was criticized for not pursuing a more radical transformation of the agrarian sector. “O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial’no-Politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), Fond (F) 575, Opis’ (Op.) 1, Delo (D.) 3, List (L.) 104.

23. Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, p. 22.

24. G. P. Murashko and A. F. Noskova, “Sovetskii faktor v poslevoennoi Vostochnoi Evrope (1945–1948),” in L. N. Nezhinskii, ed., *Sovetskaya vneshnyaya politika v gody “kholodnoi voiny” (1945–1985): Novoe prochtenie* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), p. 87.

25. The report is contained in Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF), F. 06, Op. 7, Poruchenie (Por.) 867, Papka (P.) 53, L. 9.

26. *Ibid.*

27. “O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” L. 103.

considerations. The two sides initially were able to resolve all their disagreements, even over such sensitive issues as the dispute with Italy over Trieste.²⁸

Nor did Tito and the other KPJ leaders ever question Moscow's leadership of the socialist world. Yugoslav officials regarded themselves as devoted followers of the Soviet Union. Tito continuously declared the Soviet-Yugoslav alliance the central feature of Yugoslavia's foreign policy, a principle that was maintained until the breach of 1948. After the Soviet-Yugoslav Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance was signed in April 1945, Tito declared that "the peoples of Yugoslavia have convinced themselves over the past year that in the great Soviet Union they have found the most honorable ally and the strongest protector who assists in the development [of Yugoslavia] in peacetime as well as in war."²⁹

Soviet Ambassador Sadchikov stressed Yugoslavia's loyalty in his reports to Moscow. In mid-December 1945, a few weeks after elections in Yugoslavia in November had formally brought Tito's Popular Front (the only party on the election list) to power, Sadchikov wrote to Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov that "[t]he Yugoslav Popular Front is connecting this victory . . . with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, which is seen as actively supporting the new Yugoslavia. This conviction is not only prevalent among the country's leadership but also among larger circles of the democratic intelligentsia and the people."³⁰

Thus, the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the socialist camp caught not only Western diplomats and observers by surprise.³¹ The split was equally shocking to the leaders of the KPJ and caused great confusion among them in the months after the split.³² So deep-rooted was the cult of Stalin and the belief in the Soviet model that even after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, Tito assured the KPJ's Fifth Congress in July 1948 that the Yugoslav party's "unwavering loyalty to the science of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin [would] prove in practice that [the KPJ] does not deviate from the path of that science."³³

28. Leonid Gibianskii, "The Beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Cominform," in Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform*, pp. 468–471.

29. Gibianskii, *Sovetskii Soyuz i novaya Yugoslaviya*, p. 143.

30. Memorandum from Sadchikov, 18 December 1945, in AVPRE, F. 06, Op. 7, Por. 867, P. 53, L. 49.

31. Although some Western diplomats were aware of strains in Soviet-Yugoslav relations by early June 1948, none anticipated the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform. See Beatrice Heuser, *Western "Containment" Policies in the Cold War: The Case of Yugoslavia, 1948–53* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 35–42.

32. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 162.

33. Vladimir Dedijer, ed., *Dokumenti 1948*, 3 vols. (Belgrade: Rad, 1979), Vol. 1, p. 376.

Soviet Hegemonic Aspirations and the Tito-Stalin Split

After World War II, the Soviet Union had every reason to be interested in good relations with Yugoslavia. For one thing, Yugoslavia served as a model for the other East European states in their internal development. For another, Yugoslavia was a staunch ally that shared Moscow's views of all major international issues after the war.³⁴ The journal *Bol'shevik*, the VKP(b)'s theoretical organ, showered the KPJ with praise and placed Tito's name at the top of the list of the most popular Communist leaders in Eastern Europe.

When the Soviet Union embarked on the forced Sovietization of Eastern Europe in late 1947 and 1948, Yugoslavia initially embraced the policy.³⁵ At least until the founding of the Cominform in September 1947, Soviet leaders presented Yugoslavia as a role model for others to follow. Not until late 1947 did Moscow's attitude begin to change.

The Cominform was the coordinating organ uniting all European Communist parties including the Italian and French. Although plans existed as early as 1946 to set up an organization of European Communist parties,³⁶ Stalin did not formally establish the body until after he rejected the Marshall Plan.³⁷ At the inaugural meeting of the Cominform in September 1947, Andrei Zhdanov, the leader of the Soviet delegation, gave a highly publicized speech proclaiming the division of the world into two camps: the "imperialistic and anti-democratic" camp led by the United States and the "anti-imperialistic and democratic" camp led by the Soviet Union.³⁸ This inaugural meeting signaled that the socialist camp was about to be reorganized, that Soviet control would be strengthened, and that Stalinist regimes would be imposed throughout the region.

Initially, the Yugoslavs enthusiastically supported this endeavor. Zhdanov

34. For example, although the memorandum compiled by the foreign policy commission of the Soviet Communist Party in early August 1947 criticized a few aspects of Yugoslav's revolution, it emphasized that "[a]mong the countries of the new people's republics, there is no doubt that Yugoslavia ranks first." See "O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii Sovetskogo Soyuza," L. 3.

35. On the beginning of Sovietization, see also L. Ya. Gibianskii, "Forsirovanie Sovetskoi blokovoi politiki," in *Kholodnaya vojna 1945–1963: Istoricheskaya retrospektiva* (Moscow: "Olma-Press," 2003), pp. 137–186, esp. 150–151.

36. Csaba Békés, "Soviet Plans to Establish the COMINFORM in Early 1946: New Evidence from the Hungarian Archives," Bulletin No. 10, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, March 1998, pp. 135–136.

37. L. Ya. Gibianskii, "Kak vznik Kominform: Po novym arkhivnym materialam," *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, No. 4 (1993), pp. 131–152; and G. M. Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaya Evropa, 1947–1956 gg.* (Moscow: Rossiya molodaya, 1994), pp. 48–103.

38. Zhdanov's speech at the Cominform meeting is republished in Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform*, pp. 216–251. The text appeared in *Pravda* (Moscow) on 20 October 1947, p. 1.

in his speech warmly praised Yugoslavia as the East European country that had moved furthest toward socialism. He urged the other Eastern European states to follow Yugoslavia's example. Zhdanov originally had planned to criticize as well as praise the KPJ, but the final version of the speech did not include any criticism. Early drafts of the speech chastised the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak Communist parties for certain "errors," reflecting negative comments about Yugoslavia in a background report prepared shortly before the Cominform meeting by the VKP(b)'s foreign policy commission.³⁹ The commission had been particularly critical of Belgrade's behavior toward Trieste and the Balkans.⁴⁰ No doubt, it was only through Stalin's intervention that Zhdanov refrained from bringing up these points.⁴¹ As a result, a largely harmonious atmosphere existed between the Soviet and Yugoslav delegations at the founding meeting of the Cominform.⁴²

The Cominform was not originally set up to condemn Yugoslavia, as some Yugoslav writers later claimed.⁴³ Instead, the purpose of the organization was to tighten Soviet control over all the socialist countries, including Yugoslavia. Soviet leaders as of mid-1947 had not yet decided to crack down on Yugoslavia. The VKP(b)'s foreign policy commission had noted the KPJ's "errors" in a memorandum on Yugoslavia dated 18 March 1948 (which served as background for the letter sent by Stalin and Molotov to Yugoslav leaders on 27 March 1948), but the commission was just as critical of the other East European parties.⁴⁴ On 5 January 1948, the commission sent two memoranda to Mikhail Suslov titled "On the Anti-Marxist Ideological Views of the Leaders of the Polish Communist Party" and "On Certain Errors of the Czechoslovak Communist Party."⁴⁵ In late March 1948, the commission completed another

39. Zhdanov's three draft versions are stored in RGASPI, F. 77, Op. 3, D. 94, Ll. 50–91. The critique of Yugoslav policy vis-à-vis Trieste and the Balkans is in the second draft version. See also Silvio Pons, "The Twilight of the Cominform," in Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform*, pp. 483–503, esp. 492; and Anna di Biago, "The Establishment of the Cominform," in Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform*, pp. 11–34.

40. This formerly top-secret document is stored in RGASPI, F. 575, Op. 1, D. 41, Ll. 2–24.

41. Stalin's role in deleting the passages on Yugoslavia is stressed in Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaya Evropa*, pp. 48–55.

42. Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform*; Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaya Evropa*; and Gibianskii, "Kak vznik Kominform."

