THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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DISCUSSION PAPER

PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVES FOR POLITICAL CHANGE IN JUGOSLAVIA UP TO 1980 AND THEIR FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS

by Chris Cviić

But should we be speculating about Jugoslavia at all? The question is in order because after more than a decade of intense "after-Tito-what" speculation and ever gloomier scenarios, Jugoslavia is still there, still independent and committed to its own way. Tito is still there too and may linger on for some time, perhaps even a few years. As long as he stays around, it is probably wrong to expect big changes of any kind. But even after he is gone, things may stay very much what they had been, as Tito himself keeps reassuring westerners who worry about Jugoslavia. Now a few of those, especially among professional "Jugoslavia-watchers", sympathise with that view in any case, and they can derive some support for that view from the European Experience of that past few decades.

European states no longer seem to break up unless they have first been invaded and occupied. It took four years of war and a military defeat to smash Austria-Hungary. It was the Axis invasion that finished the first Jugoslavia off in 1941. Both may have been "doomed" to extinction, as once used to be thought, but this is a view that cannot be supported so easily any more. Since the second world war, too, most successful coups and revolutions in Europe have been directly or indirectly connected with lost wars, as in France in 1958 and in Portugal in April, 1974, or with humiliating political intrigue injurious to national interest, as in Greece in July, 1974. There seems to exist a certain international bias towards the maintenance of the territorial status quo which of course, is directly related to the fear of complications with unforseen consequences that any redrawing of maps could cause. The state too has shown itself more resilient and less vulnerable to attack from within, than had been thought until recently.

Jugoslavia has, during the Cold War years, used competing power blocks to keep itself independent of both and to get them both to treat it seriously. Non-alignment has become popular with the people of Jugoslavia so that it could be said that whoever follows Tito has the mandate to continue it. During those years, Jugoslavia has made not unimpressive economic gains. Over the past 20 years, its annual economic growth rate has averaged 7.7%, while that for industrial growth has been 9.8%. National income per head of population was $375 in 1955, $795 in 1968, to reach $1,211 this year and possibly surpass $2,000 by 1985. There have been disparities too, Industrial growth has not been properly co-ordinated; agricultural growth has been slow; and the gap between the industrially developed and under-developed regions has widened rather than narrowed. More recently, there has been the rampant inflation which has reached the 30% mark while unemployment has also reached and passed the 500,000 mark. But these exist in other countries too, and right at the moment federal Ministers claim that the inflation rate is slowing down and that the balance of payments deficit may be smaller than had been expected.

Apart from the economic successes, there has been political stability combined until very recently with a wide measure of freedom surpassing anything existing in other communist countries. Even now that this freedom has been somewhat curtailed, Jugoslavia still remains the freest communist country and also one of the quieter corners of that increasingly turbulent continent. Human nature being what it is, these positive features of the Tito régime are not always readily admitted by its beneficiaries. Nevertheless, its achievements are among the factors that will help to keep Jugoslavia remaining on its present course in the transition period after Tito.

The continuation of a titoist régime after Tito would be welcome to the western powers. In fact, it would probably be true to say that the Tito régime has no warmer supporters than those it has in various foreign ministries. At the time of the recent settlement with Jugoslavia, the Italian government made it clear that it regarded the existence of a peaceful, stable and independent Jugoslavia as an important objective of its own security and therefore worth some unpopularity with the ultrarightists. Conversely, this means that no NATO power would be willing to do anything that would weaken the Jugoslav régime or undermine Jugoslavia's territorial integrity or unity. Nationalist movements within Jugoslavia seeking support from western powers would receive no encouragement. It would probably be no exaggeration to say also that although in an ideal world NATO powers would prefer to collaborate with a liberalising and reform-minded Jugoslavia, they would settle for a non-liberalising anti-reform one, provided it stayed independent. And so, whatever might occasionally be said by party leaders in Jugoslavia, their country is not threatened from the western direction. In fact, western leaders hope and pray that the present set-up continues for as long as possible. So do Jugoslavia's non-communist neighbours. In the past few years, various western countries have shown that they are willing to underpin this policy of encouraging Jugoslav leaders to stay independent with loans and grants and diplomatic support. The EEC is gradually emerging as the channel through which the west could provide much of the support for Jugoslavia that it considers necessary to keep it afloat.

