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Subject: Some Highlights of Yugoslavia in late September, 1968

In a short but intense visit to Yugoslavia from September 13-19 I gained the following impressions which may be of general interest. I was there as a guest of the Institute for International Politics and Economy, where I lectured on three successive days.

First, an absolute determination to resist the Russians. There is no doubt whatever in the mind of any Yugoslav I talked to that if the Soviet Union lays a finger on their country, they will fight back with everything they have, retreat into the mountains, if necessary giving up half the country in the process, and fight on in a Vietnam-type war whether or not anyone helps them. Flying over Yugoslavia it is perfectly clear how they can still feel confident of their capacity to fight a partisan war, given the amount of fairly vertical terrain. The strength of this conviction is underscored by private statements on the part of responsible people that even if Tito's government should give in to the Russians, the people would repudiate Tito and fight on.

A variety of tangible steps have obviously been taken to back up Yugoslavia's determination to stand off the Russians if they should attack. Belgrade is full of soldiers, even though no general mobilization has been announced. Surcin airport looks fairly normal from the ground, but from the air a perimeter of anti-aircraft batteries is visible in what seem to be hastily-dug revetments. The manager of Austrian Airways told me that tanks were removed from Surcin only the weekend before I arrived.

The second vivid impression comes from the fact that high Yugoslav officials are making no bones about the possibility of assistance from the United States in the event of trouble with the Russians. During my stay I had lengthy conversations with senior officials of the Foreign Ministry, the Party, and the Parliament. Except for the latter, the individuals I talked to were extraordinarily frank in pressing me concerning my estimates of types and quantities of U.S. help under varying scenarios, despite my disclaimer of any official position or influence. One of the highest Yugoslav diplomatic officials asked me if I thought the United States would



intervene if the Soviets hit Rumania, and if not, whether I thought the U.S. would intervene if the Soviets hit Yugoslavia. I repeated my disclaimer about being a lone professor, which he impatiently waved aside. I hastily gamed the matter out in my mind, and concluded that if Yugoslavs were encouraged to believe that the United States would assist them in the event of Soviet aggression, it might reinforce their determination and therefore contribute to deterrence of any such Russian move. I therefore ventured to predict that if Rumania were invaded the United States would probably draft some very stern diplomatic notes and cancel some current bilateral agreements with the Soviets. But if Yugoslavia were invaded my own hunch was that there would be a response from the United States. We immediately got down to essentials; they indicated that what they would want first of all would be pressure on the Soviet Union, and second of all supplies. Following that would be air cover, and only as a last resort ground forces.

I was struck by the several circuitous references to the possibility under this scenario of NATO counteraction. In an acute historical irony, one who expressed to me the private hope that NATO would remain strong, and would consider a threat to Yugoslavia as a threat to the NATO southern flank, is someone I vividly remember from my own early UN days as probably the single most vitriolic spokesman of the Communist bloc. This same individual, who is high in party circles, told me of rumors of possible partition of Yugoslavia if the Russians should push to Serbia. He sought reassurance that the United States understood its interests sufficiently to go to great lengths to keep the Soviet Union from gaining a permanent base on the Mediterranean littoral. Finally, the same individual suggested the possibility of reviving the Balkan Pact! (This pact with Greece and Turkey has been moribund for years; it would be an amazing spectacle to see Communist Yugoslavia hold its nose and consort with the current colonels' junta in Athens).

Hatred of the Russians is positively palpable in Yugoslavia. At one end are simple quips, most of which are aimed at Brezhnev, universally



considered the arch villain among many in the Moscow Politburo. ("Brezhnev's eyebrows are Stalin's mustache at a higher level"--although after the use of East German troops in Czechoslovakia, as one senior Yugoslav official put it at a lunch given for me, the reference should really be to Brezhnev's beard as representing Stalin's mustache at a lower level). There seems to be little doubt in official minds in Belgrade that as the Soviet bloc crumbles, great dangers lie ahead.

One high Foreign Ministry official told me that the Russians would have to replace all the Eastern European armies with Soviet troops and would also try to reorganize the Warsaw pact to get complete reunification of forces. The same official blamed the military for carrying the Politburo in the Czech affair! He exculpated Suslov, who opposed the operation because of his responsibility for the November party gathering. The Yugoslav foreign office believes that Kosygin was opposed, but tends to dismiss him as such an ordinary and unimpressive individual that he is not very effective. I was also told that cables from the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow are reporting unprecedented criticism of the Soviet-Czech operation from Soviet foreign ministry officials and party members in Moscow, a kind of criticism never heard in 1956.

A senior member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Yugoslav Parliament told me that during the student riots last May (with which it will be recalled Tito expressed sympathy) Soviet agents were noticed agitating the students. My informer took great pride in telling me that nevertheless the Yugoslav police made no arrests. (He also went on to say that the students were ripe for agitation given their genuine grievances based on the high unemployment rate and uncertain job prospects, growing in turn out of the transition to a market economy, a condition which led to the government encouraging 300,000 of them to emigrate to West Germany).

While I was waiting to leave Belgrade last Thursday morning, during the usual unexplained two to three hour wait after scheduled departure time, I saw a Caravelle with Aeroflot markings arrive from Moscow. A total of four passengers disembarked, and walked off in close formation, looking neither to left nor right. I guess, given the still fairly obvious defenses around Surcin airport, that this is not the best season for Russian tourists to fly into Belgrade.