43. This thesis is put forward in Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito*, Vol. 1, p. 440; and Edvard Kardelj, *Reminiscences: The Struggle for Recognition and Independence: The New Yugoslavia, 1944–1957* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1982), pp. 98–102.

44. "On the Anti-Marxist Views of the Leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Foreign and Domestic Policy Matters," 18 March 1948 is stored in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 1163, Ll. 9–24.

45. These documents are stored in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 1161, Ll. 2–19 and D. 1162, Ll. 44–73.

memorandum highlighting “errors” of the Hungarian Communist party.⁴⁶ All of these reports were issued well before the accusations against the KPJ had been prepared. From the time the Cominform was created in September 1947 until March 1948, the gradual worsening of relations between Moscow and Belgrade was by no means unique within the socialist camp. The Soviet Union was establishing much tighter control over all the East European states.

The change in Soviet policy was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict. Stalin’s decision to single out Yugoslavia was motivated largely by his displeasure with Tito’s expansionist policy in the Balkans, particularly toward Albania.

Belgrade’s Ambitions vis-à-vis Albania

Until recently, the role of the Balkans, particularly Albania, in the Soviet-Yugoslav split was known mostly from Djilas’s *Conversations with Stalin*. In 1984, a few years after Tito’s death but before the archives were opened, Yugoslav historian Vladimir Dedijer included documents in the final installment of his three-volume biography of Tito that confirmed the importance of the Balkans in the Soviet-Yugoslav split. The documents showed, for example, that in mid-April 1948, Tito told the KPJ Central Committee that “the first conflict [between Moscow and Belgrade] broke out on account of Albania.”⁴⁷ Dedijer indicated that the sensitivity of the issue had caused Yugoslav Foreign Minister Edvard Kardelj in 1953 to prohibit any further reference to this subject in Tito’s official biography.⁴⁸

A key objective of Tito’s policy in the Balkans was to establish Yugoslavia as the regional hegemon. This goal was evident as early as mid-1943, when the idea of forming a united headquarters of the partisan movements of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece ultimately failed because of Tito’s unwillingness to agree on a structure giving each member an equal voice. Instead, he wanted the organization to be subordinated to the Yugoslav partisan headquarters. Because Tito believed that his movement was the dominant

46. The document is titled “On the Nationalist Errors of the Hungarian Communist Leaders and the Bourgeois Influence in the Hungarian Press.” The report on Hungary, which is stored in RGASPI, F 17, Op. 128, D. 1165, LI. 64–68, was not as harsh as the reports on Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

47. “Zapiski sa sednice CK KPJ od 12. i 13. aprila 1948,” in Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broz Tito*, 3 vols. (Belgrade: Rad, 1984), Vol. 3, p. 370.

48. Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broz Tito*, Vol. 3, p. 318. Dedijer acknowledges in this third volume (e.g., pp. 282–285) that he was selective in the first two volumes because he was writing from the perspective of the Yugoslav government.

military force in the Balkans, he concluded that “we must be at the center of the Balkan countries in military as well as political respects.”⁴⁹

In seeking a dominant role in the region, Yugoslavia hoped to resolve long-standing ethnic and territorial issues in its favor. Unification with Albania would have eased Yugoslavia’s concerns about the large ethnic Albanian minority in Kosovo. Unlike other ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, the Kosovar Albanians largely refused to cooperate with Tito’s Popular Front during World War II. Although the KPJ maintained close relations with the Communist resistance in Albania during the war, Tito from an early stage was unnerved by the desire of some members of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA) to seek unification with Kosovo. When CPA leaders approached the KPJ in mid-1943 to discuss the prospects of Albania’s postwar unification with Kosovo, Tito refused to discuss the matter.⁵⁰ Instead he sought to resolve the Kosovo question by incorporating Albania into Yugoslavia.⁵¹ A similar problem existed with regard to Macedonia, a historically contested region divided among Yugoslavia (Vardar Macedonia), Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia), and Greece (Aegean Macedonia). Tito wanted to unite all parts of Macedonia within the framework of an enlarged Yugoslav federation with both Bulgaria and Greece.⁵²

The southern Balkans thus presented a challenge for Moscow not only because of the ongoing civil war in Greece, but also because of ethnic and territorial disputes that could precipitate a larger conflict. Efforts to stem Yugoslav’s growing influence in the Balkans became increasingly important at a time when Stalin sought to tighten control over the whole socialist camp. But the Yugoslavs were reluctant to forsake their ambitions toward Albania, and the issue sparked a clash between Moscow and Belgrade in early 1948.⁵³

Tito’s hopes of incorporating Albania into the Yugoslav Federation were aided by the signing of the Yugoslav-Albanian Treaty on Friendship and Mu-

49. L. Ya. Gibianskii, “Ideya balkanskogo ob’edineniya i plany ee osushchestvleniya v 40-e gody XX veka,” *Voprosy istorii* (Moscow), No. 11 (2001), p. 43.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

51. In *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 133–134, Djilas writes that “[b]oth Governments [Albania and Yugoslavia] agreed in principle that Albania ought to unite with Yugoslavia, which would have solved the question of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia.”

52. Gibianskii, “Ideya balkanskogo ob’edineniya i plany ee osushchestvleniya v 40-e gody XX veka,” p. 42. On the history of Balkan federations in the 1940s, see Branko Petranović, *Balkanska Federacija 1943–1948* (Belgrade: IKP Zaslona, 1991).

53. Ivo Banac acknowledges the important role of Albania in the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict but gives more weight to Yugoslavia’s position vis-à-vis the Greek civil war. See Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, esp. pp. 29–43. Leonid Gibianskii gives greater importance to Albania. See the valuable overview in Leonid Gibianskii, “The Soviet-Yugoslav Split and the Cominform,” in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–49* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 291–312.

tual Assistance in July 1946 and the conclusion of bilateral economic and customs agreements four months later. These arrangements brought Albania almost fully into the Yugoslav economic system. By late 1947, roughly 1,000 Yugoslav specialists were working in Albania on economic development projects. Yugoslavia played a large role in Albania's domestic politics as well: The CPA Central Committee included a representative from the KPJ who had a formal voice in Tirana's decision-making and played a key role in the selection of members of the CPA Politburo.⁵⁴

Soviet leaders repeatedly indicated that Albania played only a marginal role in the Soviet bloc and that Moscow would not be opposed if Albania relied more heavily on Belgrade. But Stalin and his aides warned the Yugoslavs on several occasions not to hasten unification, for fear of inducing Western powers to protest or even to intervene militarily in Albania.⁵⁵ In January 1945, Stalin told a Yugoslav delegation headed by Croatian Communist leader Andrija Hebrang that "the English understand only the language of violence" and that Yugoslavia should delay ratification of the Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance with Albania in order to avoid international complications.⁵⁶

Soviet policy on the matter began to change in the latter half of 1947, when Moscow started to establish direct links with Albania. Until that time, the Soviet Union had upheld the principle that "the way from Tirana to Moscow leads through Belgrade."⁵⁷ In May 1947, for example, before Soviet officials invited Enver Hoxha, the CPA First Secretary and chairman of the Albanian Council of Ministers, to Moscow, they first sought consent from Yugoslav leaders.⁵⁸ The fact that no CPA representatives were invited to the

54. Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi družby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 187–189; D. S. Chuvakhin, "S diplomatičeskoj missiei v Albanii: 1946–1952 gg.," *Novaya i novejšaya istoriya* (Moscow), No. 1 (January–February 1996), pp. 132–133. For background, see Peter Danylow, *Die aussenpolitischen Beziehungen Albanien zu Jugoslawien und zur UdSSR 1944–1961* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 1982). See also the polemical account by Vladimir Dedijer, *Jugoslovensko-albanski odnosi, 1939–1948: Na osnovu služebnih dokumenata, pisama i drugog materijala* (Belgrade: Borba, 1949).

55. The Albanian question was discussed at length during meetings between Stalin and Andrija Hebrang in January 1945 and between Stalin and Tito in May 1946. The transcript of the Stalin-Hebrang meeting on Albania can be found in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 7, Por. 872, P. 53, Ll. 20–21. The minutes of discussion between Stalin and Tito on Albania are stored in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 8, D. 952, P. 57, Ll. 9–10.

56. Cited from the transcript in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 8, D. 952, P. 57, Ll. 9–10. Yugoslavia postponed ratification until mid-1946.