By the same token, Russia cannot be happy with the situation. It refrained from bringing Jugoslavia back into its camp by force in 1948 after the Tito-Stalin conflict, but that may well have been due, as Khrushchev implies in his memoirs, to Stalin's fear of American retaliation. America then still had the nuclear monopoly. Formally, too, Russia has recognised Jugoslavia's right to an independent road to socialism, as demanded by the Jugoslavs as the price for their reconciliation with Russia. The so-called Belgrade declaration of 1955 has been the corner stone of Jugoslavia's policy towards Russia. But it seems that the Jugoslavs have recent evidence for the belief that the Russian acceptance of Jugoslavia's right to go its own way in its economic and political development has once again become qualified In a speech earlier this month, Mr. Todo Kurtovic, a secretary of the Jugoslav communist party's executive bureau, referred to "circles which regard the Belgrade declaration and similar documents as part of a past historical epoch" that has been superseded. But why should Russia not accept Jugoslavia on the same terms as the west accepts it?

It is, first of all, very likely that the Russians who had always trusted Tito not to allow the political developement to go beyond a certain point, may not feel so sure of his successors in this regard. They may feel that under those successors the country might become unacceptably liberal and reformist, indeed irreversibly so, and thus present a new danger to Russia's own ideological position in eastern Europe. A newly invigorated titoist heresy would be a serious cause for concern by itself. Russia may also see it as a possible ideological preparation for a slide towards the west, resulting in a shift in the balance of power in south e stern Europe. That part of Europe has become more important to Russia from the strategic point of view. Jugoslavia has fine, natural harbours which the admiral commanding the Soviet Mediterranean fleet would probably dearly love to be able to use. Jugoslavia could also be an important glacis for a more forward Soviet policy in western Europe one day. In other words, what was at the time of Jugoslavia's defection from the Soviet block in 1948 still a relatively unimportant area - certainly not to be compared with East Germany or Poland - has now become an area of growing strategic importance. A Jugoslavia that denies its territory to the west is certainly a miniuum soviet objective.A Jugoslavia that allows Russia the use of its military facilities and possibly also collaborates with it in other ways could well become an objective in the not too distant future, especially if Russia embarks on a more militant foreign policy.

Russia would therefor :ave the motive that the defensively and sometimes even defeatist-minded western powers do not have, for wanting to increase its influence in Jugoslavia in a substantial way, perhaps even to crown this with the final absorption of Jugoslavia into the Warsaw pact and Comecon one day. Its geographical proximity would give it the chance to attempt to do so in a variety of ways.

A military invasion is perhaps the least suitable method for the achievement of the long-term Soviet objectives in the area, though a quick grab at a time of some world crisis distracting America and other western leaders cannot be excluded. It is true that the Russians would probably be reluctant to get embroiled in a partisan war in Jugoslavia but they may be tempted to think that in fact Jugoslavia was not as ready for such a war as it is making out to be. The Russians could calculate that the fire had gone out of the old partisans and that overwhelming Soviet strength would suffice to deal with Jugoslavia quickly and efficiently and before anybody noticed or could do something about it.

Nevertheless, Russia would have to worry about the effects this kind of a grab would have on its relations with the west. Even now with the cloud hanging over the detente, it is difficult to see the Russians risking a full-scale confrontation with the United States over Jugoslavia. Even if Jugoslavia was not considered a vital strategic matter for the Americans, they could choose to regard a new burst of Soviet activism there as a sign that a confrontation was on the way anyway and that they had better be prepared to respond to the Russian challenge elsewhere where it might hurt Russia. Being invited by a friendly Jugoslav government would be quite another matter of course, because nobody could formally object to that. But that is another development consideredlater on.

It looks very much as if Moscow would regard the military weapon as the last resort and would rely on political and possibly also economic pressure first in an attempt to browbeat the Jugoslav leaders into submission. But a political challenge requires organised political measures of support within the country that is being challenged. Russia would need some sort of a reasonable political base if only to avoid the repetition of the fiasco in Czechoslovakia in August, 1968, when lack of preparation of the modalities of the intervention was in such striking contrast to the excellence of the military planning that had gone into it.

The creation of a friendly political base inside Jugoslavia would be hindered if Russia was at the same time using threats and pressure against Jugoslavia, so the right strategy would be to combine a low-profile in inter-party and inter-state relations with the encouragement of clandestine groups preparing an alternative to the present leadership. It may just be that it is against the building up of that pro-Soviet base that the present Jugoslav anti-cominformist campaign is directed.

Apart from recruiting supporters among the hard core of the old cominformists who opted for Stalin in the quarrel between Tito and Stalin in 1948 when Jugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform, Russia could also seek and find a measure of support among a variety of discontented officials who had fallen by the wayside during the reforming years in the 1950s and 1960s. Also among young people disillusioned with the darker side of Jugoslavia's road to socialism, yet unaware of the still darker side of Soviet-style socialism. Here also indirectly the Russians could benefit from the fact that the present rather more centralist and orthodox party line in Jugoslavia can be used as a basis for demands for more full-blooded socialism to be established. In other words, it is the party's critics who can appear to be more orthodox than the party leaders.

