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Yugoslavia: A Look at the Society on the Eve of the  
Post-Tito Period

Most of Yugoslavia's postwar years have been spent trying to build a state that can survive the death of one man--Josip Broz Tito. Over the past decade, the effort has focused on allowing Yugoslavia's eight major nationalities and 17 smaller ethnic groups a great deal of autonomy in order to convince them that their best chance for retaining their national identities is within the Yugoslav federation. The task has not been easy, but there has been progress. Nonetheless, nationality problems are bound to surface in the post-Tito period and could become a major disruptive factor.

Despite the relative tranquility since the Croatian crisis in 1970 and 1971, the perceptions and passions that fueled this and other nationalist outbursts have not disappeared; indeed, because of their self-replenishing and mutually reinforcing religious, cultural, and linguistic roots, they could easily be reactivated by an economic crisis or by a host of other stimuli. With Tito's departure, moreover, the regime will lose an unchallenged leader with an unimpeachable reputation as an ethnic nonpartisan.

Deep-seated rivalries among the country's various nationalities have resurfaced over the past year, in part as a result of continuing economic problems on the one hand and a series of government reforms on the other. Albanian nationalism in the autonomous province of Kosovo has disturbed Yugoslav officials, including Tito; Fadilj Hodza, Yugoslavia's most prominent Albanian politician, was one of the select few to visit President Tito in the hospital in February. This widely publicized meeting was clearly intended to convey Tito's personal concern for the Albanian minority.

Croatian nationalism, which brought the nation to the brink of crisis in the early 1970s, is always potentially troublesome. For the moment at least there are

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no signs that it will surface and disrupt the succession period. There are, however, reports of increased Serbian nationalism. The Serbs' discontent is in part a response to Albanian nationalism. (Serbia maintains that the predominantly Albanian inhabited region of Kosovo is historically hallowed Serbian ground and that Serbs--not Albanians--should have the leading voice in the province.) Serbian nationalism also arises from the Serbs' latent desire to play what they view as their rightful, leading role in the Yugoslav federation as a whole.

A new ingredient has recently been added to the Yugoslav nationality problem--pan-Islamic nationalism. There are some 3.5 million Yugoslav Muslims, and concern about potential unrest among them reaches into the highest levels of the Yugoslav leadership. Last November, Tito personally warned against clerical opposition to Yugoslav unity, asserting that clerics who exceed the limits of acceptable political activity must be rooted out, "even if it means harsh measures." Tito also cautioned against foreign machinations--a reference to indications in early 1979 of possible Albanian meddling in the Kosovo, as well as to the pan-Islamic movement.

Even before Tito became ill in January, there were indications that the leadership in Belgrade was taking a hard look at its past nationalities policy. The federal government has attempted over the years to encourage ethnic individuality, but it is now apparent that Belgrade has not been able to make the progress it had hoped in reconciling this particularity with the need for Yugoslav unity.

#### Collective Leadership

The collective leadership Tito has built is designed in part to defuse the nationality problem. Collective leadership at the top of nearly all party and state organizations is designed to give the public a sense of participation in the country's management; the system's rotation of official positions has been designed to break down regional, ethnic patterns of thought among the country's several nationalities and to help create a wider, Yugoslav national consciousness. Introduction of these practices at the highest levels appears to be

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intended to give powerful regional and federal officials opportunities to reconcile their competing interests, while preventing any one of them from dominating the process.

### Economic Issues

Frictions between nationalities residing in Yugoslavia's northern regions (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Vojvodina) and in the south (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo) have been accentuated by pronounced economic disparities. Per capita income in the north is double that of the poorly developed south. Surging population growth in the south also creates difficulties in improving job availability.

The problem is most critical in the mountainous province of Kosovo, where 1.2 million Albanians make up some 74 percent of the population. The Albanian problem is complicated by the fact that up until the purge of Tito's onetime confidant, Aleksandr Rankovic, the Albanians (with the exception of the gypsies) were the most discriminated-against minority in Yugoslavia. Since they gained recognition as an equal nation within the Yugoslav system in the late 1960s, the Albanians have sought to catch up--economically--with the country's other nationalities. Kosovo's per capita income, however, is still the lowest in Yugoslavia and has been falling further behind in recent years. Economic grievances goad the young impatient population--the average age of the population is now under 25--into periodic acts of frustrated defiance of Belgrade.

Belgrade's attempts to reduce regional income differences have failed and--in the process--have aggravated north-south frictions. Southern development is impeded by low management and labor skills and lack of infrastructure. These factors, together with sentiments of economic nationalism in the north, have limited voluntary northern investment in the south. The gap has not been filled by the substantial federal program of long-term investment loans and social welfare subsidies instituted in the mid-1960s. But the program, which is funded by taxes on enterprise income in the north, has caused northern resentment.

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Nationalities issues will become even more sensitive if--as seems necessary--Belgrade imposes restrictions on Yugoslavia's current rapid economic growth and decentralized economic system. Yugoslavia's high balance-of-payments deficit threatens to outrun available external financing. Just to hold the deficit even will require curtailment of economic growth, with direct central controls on credit and demand very likely to be a major part of any restrictive program. A growth slowdown, which would boost unemployment and reduce consumer gains, would be felt with particular keenness in the south, where growth expectations and needs are highest. Slack expansion would also generate wider nationalistic frictions--for example, between Serbia and Croatia--that have been held in check by the balm of prosperity. The imposition of central restrictions would add a third problem: increased resentment by all nationalities at reduction of their independence from Belgrade.