57. Dmitrii Chuvakhin, the Soviet envoy to Tirana from 1946 to 1952, recounts his experiences in an article published in 1996. He notes that "Albanian-Yugoslav relations at this time were dominated by the secret principle that 'the way from Tirana to Moscow leads through Belgrade.'" Chuvakhin, "S diplomatičeskoj missiei v Albanii," p. 124.

58. Transcript of Conversation between Anatolii Lavrent'ev, the Soviet ambassador to Belgrade, and Tito, 27 May 1947, in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 9, D. 1285, P. 82, Ll. 41–42. According to the transcript,

Cominform meeting in September 1947 suggests that Moscow still, for the most part, regarded Albania as an appendage of Yugoslavia.

At around this time, however, Stalin and Molotov began to have doubts about Yugoslavia's policy in the Balkans. Dmitrii Chuvakhin, the Soviet envoy to Tirana from 1946 to 1952, later recalled that Stalin told the Albanian delegation visiting Moscow in July 1947 that the USSR did not agree with Belgrade's policy toward Albania and that Albania as an independent country should take care of its foreign relations on its own.⁵⁹ Stalin's attitude was consistent with the "information note" on Yugoslavia prepared by the VKP(b)'s foreign policy commission in August–September 1947, which noted that

Despite the conclusion of a Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance with Albania, the Yugoslav government has not fulfilled its obligations toward Albania over an entire year and has not assisted the Albanian Republic economically. The leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party are very jealous that Albania seeks direct relations with the Soviet Union. According to the opinion [of the Yugoslavs], Albania should have relations with the Soviet Union only via the Yugoslav government.⁶⁰

It is not entirely clear from the Soviet documents how Stalin perceived Yugoslavia's policy in the Balkans during this time. Apparently, one key reason for the growing unease in Moscow was the deterioration of East-West relations and Yugoslavia's increasing involvement in the Greek civil war. In the summer of 1947 Soviet officials learned that Belgrade was about to become militarily engaged in Greece. The Soviet ambassador in Belgrade, Anatolii Lavrent'ev, warned about the possibility of a war in the Balkans, based on a conversation he had with Tito on 26 July 1947: "It is absolutely clear that the thought of striking militarily against Greek provocations is now on Tito's mind."⁶¹

Tito's goals vis-à-vis Greece were twofold. First, he hoped that by supporting the Greek Communist guerrillas, half of whom were Slavic-born Greeks (so-called Greek Macedonians), Yugoslavia could gain territory in the northern, Slavic-populated areas of (Aegean) Greece. Second, Tito regarded the war in Greece as a pretext to strengthen Yugoslavia's presence in Albania, on the grounds that Yugoslav as well as Albanian borders were threatened by

Lavrent'ev asked Tito "whether he objects to having an Albanian delegation travel to Moscow." Tito responded that he would have objected a year ago, but that "circumstances have changed" and he is in favor of the journey.

59. Chuvakhin, "S diplomaticheskoi missiei v Albanii," p. 122. See also the transcript of Hoxha's conversation with Molotov the day before Hoxha's meeting with Stalin, "Zapis' besedy s E. Khodzhei," 15 July 1947, in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 9, P. 31, D. 431, Ll. 2–15.

60. This document is stored in RGASPI, F. 575, Op. 1, D. 41, Ll. 2–24 (citation from L. 23).

61. "Zapis' besedy s Tito, 26 iyulya 1947," 26 July 1947, in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 9, D. 1285, P. 82, Ll. 82–83.

provocations from “Greek Monarcho-Fascists.”⁶² Chuvakhin, the Soviet envoy in Albania, later recalled that Tito wanted to exploit the Greek civil war to move ahead with the annexation of Albania:

Armed provocations on the Greek borders with Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia intensified. The situation in the Balkans could have degenerated into an international conflict. In this situation, Yugoslavia was the only friendly country through which Albania maintained contacts to the outside world. The Belgrade politicians took advantage of this to foster a closer union between the two countries, that is, literally to incorporate Albania into Yugoslavia. They [the Yugoslavs] created an artificial atmosphere of insecurity and fear [in Albania] and scared the Albanians by telling them they were not in a position to defend themselves against the “aggression of the Anglo-Americans and the Greek Monarcho-Fascists.” It has to be said that the Yugoslavs were quite successful at achieving their goal.⁶³

Not surprisingly, the increased Soviet presence in Albania aroused disquiet in Belgrade. Yugoslav leaders were especially worried about the influx of Soviet specialists into Albania to help out with mining and oil refining. Yugoslav officials suspected that the establishment of direct Soviet-Albanian economic relations would encourage a later political reorientation of Albania.⁶⁴

These assessments were not far off the mark. Albanian leaders at the time increasingly viewed the Soviet Union as a bulwark against Yugoslav influence. The question of Albania’s foreign policy orientation was greatly affected by a power struggle within the Albanian Politburo that revolved essentially around three people: CPA First Secretary Hoxha, Internal Affairs Minister Koçi Xoxe (who was also a CPA Secretary and deputy chairman of the Albanian Council of Ministers), and Economy and Industry Minister Naco Spiru.⁶⁵

Tensions among these officials increased in November 1947 when Yugoslav leaders accused the CPA Politburo of adopting a hostile position toward Yugoslavia. These accusations were directed principally at Naco Spiru, the proponent of an anti-Belgrade line. Under the influence of Xoxe, Spiru’s strongest opponent, Hoxha agreed to launch an investigation of Spiru. The investigation was still under way when Spiru died under mysterious circumstances. According to the official account, Spiru took his own life just a few

62. This is evident, for example, from Minutes of a Conversation between Lavrent’ev and Tito, 23 May 1947, in AVPRE, F. 06, Op. 9, D. 1285, P. 82, Ll. 36–38.

63. Chuvakhin, “S diplomaticheskoi missiei v Albanii,” p. 125.

64. On Yugoslavia’s unease about the growing Soviet involvement in Albania, see, for instance, Minutes of Tito’s Conversation with Soviet Ambassador Lavrent’ev, 13 December 1947, in AVPRE, F. 06, Op. 9, Por. 1285, P. 82, Ll. 173–177.

65. On the power struggle, see Chuvakhin, “S diplomaticheskoi missiei v Albanii,” pp. 114–140. Further descriptions of Albania’s domestic political situation from a Soviet point of view can be found in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 96, Ll. 1–2, 68–78 and D. 472, Ll. 16–21.

days after the start of the proceedings. His death was politically significant because he had maintained close contacts with the Soviet mission in Tirana and regularly heeded the mission's instructions. Shortly before his death he reportedly visited the mission to consult with Soviet officials about his situation.⁶⁶

After Spiru's death, Tito instructed the Yugoslav ambassador in Moscow, Vlado Popović, to approach Stalin immediately about the Albanian question. The Yugoslav ambassador met twice, on 4 and 7 December 1947, with Soviet Politburo-member Andrei Zhdanov. Popović called Spiru a traitor who in his anti-Yugoslav activities had made use of "imperialist" methods. The Yugoslav ambassador emphasized Spiru's close cooperation with the Soviet mission in Tirana and thereby indirectly expressed his displeasure at the Soviet presence in Albania. He emphasized that Albania received all the help it needed from Yugoslavia. Popović told Zhdanov that, in light of Spiru's "suicide," the Yugoslav government would be providing "substantial assistance" to the CPA to purge and consolidate its ranks.⁶⁷ Popović's comments had a clear purpose: to secure Moscow's acknowledgment of Albania's place in the Yugoslav sphere of influence.⁶⁸

Zhdanov reported the discussion to Stalin, who in turn sent a telegram to Tito on 23 December 1947 asking him to send to Moscow "a responsible comrade, for example Djilas or some other person who is familiar with the situation in Albania."⁶⁹ On 17 January 1948, shortly after Djilas arrived in Moscow, he was summoned to the Kremlin for consultations with the Soviet dictator. Once again, Stalin expressed support for convergence and the subsequent integration of Albania into the Yugoslav Federation. But he added, as a qualification, that a formal merger of the two countries should be delayed until an appropriate time and format could be worked out. Stalin indicated that a political merger should be accomplished voluntarily, not against the will of the Albanians.⁷⁰

The documents do not clearly indicate which objectives Stalin was really

66. See "Summary of Ambassador Popovic's Two Conversations with Andrei Zhdanov on 4 and 7 December 1947," in RGASPI, F. 77, Op. 3, D. 99, Ll. 4–5, 8. See also Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi družhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 189, 206.