Alternatively, Russia could support one or more of the nationalist movements in various republics: the Croats, the Albanians, the Serbs. The Serbs can be wooed by promises of a strong centralised Jugoslavia that would stop the further disintegration of the Serbian nation outside Serbia proper: 40% of Serbs in Jugoslavia live outside Serbia proper. The Croats could be encouraged to think that Russia might be prepared to grant Croatia independence in return for its support and military bases. It is more likely, simply because the Serbs make up nearly 40% of Jugoslavia's population and have had closer links with Russia in the past, that they rather than the Croats who are only just over 20% of the Jugoslav population, would be more interesting to the Russians. But there would be nothing to stop the Russians from using their alleged support for the Croats to frighten the Serbs into stronger support for state centralism and closer ties with Russia, as may have happened in 1970 and 1971.

All this is merely intended to show that Russia has several cards that it can play if it should decide on a more interventionist policy in Jugoslavia and that military intervention is probably only the ultimate sanction. Jugoslav leaders have several options too. One would be to go to the western powers and ask for direct support. This is unlikely for

various reasons, not least because this would give the Russians the pretext to invoke Brezhnev doctrine against Jugoslavia and thus bring about the very intervention that they have been trying to avoid. They could themselves introduce a tough internal régime designed to withstand Russian pressure while simultaneously avoiding the danger of a liberal resurgence. The army could play a role in this kind of solution if the politi could not agree on modalities. It is perfectly possible that such a solution might appeal to a number of people in Jugoslavia. The army is a well-organised force that had stood aside from national and social conflicts. It is at the moment intelligently and ably led by well-paid officers not compromised by corruption and scandal. The conservative forces in the country might rally round a direct or indirect army rule and this could have the effect of neutralising the pro-Moscow forces to a certain extent. In fact, this looks very much how things might go if the politicians do not achieve an economic stablisation and then have to cope with serious economic unrest with political undertones.

But the difficulty is that problems would not stop overnight just because the soldiers, however competent, have taken over, and so the army itself could come divided rather as it has done in Portugal. These divisions would probably run along national lines and this would then disrupt the army's rule and eventually endanger the unity of the state as Croats, Serbs and the others clashed with each other in and out of uniform. This, rather than the widely rumoured though nowhere documented pro-Soviet feelings of Jugoslav generals would be the real danger of army dictatorship in Jugoslavia. Far from saving Jugoslavia from the Soviet challenge, it could fatally weaken its ability to withstand such a challenge.

Alternatively, there could be another attempt after Tito is gone to achieve a deal among leaders of various republics representing legitimised nationalities. That looked like beginning to happen in 1970-71 when various republics had leaders enjoying public support and with genuine constituencies behind them. Most of those leaders have been purged but they are around. Even if they are not called back at some stage (though there is no reason why some of them should not) they could be used to support a broadly based effort as arriving at some sort of a national consensus which is far more important for the survival of a nationally mixed country like Jugoslavia than any other type of consensus. Such negotiations would be tricky and dangerous and might easily be sabotaged. They would undoubtedly bring out more nationalist agitation with fears of where this might lead. This would certainly have its dangers. But ultimately by bringing these antagonisms into the open and harnessing them to political groupings, it may-just may - be possible to control them and integrate them into broad support for a broadly based Jugoslav federation. For ultimately either such a federation is a federation of all its peoples more or less equal with each other or it is condemned to stay a dictatorship, and moreover one that would, because of its rejectionby a sizable opposition be driven to seek support from outside - which could only mean Russia. So in a way, the future of Jugoslavia does depend on what the Jugoslavs do among themselves - whether they negotiate and deal with each other realistically, recognising their national and religious differences but also their common interests, or whether they deliver themselves into somebody else's safe keeping through sheer inability to work out a lasting arrangement among themselves.

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A military invasion is perhaps the least suitable method for the achievement of the long-term Soviet objectives in the area, though a quick grab at a time of some world crisis distracting America and other western leaders cannot be excluded. It is true that the Russians would probably be reluctant to get embroiled in a partisan war in Jugoslavia but they may be tempted to think that in fact Jugoslavia was not as ready for such a war as it is making out to be. The Russians could calculate that the fire had gone out of the old partisans and that overwhelming Soviet strength would suffice to deal with Jugoslavia quickly and efficiently and before anybody noticed or could do something about it.

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But the difficulty is that problems would not stop overnight just because the soldiers, however competent, have taken over, and so the army itself could come divided rather as it has done in Portugal. These divisions would probably run along national lines and this would then disrupt the army's rule and eventually endanger the unity of the state as Croats, Serbs and the others clashed with each other in and out of uniform. This, rather than the widely rumoured though nowhere documented pro-Soviet feelings of Jugoslav generals would be the real danger of army dictatorship in Jugoslavia. Far from saving Jugoslavia from the Soviet challenge, it could fatally weaken its ability to withstand such a challenge.

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