

History Internal Assessment

“To what extent was the conflict of the geopolitical interests between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union the major cause of the the Yugoslav-Soviet split of 1948?”

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Identification and Evaluation of Sources

The research question for this investigation is “To what extent was the conflict of the geopolitical interests between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union the major cause of the the Yugoslav-Soviet split of 1948?” Among the sources investigated, two sources were especially noteworthy: *Tito and Goliath* written by Hamilton Fish Armstrong and published in 1952, and *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, a collection of conference papers published in 1982. Both sources are highly relevant to the topic of the investigation, both in their analyses of the causes of the Yugoslav-Soviet split of 1948 and the different historiographies proposed.

Tito and Goliath is valuable to historians because of its origin. Hamilton Armstrong, an American diplomat and the managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, developed deep understanding of the Balkans during his service there during WWI. A value for the source’s purpose is that it describes the Yugoslav-Soviet relationship from pre-WWII to the split in different time periods, and thus demonstrates both the long-term and short-term causes leading up to the split. The content of the source is valuable because it contains direct conversations from Tito, represent Tito’s standpoint, and Yugoslav primary sources and data to support its arguments. A limitation of the origin is that Armstrong, as an American historian, is biased because of the U.S. stance towards and aid to Yugoslavia after the split, as well as his personal relationship with Tito. Its purpose has limitations as it excludes emphasis on the personal relationships between Tito and Stalin, and uses the split to explain the disunity among the communist world. The content has limitations as the book was published for the general public, and the writing is not academic and contains subjective arguments. The content also did not represent either Soviets’ or Stalin’s views.

At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective is valuable regarding its origin as it is a collection of essays from various well-respected historians who presented their views of the split and its after effects at a Stanford conference in 1978.¹ The purpose is valuable as the conference sought to predict the future of post-Tito Yugoslavia by analyzing specific aspects of the split and its effect on current Yugoslavia. The content is valuable because it contains diverse academic sources and historiographies on particular aspects of the split and its effect on the post-split Yugoslavia, including valuable sources that are revealed years after the split. A limitation of the origin is that, unlike Armstrong, none of the authors had first-hand interaction with Yugoslavia or Soviet leaders involved in the conflict, and all analyses are based on published data. The purpose has limitations because it focuses on the short term and more data-supported causes of the split, rather than long-term and ideological causes. The content’s specificity also adds limitations, as it fails to consider other factors or provide a general view of how different factors cause the split altogether.

¹ Wayne S. Vucinich, *Preface*. In *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, edited by Wayne S. Vucinich, vii-x (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1982), vii.

Investigation

The end of WWII created a new political order in Europe. After the Yalta Conference, the Soviet Union established absolute control of Eastern European countries. The Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, a new communist state, was created under Marshall Tito's rule. Yugoslavia remained under Soviet's sphere of influence, until the Cominform resolution of June 28, 1948, which expelled the KPJ (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) from Cominform and marked the departure of the harmony of the two Communist states, also known as the "Yugoslav-Soviet Split". There have been shifting historiography debates regarding the split. The Cominform described Yugoslavia as reactionary, bourgeois, and nationalistic, which betrayed the nature of People's democracies.² KPJ stated that the resolution was a Soviet Union's failed attempt of colonization.³ Khrushchev believed the conflict was magnified by Stalin's cult of individual⁴, while Western historians stated it was a geopolitical conflict rather than ideological.⁵ The Yugoslav-Soviet Split was a combination of ideological differences of the two parties, Yugoslavia's self-interest in Europe and the Soviet pressure against it, and poor experience of collaboration with the Soviet Union since WWII. All of them originated from conflicting geopolitical interests between them.