67. "Summary of Ambassador Popovic's Two Conversations with Andrei Zhdanov on 4 and 7 December 1947."

68. See Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi družhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," p. 190; and Gibianskii, "U nachala konflikta," pp. 177–179.

69. The drafts of Stalin's telegram to Tito, in Zhdanov's handwriting, are stored in RGASPI, F. 77, Op. 3, D. 99, Ll. 6–7 (first handwritten draft) and L. 8 (second typewritten draft). Stalin's telegram to Tito was first published in *Pravda* (Moscow), 6 March 1990, p. 2.

70. Gibianskii, "The Soviet-Yugoslav Split and the Cominform," p. 294. The conversation of 17 January is also recounted in Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 143–146.

pursuing in his statements to Djilas. Was he merely playing for time in order to clamp down on Yugoslavia's ambitions toward Albania at some later date? In any case, what mattered most was how the Yugoslavs perceived Stalin's position. Two days after the discussions with Stalin, Djilas sent a telegram to Belgrade describing the meeting in Moscow and expressing satisfaction with the results. He showed no sign of doubt about Stalin's sincerity.⁷¹

Yugoslav-Albanian Relations and Moscow's Reaction

Tito interpreted Stalin's statements as approval of Yugoslavia's policy toward Albania. Upon receiving Djilas's report from Moscow, Tito sent Hoxha a telegram suggesting that Albania should allow Yugoslav troops to use military bases near the south Albanian city of Korcha.⁷² Tito justified this proposal by alluding to the danger of an incursion by the "the Greek Monarcho-Fascists with the support of the Anglo-Americans."⁷³ On 20 January 1948 Hoxha responded that the Albanian side agreed with Tito's proposal.⁷⁴

Although the contacts between Belgrade and Tirana were conducted under maximum secrecy, Soviet officials learned about the events on the same day. On 21 January, Ambassador Lavrent'ev informed Moscow that the proposed deployment of troops had been agreed without consulting the Soviet military advisers on the scene.⁷⁵ Although it remains unclear who passed this information on to Lavrent'ev, Soviet diplomats in Tirana received information about the planned troop movement directly from the Albanian government.⁷⁶

Soviet leaders clearly felt provoked, and their reaction was harsh, in part

71. Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi druzhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 191, 207.

72. The accounts in Djilas's memoir and in declassified Yugoslav documents indicate that the decision to send Yugoslav troops to Albania was taken in Belgrade. This contradicts Dedijer's thesis that Enver Hoxha requested the divisions. See Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi druzhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 192, 207. See also Milovan Djilas, *Vlast i pobuna* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1991), p. 125.

73. Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi druzhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 192, 207.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193. The thesis that Hoxha did not reply to the Yugoslav proposal is taken from his memoirs. See Enver Hoxha, *The Titoists: Historical Notes* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori Publishing House, 1982), pp. 439–444.

75. Memorandum from Lavrent'ev, 21 January 1948, in AVPRE, F. 059, Op. 20, Por. 257, P. 36, Ll. 89–90.

76. Detailed information on the proposed Yugoslav troop movement and the situation on the Albanian-Greek border is contained in a report provided to the Soviet mission in Tirana by the Albanian government, stored in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 472, Ll. 77–83. Further documents on Soviet-Albanian relations in connection with the Spiru affair and the events of January can be found in AVPRE, F. 067, Op. 14, Por. 6, P. 104, Ll. 51, 73, 81, 93, 97, 99, 151–152.

because this was not the only disturbing news from the Balkans in recent days. A week earlier, on 15 January 1948, the Soviet Politburo received word that Koçi Xoxe had privately indicated that a merger of the Yugoslav and Albanian armies was in the works. Xoxe also indicated that Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania had already agreed to form a single army under a common command if the situation demanded it. According to Xoxe, Hoxha had approved of all these plans.⁷⁷

On 28 January, Ambassador Lavrent'ev met with Tito at Molotov's behest to find out whether reports about the proposed troop deployment were accurate. Lavrent'ev handed a message from Molotov to Tito stating that the "Anglo-Saxons" regard the "movement of the Yugoslav army into Albania as an act of occupation of Albania by the Yugoslav army and an infringement of its sovereignty" and could use these circumstances as a "pretext for intervention in these affairs."⁷⁸

After receiving Tito's response, the ambassador reported back to Molotov that same day:

In Tito's opinion the Greek Monarcho-Fascists and their supporters must be made to understand that Yugoslavia will fully defend Albania. In the event that [Yugoslavia] does not make this intention demonstrably clear, the Monarcho-Fascists could easily occupy southern Albania because the Albanian-Greek border is basically unprotected. Tito further stated that he agrees with Moscow's view that we have to reckon with possible actions on the part of the Anglo-Saxons. It is not impossible that [the movement of Yugoslav troops] will create a stir in the [Western] press, but this does not concern us. Tito asked for his views to be passed on to Moscow and decided at the same time to postpone the sending of divisions to Albania for the time being. If the Soviet Union considers it desirable to abandon this project, Yugoslavia will accept this recommendation. But if Greece marches into Albania, Tito said in a half-joking tone, "Yugoslavia together with the Soviet Union will clear this mess up [*raskhleblyvat' etu kashu*]."⁷⁹

Three days later, Lavrent'ev handed Tito another letter from Molotov that was phrased in an extremely sharp tone. For the first time, Molotov referred to "serious differences" between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia:

77. Report ("Top Secret") Distributed to Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov, Lavrentii Beria, Anastas Mikoyan, Georgii Malenkov, and Nikolai Voznesenskii, is stored in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 1160, Ll. 1-4.

78. "Iz telegrammy V. M. Molotova A. I. Lavrent'evu dlya peredachi I. Broz Tito ili E. Kardelyu, 28 yanvarya 1948 g.," *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 57.

79. "Iz telegrammy A. I. Lavrent'eva v MID SSSR, 28 yanvarya 1948 g.," *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 59.

From your conversation with comrade Lavrent'ev it is apparent that you consider it normal if Yugoslavia, which has signed a Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the USSR, not only believes it can forgo consulting the USSR about the question of deploying its army to Albania but does not even consider it necessary at least to inform [the USSR about such matters]. . . . The Sov[iet] Gov[ernment] has purely by chance, through personal discussions between Soviet representatives and Albanian officials, become aware of the Yugoslav government's decision concerning the deployment of your army to Albania. The USSR does not consider such a procedure to be normal. But if you regard it as normal, then on behalf of the Soviet government I must inform you that the USSR cannot agree to being presented with a *fait accompli*. It goes without saying that the USSR as an ally of Yugoslavia is not prepared to accept responsibility for the potential consequences of such conduct.⁸⁰

Lavrent'ev reported back to Moscow that after reading the missive, Tito became very uneasy. According to the ambassador, Tito conceded that it was a serious error to make the decision without consulting Moscow. Lavrent'ev said that the Yugoslav leader promised not to move the Yugoslav divisions to Albania and to consult with Moscow in advance about all such matters in the future.⁸¹

The Soviet authorities were not content with a simple apology from Tito. On 1 February 1948 Lavrent'ev handed the Yugoslav marshal a further letter from Molotov emphasizing that

serious differences exist between us with regard to questions of foreign policy. In view of the tense international situation we believe it necessary to eliminate these differences by means of an exchange of views at an unofficial meeting in Moscow. We therefore request that you send two or three senior officials of the Yugoslav government to Moscow for an exchange of views. Officials of the Bulgarian government have also been invited. Time of arrival not later than 8–10 February. Inform us of your view.⁸²

Tito immediately accepted the invitation and sent a high-ranking Yugoslav delegation to the Soviet capital. On 8 February, in line with the timetable, Edvard Kardelj, the “second man” in the Yugoslav leadership after Tito, along with another senior Yugoslav official, Vladimir Bakarić, arrived in Moscow. Djilas was already there awaiting them and joined the Yugoslav delegation.

80. “Iz telegrammy V. M. Molotova A. I. Lavrent'evu dlya peredachi I. Broz Tito, 31 yanvarya 1948 g.,” *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 59.

81. “Iz telegrammy A. I. Lavrent'eva V. M. Molotovu, 31 yanvarya 1948 g.,” *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 59.

82. “Iz telegrammy V. M. Molotova A. I. Lavrent'evu dlya peredachi I. Broz Tito, 1 fevralya 1948 g.,” *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 60.