#### Political Dissent

For the moment, Yugoslavia is not troubled by widespread political dissent. The country does have a small number of dissidents, but the regime has contained the problem they pose. The relatively free political atmosphere in Yugoslavia may be the best explanation for Belgrade's success. The well-established system of rule by self-managing committees in all economic enterprises has fostered a candid grass-roots political and economic debate. The frustrations of being denied a voice in local politics are thus not as widely felt in Yugoslavia as in other parts of Eastern Europe. In addition, the government does not prohibit intellectuals from acquiring materials in the West or from contacting their Western colleagues--nor are the intellectuals bound by rigid ideological restrictions. The regime also has an open border policy--which permits thousands of Yugoslavs to work and travel in the West--and is thus unable to control completely the ideas and political practices to which the population is exposed.

In addition, the Yugoslav press acts as a safety valve by criticizing graft and corruption and by reporting widely on world events. Moreover, the dissidents share with the regime a common opposition to the USSR. Both oppose Moscow's heavyhanded suppression of Soviet

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dissident activity, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Kremlin's attempts to outmaneuver Yugoslavia internationally.

There are, however, limits to the freedoms in Yugoslavia, and it is these limitations that the dissidents oppose. For example, Tito's person is beyond reproach, the basic tenets for self-management and Yugoslavia's nonaligned foreign policy may not be questioned, and ranking regime leaders may not be criticized in the media by name. The regime's measured response to the dissidents appears to be paying dividends, and a continuation of this policy by Tito's successors should help defuse this potentially disruptive element in society in the post-Tito era.

#### Signs of Hope

Despite serious nationalities and economic problems awaiting Tito's successors, there are positive signs.

Progress has been made--despite years of turmoil--in forging a Yugoslav state. The system Tito has built recognizes the strength and durability of ethnic and regional interests and does not try to fight them; it attempts to build on them. The rotating collective leadership system also guarantees that each republic and province will have a share in the decisionmaking responsibilities of the federal government.

Not all nationality questions in Yugoslavia threaten national unity. Indeed, two national minorities are actively working to preserve the system Tito has built--the Macedonians and the Slovenes.

Belgrade has recognized and encouraged the development of Macedonian nationalism. The regime has been so successful that Macedonian nationalism within Yugoslavia has achieved a political dynamic of its own. Skopje, capital of the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, never misses a chance to castigate neighboring Bulgaria for its denial of the existence of the Macedonian minority within its borders. Belgrade--though occasionally uncomfortable over the assertiveness of Macedonian nationalism--naturally continues to encourage the concept that the Macedonian nation's best hope for survival is within the Yugoslav federation.

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Looking into the succession period, Belgrade's argument appears to make sense to most Macedonians. The republic does not have an adequate economic base to survive as an independent state. The only alternative, union with Bulgaria, offers little enticement to Yugoslav Macedonians because of Sofia's sycophantic relationship with Moscow and its denial of the Macedonians' separate identity.

At the other end of Yugoslavia are the Slovenes, who have gained the reputation of being the ones who have made the Yugoslav system work. Edvard Kardelj, the father of self-management and one of Tito's closest advisers, was a Slovene. The Slovenes appear to feel that the Yugoslav federation can be made to work along lines compatible with their own goals and objectives. The memory of being formally incorporated into Nazi Germany during World War II has left a lasting mark on the Slovenes. In 1970 and 1971 they showed little sympathy with the separatist aspects of Croatian nationalism and argued with Zagreb not to disrupt the system that Tito was building. Currently a key figure in the succession process appears to be Stane Dolanc, a Slovene, around whom much of the political life in the higher party circles revolved in the 1970s.

#### External Factors

There are foreign developments and factors affecting the succession over which Belgrade has no control but which, nevertheless, have had--and will continue to have--an effect on the Yugoslav society as a whole. For example, the Yugoslavs are united in their opposition to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Soviet move into Afghanistan may have done more than anything else to unify Yugoslavia's divergent nationalities behind Tito's successors. The economic problems and nationality bickering have apparently been put aside in their condemnation of the Soviet move.

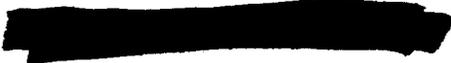
The response of Yugoslav society to Afghanistan is similar to that following the Soviet-led intervention in Czechoslovakia. Applications for party membership, for example, have shot up; the federal and regional parties are responding as one in their condemnation of the Soviets; and the Yugoslavs as a whole see the Soviet

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move into Afghanistan as a potential threat to their independence.

The festering dispute with Bulgaria over Macedonia also affects Yugoslav society as a whole and could figure prominently in the succession picture. Yugoslavia and Bulgaria have used the Macedonian issue against each other for years and have exchanged charges and counter-charges in the past year. Given the current level of the dispute, the new Yugoslav leaders will undoubtedly try to use the problem to project the prospect of a foreign threat to Yugoslav national unity and to attempt to rally the people behind them.



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