Despite being Communist states, there exist ideological differences regarding the uniformity of Communist nations and Nationalism. Yugoslavia's government structure was identical to the Soviet one; its 1946 Constitution was closely modelled after the Soviet's of 1936.⁶ However, Yugoslav Communists were mainly peasants, rather than workers in the Soviet model. Stalin once ordered Tito to reconstruct the power structure around workers, to use Bolshevik "revolutionary experience,"⁷ but the fact that most of the partisans were peasants made this impossible. Additionally, Yugoslavia was the only Eastern European country that was not occupied entirely by Axis forces and liberated by the Red Army. Tito's Partisan movement, an independent victory, made him the national leader and superior over any other liberated regimes, and led him to pursue equality within the communist community. The KPJ remained loyal to the Soviets to build Soviet-style socialism, but they looked first to Tito and then Stalin. They stressed their revolution's indigenoussness, thus minimizing the importance of Soviet military assistance, and underlining the distinctive qualities of Yugoslav conditions. Instead of following the Soviet model exactly, "the transition from capitalism to communism, naturally,

² Lucien Karchmar, *The Tito-Stalin Split in Soviet and Yugoslav Historiography*, In *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, edited by Wayne S. Vucinich, 253-272 (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 259.

³ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), XI.

⁴ Russian Institute, *The anti-Stalin campaign and international communism: a selection of documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 62.

⁵ Nebojsa Bjelakovic, "Comrades and Adversaries: Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict in 1948 — a Reappraisal." (*East European Quarterly* 33, no. 1 1999: 97), accessed January 29, 2018,

<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/1G1-54297064/comrades-and-adversaries-yugoslav-soviet-conflict>

⁶ John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as history: twice there was a country* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 234.

⁷ Bjelakovic, "Comrades and Adversaries: Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict in 1948 — a Reappraisal."

cannot but give to a great quantity and variety of political forms".⁸ The sense of nationalism and minor ideological differences increased frictions, leading to Tito's resistance against Stalin's Sovietization. "I will shake my little finger — and there will be no more Tito. He will fall."⁹ As Khrushchev recalled, Stalin did not allow Yugoslavia to break the uniformity of Sovietization. In 1948, letters were sent from Stalin to threaten Tito to conform, such as "We think the political career of Trotsky quite instructive."¹⁰ KPJ considered this a temporary misunderstanding, affirmed its admiration for the Soviets, but emphasized its priority towards Yugoslavia: "in no case love his country less"¹¹. Stalin decided to remove Tito, by propaganda offensives against KPJ, resulting in an ideological war. It was Tito's lack of obedience and commitment of Sovietization to satisfy Eastern Europe's total homogeneity that contributed to the split. As one post-split Cominform article revealed, "The attitude toward the Soviet Union is now the test of devotion to the cause of proletarian internationalism."¹² Stalin, unlike what Khrushchev described "The crisis with Yugoslavia was purely personal because of Stalin's cult of individual,"¹³ was only a catalyst added to amplify two countries' oppositions on homogeneity in People's Democracies.

Yugoslavia's self-interest in its geopolitical considerations clashed with the Soviets'. Tito believed Yugoslavia as a leader in the Balkans with its strong military and aim to expand its influence. In Tito's 1945 speech in Ljubljana, he rejected any Yugoslav subordination to the "policy of the spheres of interest"¹⁴ of larger states, to express opposition to Soviet control. Tito attempted to combine Yugoslavia and Bulgaria into a South Slavic Federation, under Stalin's approval. However, when Dimitrov visited Tito at Bled in 1947, the project threatened to develop into a federation that might eventually include other People's Democracies with Tito's high popularity in those states. Dimitrov commented on Jan 17, 1948, "When the question is ripe - and it will ripen at all cost - then our peoples of the People's Democracy of... will decide it."¹⁵ This alerted Stalin, and he replaced Dimitrov with a Soviet-controlled leader and proposed to annex Yugoslavia for a Balkan Federation to control Tito through the Bulgarians. Additionally, Tito criticized Stalin's acceptance of the Yalta decisions affecting Yugoslavia without consulting him and his actions stopping Yugoslav territorial gain. The Soviet ordered partisan units which had occupied parts of Carinthia and Styria to retreat without warning, and flatly refused Yugoslavia's plan for Trieste. Stalin warned: "Do not consider your struggle only for your own national point of view but from the international point of view, from the point of the

⁸ Pedro Ramet, *Self-Management, Titoism, and the Apotheosis of Praxis*. In *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, edited by Wayne S. Vucinich, 169-194 (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 179.