The Soviet “letter of invitation” indicates that a Bulgarian delegation was also summoned to Moscow. This was in response to a controversial statement by the Bulgarian Communist Party leader Georgi Dimitrov.⁸³ Speaking to Western journalists on 17 January 1948, Dimitrov referred to the merger of East European states and the eventual unification of the “people’s democracies” into a single federally organized state. He stated that “when the time is ripe [for a federation or confederation]—and it is turning ripe now—. . . our people, the people of the people’s democracies, that is, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Greece (please note, Greece as well!), will solve this question.”⁸⁴

Dimitrov’s mention of Greece as a “people’s democracy” aroused great international attention. To be sure, the first negative reaction from the side of the socialist camp came not from Moscow but from Belgrade. Tito argued that Dimitrov’s speech was “damaging” and asked Djilas to suggest that Stalin “have a word with the Bulgarian comrades.” The Yugoslav leader wanted to emphasize that Dimitrov’s position could not be equated with that of Belgrade, particularly regarding Greece.⁸⁵

The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* mentioned the issue on 23 January 1948 but refrained from criticizing Dimitrov. Two days later, however, Stalin sent Dimitrov a telegram describing the statement as a “rash and damaging” comment that facilitated the “struggle of the Anglo-Americans against . . . the people’s democracies.”⁸⁶ On 28 January, *Pravda* again mentioned Dimitrov’s statement but this time subjected it to severe criticism. The following day, the Bulgarian government announced through its press agency that it totally accepted the Soviet position. On 2 February Dimitrov publicly disavowed his statement and wrote to Stalin assuring him of his solidarity with the Soviet position.⁸⁷

The Soviet Union’s sudden change of policy vis-à-vis Dimitrov’s statement had relatively little to do with the statement per se. When Djilas met with Zhdanov on 19 January 1948 to clarify the Yugoslav position on Dimitrov’s statement, Zhdanov did not indicate whether Moscow would exert influence on Bulgaria, and he also refrained from commenting on

83. Well before the latest documentary evidence became available, the importance of this event in the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict had been stressed. See Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito*, Vol. 1, pp. 459–460.

84. The text of Dimitrov’s speech is cited in Gibianskii, “U nachala konfliktka,” p. 181.

85. Memorandum from Lavrent’ev to Molotov, in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 7, Por. 872, P. 53, Ll. 16–18, 34–35. See also Gibianskii, “Ot ‘nerushimoi druzhby’ k besposhchadnoi bor’be,” pp. 187, 206.

86. See Gibianskii, “U nachala konfliktka,” pp. 183–184; and Gibianskii, “Ot ‘nerushimoi druzhby’ k besposhchadnoi bor’be,” p. 194.

87. Gibianskii, “U nachala konfliktka,” p. 195.

Dimitrov's statement.⁸⁸ The turnaround in Soviet policy apparently came when Soviet leaders learned about Tito's intention to send two Yugoslav divisions to Albania. Thus, it was not Dimitrov's statement as such but the general direction of Yugoslav policy in the Balkans (and particularly the plans to send troops to Albania) that prompted the Soviet rebuke of Dimitrov.

Path to Confrontation: The Meeting of 10 February 1948 and Its Aftermath

On 10 February 1948, Bulgarian and Yugoslav officials met in Moscow with Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov, and other high-ranking Soviet officials (Georgii Malenkov, Mikhail Suslov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Valerian Zorin). The Soviet participants voiced severe criticism of Bulgarian and Yugoslav actions.⁸⁹ The first point raised by Molotov was the Yugoslav-Bulgarian Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance, which had been signed in Bled on 1 August 1947 without prior consultation with Moscow. The lack of consultation about this matter, Molotov argued, reflected "serious differences" between Moscow and the Yugoslav and Bulgarian governments.⁹⁰

The main accusation was lodged against Yugoslavia for its plan to send two divisions to Albania. At Stalin's request, Molotov read the passage from Lavrent'ev's telegram of 28 January 1948 referring to the need for the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia to "sort out the mess" together in case of an Anglo-

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–195, 207.

89. Until the opening of archives in Eastern Europe, historians had to rely on the account by Dedijer (*Josip Broz Tito*, Vol. 1, pp. 461–467), the memoirs of Kardelj (*Reminiscences*, pp. 103–112), and the recollections of Djilas (*Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 171–186) to gauge the proceedings. Although the full Soviet transcript of the session has not yet been released, the Yugoslav and Bulgarian versions were gathered in the early 1990s by Leonid Gibianskii, who published the minutes of conversations with extended comments in a series of four articles. L. Ya. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg.: Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavsko-bolgarskaya vstrecha v Moskve 10 fevralya 1948 goda" [Part 1], *Sovetskoe slavyanovedenie* (Moscow), No. 3 (1991), pp. 12–23; L. Ya. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg.: Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavsko-bolgarskaya vstrecha v Moskve 10 fevralya 1948 goda" [Part 2], *Sovetskoe slavyanovedenie*, No. 4 (1991), pp. 27–36; L. Ya. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg.: Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavsko-bolgarskaya vstrecha v Moskve 10 fevralya 1948 goda" [Part 3], *Slavyanovedenie* (Moscow), No. 1 (1992), pp. 42–56; and L. Ya. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg.: Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavsko-bolgarskaya vstrecha v Moskve 10 fevralya 1948 goda" [Part 4], *Slavyanovedenie* (Moscow), No. 3 (1992), pp. 35–51. An English version of Djilas's original report about the meeting has been published with extended comments by Leonid Gibianskii in "Report of Milovan Djilas about a Secret Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav Meeting 10 February 1948," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (March 1998), pp. 128–134. Djilas's report, apart from providing richer detail, largely coincides with his account in *Conversations with Stalin*.

90. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 3], p. 43.

American intervention.⁹¹ When Kardelj tried to justify the Yugoslav position by citing the military threat to southern Albania from the Greek government, Molotov replied that Moscow had no information about this matter. Stalin clearly believed that Yugoslavia's regional ambitions vis-à-vis Albania were what had spurred the decision. "Half-jokingly," the Soviet dictator said that "the Yugoslavs [were afraid of] the Russians in Albania and so were hurrying to move their army there."⁹²

Stalin repeatedly broached the subject of the civil war in Greece. To the surprise of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders, Stalin insisted that the Greek Communists "must be helped if there is a chance of achieving victory, and if that is not the case, consideration should be given to disbanding the partisan movement." When Kardelj suggested that the Greek partisans could win, Stalin declared that the Soviet leadership "has in recent times had grave doubts about this" and "does not believe that things are developing as well in Greece as in China."⁹³ Both Djilas and Kardelj note in their memoirs that at the 10 February meeting, Stalin explicitly demanded an end to the Greek rebellion.⁹⁴ Stalin also was signaling to the Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders that they should suspend all assistance to the Greek Communists. This was particularly relevant to Yugoslavia, which played a key role in the Greek civil war. The survival of the Greek partisans depended substantially on the scale of Yugoslav support.⁹⁵

Stalin and Molotov argued that Yugoslav and Bulgarian actions in Greece could have led to dangerous international complications. Although none of the actions cited by Moscow, not even the advance of Yugoslav troops into Albania, directly conjured up the danger of war—and thereby of possible international involvement—maneuvering over the Greek civil war did have the

91. "Report of Milovan Djilas about a Secret Soviet-Bulgarian-Yugoslav Meeting 10 February 1948," p. 130.

92. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 3], p. 130. Soviet sources imply that the Albanian border was not threatened by Greece at this time and that the Yugoslavs were using this argument solely as a rationalization of the gradual integration of Albania into Yugoslavia. See the discussion at this time involving Soviet Ambassador Lavrent'ev and A. I. Ivanov, the first counselor of the Soviet embassy in Belgrade, and Yugoslav Foreign Minister Stanoje Simić. Simić was one of the few non-Communists in the Yugoslav government and was not privy to Yugoslavia's secret plans concerning Albania. In a discussion with Lavrent'ev on 18 February 1948, Simić insisted that there was no reason to believe that Greek monarchists had decided to take Northern Epirus (southern Albania). In Simić's view, the Greek monarchists wanted mainly to ward off attacks by the Greek democratic (Communist) army. A summary of Lavrent'ev's and Ivanov's conversation with Simić is stored in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 10, Por. 1106, P. 79, Ll. 32–34.

93. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 3] p. 42.

94. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 181–182; and Kardelj, *Reminiscences*, pp. 107–108.

95. See John O. Iatrides, "Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy, and Tactics in the Greek Civil War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 3–33.

potential to spark a major international crisis. Soviet leaders sensed that victory for the Greek Communists could be achieved only through direct military intervention, which would risk a confrontation with the Western powers that were already preparing a formal military alliance. Stalin did not want to aggravate international tensions for a futile cause.⁹⁶ He was aware that the West regarded the Greek civil war as an indicator of Soviet expansionist plans.⁹⁷

Nonetheless, although fear of international escalation was certainly important, it was hardly the only reason for Stalin's shift on the Greek uprising. When a crisis arose in Czechoslovakia later that month, Stalin was ready to help the Czechoslovak Communists come to power with more than just diplomatic means, if necessary.⁹⁸ Similarly, when growing tensions over Berlin in the first several months of 1948 escalated into a full-blown crisis in the summer, the Soviet Union came close to fomenting a confrontation with the West.⁹⁹

The documents currently available in Moscow do not fully clarify Stalin's position on the issue of Greece. Leonid Gibianskii argues that

the basis for Soviet condemnation of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian initiatives was, in the final analysis, [Stalin's] dissatisfaction with the independence of the actions themselves . . . although it is entirely possible that at the same time the Kremlin was genuinely apprehensive of possible Western reactions to these moves.¹⁰⁰

This is in line with the explanation offered by Djilas:

96. A. S. Anikeev, "Protivostoyanie SSSR-SShA v Yugo-Vostochnoy Evrope i sovetско-yugoslavskii konflikt 1948 goda," in Nezhiinskii, ed., *Sovetskaya vneshnyaya politika v gody "kholodnoi voiny*," p. 121.

97. Important in this respect was a speech on 22 January 1948 by British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, who told Parliament that Western states must join together to face the danger posed by the Soviet Union. Soviet officials responded harshly to the speech, especially to Bevin's warning that the "provocations" by Greek Communist rebels could lead to "serious incidents." See L. Ya. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 4], p. 43.

98. The Yugoslav ambassador in Moscow, Vlado Popović, sent a telegram to Tito on 21 February 1948 describing the Soviet view of events in Czechoslovakia: "Here [in Moscow] they think that the situation in Czechoslovakia could cause unrest. They are not convinced that the comrades in the CR are in a position to deal successfully with the crisis. That is why [Deputy Foreign Minister] Zorin has gone to Prague. From discussions with official representatives it appears that if [Zorin's] advice does not help, [the Soviet government] is prepared, if worse comes to worst, to resort to other measures to ensure the victory of the democrats in the CR." See Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetско-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 2], p. 33.

99. On the Berlin crisis, see M. M. Narinskii, "Berlinskii krizis 1948–1949: Novye dokumenty iz rossiiskikh arkhivov," *Novaya i noveyshaya istoriya* (Moscow), No. 3 (May–June 1995), pp. 16–29.

100. Leonid Gibianskii, "The Soviet Bloc and the Initial Stage of the Cold War: Archival Documents on Stalin's Meetings with Communist Leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (March 1998), p. 116.

Not even today am I clear on Stalin's motives in condemning the uprising in Greece. Perhaps he thought that to create still another Communist state—Greece—in the Balkans, when not even the others were reliable and subservient, could hardly have been in his interest, to say nothing of possible international complications, which were becoming more and more threatening and even if they did not drag him into war, they might endanger positions he already had won.¹⁰¹

Toward the end of the meeting, Stalin condemned Dimitrov's statement of 17 January but then unexpectedly proposed the creation of three smaller federations in Eastern Europe.¹⁰² Specifically, he supported a union of Romania and Hungary, a union of Poland and Czechoslovakia, and a union of three Balkan states—Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania.¹⁰³ As a first step, Stalin ordered the immediate merger of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Only at a later date would Albania join the Balkan federation.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, Stalin's intention in shifting the focus to Bulgaria was to disrupt Yugoslavia's efforts to incorporate Albania. Tito was no longer as gung-ho about a union with Bulgaria as he had been right after the war.¹⁰⁵

The Yugoslav and Bulgarian participants were contrite during the 10 February meeting. They acknowledged having made "mistakes" and having violated procedures. The day after the meeting, Kardelj and Dimitrov signed a Bulgarian-Yugoslav treaty drawn up by Moscow that committed Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to consult with the Soviet Union on all relevant international matters.¹⁰⁶

The meeting in Moscow represented an ultimatum regarding intra-bloc procedures on foreign policy. Shortly after the Moscow meeting, on 19 February, the KPJ Politburo met secretly to discuss the Moscow talks.¹⁰⁷ The partic-

101. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 182–183.

102. Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetsko-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 3], p. 44; and Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetsko-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 1], p. 21.

103. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 177; and Gibianskii, "K istorii sovetsko-yugoslavskogo konflikta 1948–1953 gg." [Part 3], p. 49.

104. Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi druzhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 199, 208. Djilas indicates that Stalin gave an ultimatum to the Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders to sign a treaty on this subject as soon as possible. See Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 177.

105. Stalin's position on federal projects in Eastern Europe is difficult to grasp. Stalin spoke on numerous occasions in favor of federal plans, although none of these ideas came to fruition. Most Western and Yugoslav authors have accepted Kardelj's interpretation of Stalin's proposal to create a Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation as a means of exerting greater influence on Yugoslavia through pro-Moscow leaders in Bulgaria. However, Kardelj's thesis that Stalin wanted to use Bulgaria as a "Trojan horse" against Yugoslavia has not yet been corroborated by archival sources. See Gibianskii, "Ot 'nerushimoi druzhby' k besposhchadnoi bor'be," pp. 199, 208.

106. The text is published in *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 6 (1990), p. 55.

107. That a meeting took place at all on 19 February 1948 has been known only since Gibianskii

ipants unanimously agreed that Yugoslavia should not form a federation with Bulgaria.¹⁰⁸ This was the first time that Tito had refused to obey a direct, unambiguous order from Moscow.

Two days later, Yugoslav leaders disregarded yet another Soviet request. Tito, Kardelj, and Djilas met with high-ranking Greek Communist officials, including the General Secretary, Nikos Zakhariádēs, and informed them that Stalin had spoken in favor of ending the Greek civil war. Tito, however, promised to continue to support the Greek “war of liberation” with military aid.¹⁰⁹

To be sure, the situation along the Yugoslav-Greek border had become acute by this point. In a discussion with Yugoslav Foreign Minister Stanoje Simić on 10 March 1948, Lavrent’ev learned that the entire Yugoslav air force had been put on a war footing. According to Simić, the Yugoslav General Command made this decision to thwart expected “military provocations from the Greek Monarcho-Fascists.”¹¹⁰ Shortly after speaking with Simić, Lavrent’ev approached Tito about the situation in Greece:

I asked Tito what news there was from Greece. Tito limited his answer to the statement that the Democratic Greek Army had achieved a major victory in Epirus over the forces of the Greek Monarchists. Tito said nothing to me about the matter that Simić brought up with me today—that Yugoslavia’s General Command had taken appropriate measures in case of military provocation from the Greek Monarchists.¹¹¹

To Moscow’s irritation, Yugoslavia also still planned to send troops to Albania. But because of the tension in Soviet-Yugoslav relations, Tito wanted the Albanians to press for the dispatch of two Yugoslav divisions. At Tito’s behest, the Albanians sought to persuade Moscow of the need for Yugoslav forces in Albania. Likewise, the Albanians “at their own initiative” were supposed to urge Stalin to approve of the merger of Albania and Yugoslavia.¹¹²

The extent of Yugoslav pressure on the Albanian side during this time is evident from the text of a resolution adopted by the CPA Central Committee

found the respective document in the Tito-Archive in Belgrade. See Gibianskii, “Ot ‘nerushimoi druzhby’ k besposhchadnoi bor’be,” p. 199. For the minutes of the Politburo meeting, see pp. 199, 208.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 208. The Bulgarians supported the establishment of a federation, as noted in a report stored in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 10, Por. 1106, P. 79, Ll. 55, 78.

109. Gibianskii, “Ot ‘nerushimoi druzhby’ k besposhchadnoi bor’be,” p. 200.

110. The conversation between Lavrent’ev and Simić is summarized in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 10, Por. 1106, P. 79, Ll. 63–64. Just a few weeks earlier, Simić had told Lavrent’ev that provocations from the Greeks were quite improbable (see note 92 *supra*).