⁹ Russian Institute, *The anti-Stalin campaign and international communism: a selection of documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 62.

<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/100711410/the-anti-stalin-campaign-and-international-communism>

¹⁰ Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, 62.

¹¹ *ibid*, 80.

¹² *ibid*, 81.

¹³ Russian Institute, *The anti-Stalin campaign and international communism: a selection of documents*, 62.

¹⁴ Bjelakovic, "Comrades and Adversaries: Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict in 1948 — a Reappraisal."

¹⁵ Charles G Stefan, "The Emergence of the Soviet-Yugoslav Break: A Personal View from the Belgrade Embassy." (*Diplomatic History* 6, no. 4 1982: 387-404), 390, accessed January 29, 2018.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24911353>.

English-Soviet-American coalition.”¹⁶ Stalin further ordered Yugoslavia to stop its continuous support for the communists in the Greek Civil War¹⁷, which KPJ supported the Greek communist partisans’ efforts to seize Macedonia.¹⁸ Moscow also tried to decrease Yugoslavia’s existing influences, by forcing Albania, Yugoslavia’s satellite, to obey Soviet influence.¹⁹ Tito saw that the national interests of Yugoslavia differed significantly from the Soviets’ and felt betrayed by their lack of support and that no compromise could be reached with Stalin.

The Soviet Union was Yugoslavia’s most important military and economic partner. However, there was a weak aiding history of the Soviets towards Yugoslavians. During WWII, Tito asked for weaponry support. Stalin didn’t support Tito because he didn’t know if Tito would succeed, and to avoid Western criticisms for outputting Communist influences. Moscow’s doubt of the Partisan’s loyalty and strength caused Tito profound disappointment and thus he considered the Soviet aid in 1944 “excess baggage”²⁰. Soviet forces also behaved brutally toward the Yugoslavians during its operation there. In April 1945, Tito visited Stalin in Moscow and returned with a 20-year treaty of mutual assistance to industrialize Yugoslavia with his “Five-Year Plan”. As time went by, Tito began to see that the assistance wasn’t mutual; the trade and aid agreements were delayed, and he received the impression that in the Soviet long-range scheme the new Yugoslavia was to remain a producer of agricultural and raw materials.²¹ Raw materials which would have gone to feed native industries would be shipped instead to Soviet Union or satellite states chosen for production, instead of domestic industrialization, and Yugoslavia would remain a backwards agricultural economy. Two joint-venture companies had been set up to create and operate Yugoslav shipping and air services²², but the Soviets showed unrivaled investment and absolute logistical control, including price discriminations for Yugoslavians. Soon, deals for raw materials were aborted because of Yugoslav sorrow experiences. Stalin took responsibility, and proposed investment credits of \$135 million, but less than \$1 million were delivered.²³ Tito was disappointed as he had burned bridges with the West and failed in his plan for industrialization with Soviet help. Additionally, Soviet military aid was useless to the Partisans, as they received unusable weapons and delivery was suspended in 1947, and they resisted Soviet attempt to transform the Partisans into Red Army divisions under Soviet doctrine and wanted to maintain partisan-style tactics. Tito discovered Soviet intelligence was actively recruiting in Belgrade, and Hebrang and Zujovic, two relatively high party officials who were Soviet agents designed to interfere Party affairs.²⁴ The Cominform was headquartered in Belgrade to exert pressure, and

¹⁶ Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, 27.

¹⁷ Nicholas Pappas, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Greek Civil War*. In *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, edited by Wayne S. Vucinich, 219-238 (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 223.

¹⁸ Stefan, "The Emergence of the Soviet-Yugoslav Break: A Personal View from the Belgrade Embassy.", 391.

¹⁹ Bjelakovic, "Comrades and Adversaries: Yugoslav-Soviet Conflict in 1948 — a Reappraisal."

²⁰ Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, 30.

²¹ *ibid*, 48.

²² Lampe, *Yugoslavia as history: twice there was a country*, 246.

²³ *ibid*.

²⁴ Stefan, "The Emergence of the Soviet-Yugoslav Break: A Personal View from the Belgrade Embassy.", 389.

Cominform Journal's editorial board was under strict control from Moscow and refused to publish articles about Yugoslavia.²⁵ KPJ recognized the Soviets' semi-colonial nature in its economic, military, and political policies that aimed to establish total control over Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavia's homogeneous resistance to Soviet designs and insurance on pursuing industrialization for practical power and profit had provoked the Soviets and resulted in the Cominform resolution.²⁶

Nikolai Bukharin stated that rivalries between Communist states are "by definition an impossibility"²⁷ because Communist society would be unselfish and harmonious. However, the Yugoslav-Soviet split marked the first disunity in the Communist world. The "impossible" yet unavoidable split was a result of Yugoslav resistance of total Sovietization, its ego in the Balkans clashing with Soviets' grand plans, and the poor records of cooperation with the Soviets, all caused by the Soviet Union's conflict of geopolitical interest with Yugoslavia in Europe. Stalin's cult of individual and Yugoslavia's nationalism were catalysts of the conflict, but they were the byproducts of geopolitical interest conflicts. The split marked the change in Yugoslavia's political system as it forced the adoption of workers' self-management²⁸ and Titoism²⁹ for KPJ to differentiate itself doctrinally from Soviet-style communism, and influenced it to start the non-alignment movement.

²⁵ Stefan, "The Emergence of the Soviet-Yugoslav Break: A Personal View from the Belgrade Embassy.", 389.

²⁶ Lucien Karchmar, *The Tito-Stalin Split in Soviet and Yugoslav Historiography*, 262.

²⁷ Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, ix.

²⁸ Eric R. Terzuolo, *Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Origins of Yugoslavia's Self-Management System*. In *At the brink of war and peace: the Tito-Stalin split in a historic perspective*, edited by Wayne S. Vucinich, 195-218 (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 217.

²⁹ Ramet, *Self-Management, Titoism, and the Apotheosis of Praxis*, 169.

Reflection

For this investigation, the inquiry method was crucial as it is such a controversial historical event. My approach combined different kinds of sources to understand the topic from various perspectives from the party involved and historians. Those included official primary source between governments, interviews and embassies' witness, secondary sources, historiographies on specific aspects of the split, and journal articles and essays.

The reliability of sources was the primary concern of the investigation. The historiographies from the Yugoslav and Soviet Union government and communist party were unstable and changed regularly in different political contexts for their current political stance. Primary and secondary sources might also be biased as some authors favoured one side under the global political context. For example, it was hard to validate if Stalin's "shake my little finger"³⁰ talk existed, or it was just over-exaggeration.

Besides the limitations of the sources selected, the investigation itself contains several limitations. First, the long-term causes, particularly those during the early years of World War II, are hard to define and quantify. Since there were no official documents or journal regarding Stalin's opinion on Yugoslavia, Stalin's distrust toward the KPJ and Tito are mostly inferred. During the split, opinions from both sides are not stated but implied from government newspaper journals, letters, and activities; thus it was hard to define those intentions.

Among the many causes of the split, the significances of events were hard to define. First, it was hard to quantify the impact of historical events on the split (Tito's role in WWII, Tito's Ljubljana speech, KPJ's response to Soviets), as it involves psychological impact on the leadership level. It was harder to identify the impact of events in authoritarian states where leaders' decision and thought process were not well documented and sometimes being twisted with propaganda.

³⁰ Russian Institute, *The anti-Stalin campaign and international communism: a selection of documents*, 62.

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