111. The minutes of the conversation between Lavrent’ev and Tito are stored in AVPRF, F. 07, Op. 21, Por. 471, P. 31, Ll. 26–31.

112. Gibianskii, “Ot ‘nerushimoi druzhby’ k besposhchadnoi bor’be,” pp. 200, 208.

at a plenum on 26 February–8 March 1948. The resolution discussed Yugoslav-Albanian relations at length, focusing mostly on the internal situation and self-criticism of the party. The resolution denounced “certain elements” that together with the late Naco Spiru had spoken against a merger with Yugoslavia. The resolution also declared that a pro-Yugoslav orientation was Albania’s official foreign policy line.¹¹³

Subsequently, the Albanian authorities adopted a secret document regarding the planned “merger of the Albanian army with the Yugoslavian.” The document highlighted the various components of the Albanian army that would be reorganized to facilitate a merger. The justification for this move was laid out in the introductory preamble, which stressed the danger of a Greek invasion of southern Albania and claimed that the deployment of Yugoslav troops to fortify the borders was “urgently necessary.”¹¹⁴

At a further meeting of the KPJ Politburo on 1 March, the participants reaffirmed their position. For the first time, senior Yugoslav officials openly complained that Soviet leaders were taking no account of Yugoslavia’s interests and were trying to impose unwise measures on Yugoslavia. The KPJ Politburo also accused Moscow of willfully torpedoing Soviet-Yugoslav economic and military-industrial cooperation and passed a resolution calling for a more independent course in these areas.¹¹⁵

Stalin and his associates were kept closely apprised of the situation in Yugoslavia. The most important source of information was Sreten Žujović, a KPJ Politburo member and minister in the Yugoslav government, who informed Soviet officials about the KPJ Politburo’s 1 March meeting (he did not attend the meeting on 19 February).¹¹⁶ Reports from the Soviet embassy in Belgrade also contributed to the increase in Soviet-Yugoslav tension. From March 1946 (when Sadchikov was replaced by Lavrent’ev as Soviet ambassador), these reports took on an increasingly negative tone. Lavrent’ev spoke harshly about Yugoslav actions and highlighted the shortcomings of individual Yugoslav leaders. The reports frequently condemned the “national narrow-mindedness” of Yugoslav officials and their insistence on downplaying the role of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷

113. The text of the resolution is in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 472, Ll. 31–41.

114. The document is stored in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 128, D. 472, Ll. 77–83.

115. Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broz Tito*, Vol. 3, pp. 303–308.

116. Gibianskii, “Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948” [Part 1], p. 122.

117. Lavrent’ev’s reports for the period 1946–1948 are in AVPRF, F. 07, Op. 21, Por. 471, P. 31; *Ibid.*, F. 07, Op. 11, Por. 503, p. 30; *Ibid.*, F. 06, Op. 9, Por. 1285, P. 82; *Ibid.*, F. 06, Op. 10, Por. 1106, P. 70; *Ibid.*, F. 06, Op. 8, Por. 943, P. 56 and *ibid.*, F. 0144, Op. 31, Por. 16, P. 123.

Open Conflict

In the spring of 1948 the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict became a more overtly ideological confrontation. On 18 March 1948 the USSR withdrew its military advisers from Yugoslavia. On 27 March Stalin and Molotov sent their famous first letter to the Yugoslav leaders, accusing them of an anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist-Leninist position.¹¹⁸ When Tito rejected Moscow's accusations, Stalin and Molotov sent a copy of the letter in late April 1948 to the other Eastern European leaders. This was the first step toward uniting the socialist camp against Yugoslavia and preparing for the official Cominform condemnation in June. Significantly, Stalin and Molotov in their exchanges with Tito from March to May 1948 almost totally refrained from criticizing Yugoslav policy in the Balkans. Evidently they wanted to avoid the impression that this was just an argument about power politics.

Why did Tito refuse to acknowledge his "errors" after the start of the Soviet ideological campaign in March 1948? Clearly, it was not in Tito's interest to provoke this kind of conflict. His claim to build socialism and rule Yugoslavia rested on a close alliance with the Soviet Union. But after the fierce ideological confrontation began in March 1948, Tito was essentially confronted with choosing the lesser of two evils: to surrender or to resist Stalin. Tito had no illusions that "confessing" to the harsh Soviet accusations would mean only his total submission. As one of the few Yugoslav Communists in the Soviet Union who survived the Stalinist purges in the late 1930s (some 800 of his comrades were killed), he also knew that giving in not only would end his political career, but might also cost him his life.¹¹⁹

Resisting the Soviet Union after the break entailed two great risks. The first was the prospect of Soviet military intervention. Because Soviet military planning documents on this matter are still inaccessible, it is impossible to say for sure whether Stalin ever seriously considered a direct military invasion of Yugoslavia.¹²⁰ The documentary evidence that is available from East European

118. The letter of 27 March 1948 is reproduced in Gibianskii, "Sekretnaya sovetско-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948" [Part 1], pp. 127–129.

119. An indication of this is that Tito did not travel to Moscow for meetings with Stalin in February 1948 or to Romania for the Cominform meeting on 19–23 June 1948. According to Dedijer's early accounts, Tito and other KPJ leaders feared they might not return alive from the Cominform meeting. See Vladimir Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito: Prilozi za biografiju* (Zagreb: Kultura, 1953), p. 357.

120. Prior to the opening of the archives, the literature on this subject largely accepted the claims by Béla Király, the commander of Hungarian infantry in 1949 who emigrated to the United States after 1956. Király insisted that the Soviet Union was actively preparing to invade Yugoslavia. According to Király, Stalin undertook a massive military build-up and exercises in 1949–1950 to lay the groundwork for an invasion but aborted these plans after the forceful U.S. intervention against North Korea in June 1950. See, for example, Béla K. Király, "The Aborted Soviet Military Plans against Tito's Yugoslavia," in Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace*, pp. 284–285. The documentation now

and Western countries strongly suggests that, at least through late 1950, Stalin did not prepare for military intervention in Yugoslavia. What his intentions were in the final two years of his life is less clear, but regardless of his precise aims, the fact is that the Yugoslavs from the outset greatly feared such a scenario.¹²¹ As rumors of an imminent Soviet attack spread from mid-1948 on, the Yugoslav authorities tried to plan for war with the Soviet Union and its allies.¹²² The second risk facing Tito was an internal move against him. He knew that his decision to resist would likely stir up considerable opposition within the KPJ, which included many true Stalinist believers. Ivo Banac suggests that up to 20 percent of party members sided with Stalin rather than Tito after the split. Tito and his colleagues responded with a massive campaign against real or imagined “Cominformists” (also called *ibeovci*), thousands of whom were imprisoned, killed, or forced into exile. Prominent victims included Andrija Hebrang and Sreten Žujović.¹²³

The single most important reason for Tito to resist Stalin was, however, the nature of his power base. Of all the Communist leaders in Eastern Europe, Tito and Hoxha were the only ones who played a large role in the liberation of their countries from wartime occupation. At the end of the war, Tito’s partisan guerrillas numbered roughly 200,000. Unlike other resistance movements in Yugoslavia, Tito’s forces included fighters from all the major Yugoslav nationalities. The fact that Tito came to power supported by a mass movement must have contributed to his self-confidence and given him the sense that he could defend his position against “internal enemies” or even against an outside attack.¹²⁴

What was Stalin’s larger calculus behind the condemnation of Yugoslavia? The role of the Cominform is important in this regard. Whereas the inaugural meeting of the Cominform in September 1947 was intended to speed up the Sovietization of Eastern Europe, the meeting that condemned Yugoslavia

available from both Eastern Europe and the United States makes clear that Király’s assertions were fallacious. For a valuable review of some of this new evidence, see László Ritter, “War on Tito’s Yugoslavia? The Hungarian Army in Early Cold War Soviet Strategy,” Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, February 2005 (online text including additional commentaries, documents, and maps available at http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/coll_tito/intro.cfm).

121. According to Dedijer, Kardelj, upon receiving Stalin’s letter of 27 March 1948, claimed that “I know the Russians. . . . I know their reasoning. . . . They will label us as fascists in order to create before the world a moral-political excuse for war against us. . . . If they can, they will eliminate us by force.” See Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broz Tito*, Vol. 3, p. 428.

122. Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, p. 131.

123. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–115, 146–151, 243–254.

124. The Yugoslav leaders’ confidence is expressed in Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broz Tito*, Vol. 3, pp. 428–429. See also the Soviet assessments of Tito’s domestic position in mid-1946 and in September 1947. “O mezhdunarodnom polozhenii Sovetskogo Soyuza,” L. 103; and Gibianskii, *Sovetskii Soyuz i novaya Yugoslaviya*, p. 143.

in late June 1948 was intended to demonstrate to all the Communist leaders that the rules of the game had changed. The accusations lodged against Yugoslavia signaled Stalin's new organizational program for the socialist camp.¹²⁵ Illustrative in this respect is the letter of 4 May 1948 from Stalin and Molotov to KPJ leaders affirming the Soviet Union's right to interfere in the East European states' internal affairs.¹²⁶ Previously, the system allowed a modicum of flexibility and left a bit of leeway for individual states, but starting in 1948 the slightest deviation was tantamount to disobedience and was therefore forbidden.

No document has yet emerged from the archives that conclusively illuminates Stalin's own role in the conflict and his personal attitude toward the KPJ. The most useful source currently available on this matter is a report sent by Stalin to the Czechoslovak leader Klement Gottwald on 14 July 1948, just two weeks after the Cominform meeting:

I have the impression that you [Gottwald] are counting on the defeat of Tito and his group at the next congress of the KPJ. You suggest publishing compromising material against the Yugoslav leaders. . . . We in Moscow are not counting on the early defeat of Tito and have never counted on it.

We have achieved the isolation of Yugoslavia. Hence, the gradual decline of Tito's Marxist groups is to be expected. This will require patience and the ability to wait. You seem to be lacking in patience. . . . There can be no doubt that Marxism will triumph in due course.¹²⁷

The document suggests that Stalin's primary aim was not to topple Tito but to isolate Yugoslavia. It casts doubt on Nikita Khrushchev's claim about Stalin's supposed confidence that Tito would be quickly removed. Khrushchev in his secret speech to the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress in 1956 insisted that when the conflict with Tito erupted Stalin had declared, "I will shake my little finger—and there will be no more Tito. He will fall."¹²⁸ Even if Stalin initially (i.e., before the Cominform resolution) believed that Tito, like other prominent East European Communists, could not withstand Soviet pressure (there are, however, no archival sources to sustain this view), the letter to Gottwald shows that Stalin clearly did not expect Tito's rapid ouster after the

125. Dzhuzeppe Boffa, *Istoriya Sovetskogo Soyuza*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Mezhdunarondye otnosheniya, 1994), p. 349.

126. Gibianskii, "Sekretnaya sovetko-yugoslavskaya perepiska 1948" [Part 3], p. 143.

127. The document, stored in the Russian Presidential Archive, is cited in Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Sem' vozhdai: Galereya liderov SSSR v 2-kh knigakh*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), Vol. 1, p. 246.

128. Cited from Khrushchev's secret speech to the closed session of the Twentieth Party Congress, Moscow, 25 February 1956, reprinted in "O kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviyakh," *Istochnik* (Moscow), No. 6 (2000), pp. 83–108.

Cominform adopted its resolution.¹²⁹ Most likely, the statement quoted by Khrushchev is spurious.

Why was Stalin in no hurry to bring Yugoslavia under full Soviet control? Part of this has to do with his view of the Balkans after World War II. At the beginning of the war the Soviet Union regarded Yugoslavia and Greece to be outside its sphere of immediate interest. Molotov had made this clear in August 1939 when he negotiated the Nazi-Soviet pact with the Germans.¹³⁰ Soviet attitudes changed during the war when it became clear that the tide was shifting in Moscow's favor. A high-ranking Soviet Foreign Commissariat official, Ivan Maiskii, claimed in October 1943 that the whole of the Balkans had been assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence.¹³¹ Later Soviet statements and documents suggest a more flexible Soviet position. A report by Deputy Foreign Minister Maksim Litvinov in February 1945 proposed seeking a compromise with the West over Yugoslavia—a view that seems to have reflected Stalin's own position.¹³² The secret "percentages deal" concluded by Stalin and Winston Churchill on 9 October 1944 stipulated that each side would be given a "50-percent share" of influence in Yugoslavia.¹³³

This allocation worked decidedly in favor of the Soviet Union. The country fell under Soviet influence not because of any grand strategic design but because of events on the ground. The Red Army marched into Belgrade in 1944, but Tito's own forces had already freed the rest of the country by then, and the partisans reached Belgrade at basically the same time that Soviet troops did. For the USSR this situation was advantageous as long as it was controllable. But when Stalin sensed that Tito was pursuing a separate, ambitious agenda in the Balkans, he decided to get rid of the Yugoslav leader—maybe even at the risk of losing the country altogether.

Most likely, Stalin believed that what he actually gained from the conflict was, at least in the short run, worth the cost of losing Yugoslavia. Stalin's strategy to isolate Yugoslavia strengthened Moscow's grip over the rest of the socialist camp. As noted above, the Soviet Union was preparing in early 1948 to

129. Khrushchev writes in his memoirs, "Although the accusations against the Yugoslavs were false, Stalin had high hopes they would trigger internal opposition to Tito. When his hopes were frustrated, he tried to remove Tito by other means—sending special agents there." Cited from: Jerrold J. Schecter, ed., *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), pp. 102–103.

130. François Fejtö, *Die Geschichte der Volksdemokratien: 1. Band, Die Ära Stalin 1945–1953*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Eichborn Verlag, 1988), p. 75.

131. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain," Working Paper No. 13, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, July 1995, p. 3.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

133. See, for example, Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens 1918–1980* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1982), pp. 138–139.

attack Communist leaders in Poland and Czechoslovakia. By orchestrating the Cominform's condemnation of the KPJ, Stalin created both a pretext and a precedent for the subsequent purges of Communist parties in the other East European countries. A series of accusations followed against high-ranking Communists, who were denounced as "Titoists." Among these were Władysław Gomułka in Poland, János Kádár in Hungary, and Gustáv Husák in Czechoslovakia. The many who were executed for allegedly pro-Titoist tendencies (often following show trials and "confessions") included Koçi Xoxe in Albania, László Rajk in Hungary, Traicho Kostov in Bulgaria, and Rudolf Slánský in Czechoslovakia.

The split with Belgrade also helped Moscow to achieve a number of important objectives in the Balkans. Albania turned completely away from Belgrade and found its new patron in Moscow. Bulgaria became one of the strongest critics of Tito and closest allies of Moscow. Finally, Yugoslavia ended its assistance to the Greek Communist guerrillas a few months after the Cominform resolution and thereby contributed to the defeat of the Communists in the Greek civil war.

Conclusion

The former Soviet archives have not yielded sensational new evidence that would force a complete revision of the history of the Soviet-Yugoslav split. Rather, the Soviet documents make clear which events were particularly important and how they became entangled with the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict. In particular, the new evidence permits a much more detailed understanding of the significance of Yugoslavia's policy in the Balkans, showing how Tito's attempts to integrate Albania into Yugoslavia ran afoul of Stalin's Sovietization plans for Eastern Europe.

The newly available documents do not definitively settle the question of whether a confrontation between Tito and Stalin was inevitable. Contrary to a widespread view in the earlier literature, the latest evidence from the Russian archives does not support the thesis that the two sides were destined to clash because of differing views about the establishment of socialism. Moreover, although the hardening of Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe was a necessary condition for the Soviet-Yugoslav split, it was not a sufficient condition. Not until March 1948, when Yugoslav leaders decided that they would not accept Moscow's demands—and the Soviet Union in turn embarked on an ideologically charged attack—did a confrontation become unavoidable. Thus, the process of region-wide Sovietization and the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict did not become directly intertwined until the spring of 1948. Soviet

leaders came to see the maintenance of Albanian independence as a prerequisite for limiting Yugoslavia's influence in the Balkans.

The declassification of Soviet and East European documents has greatly illuminated previously obscure events in the complicated triangle involving Moscow, Belgrade, and Tirana. Nonetheless, important gaps in our knowledge remain. Soviet strategic thinking and policies vis-à-vis the southern Balkan region have thus far attracted relatively little attention among scholars of the Cold War. Soviet perceptions of the Greek civil war, of the federation plans among the Balkan states, and of relations with Albania have gone largely unexplored. Given the salience of Albania in the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, a thorough scholarly analysis of Soviet policy toward this small Balkan state will be a key task for future research.