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DDA Memo, 4 Apr 77

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MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Intelligence information received by CIA bearing on the rift between the Cominform and the Tito regime.

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1. Commencing with early June several reports were received by CIA indicating increasingly strained relations between Belgrade and Moscow, and between certain factions within Yugoslavia. None of these reports, however, forecast the extent or timing of the open break which was revealed by the Cominform denunciation of Tito. Among such reports were the following:

a. Embassy Belgrade telegram #709, dated 8 June 1948. The Embassy expressed the view that, for the first time, the hold leadership of the Tito regime seemed to be faltering, and that the firmness of recent US policy, the renewed vitality of Western Europe, the economic difficulties within Yugoslavia and political defections at upper Government levels had undermined the previous surging optimism of the regime.

b. Embassy Belgrade telegram #710, dated 9 June 1948. The Embassy interpreted a Cominform Journal editorial, calling for drastic tightening up of Party leadership, as foreshadowing a concerted effort to eliminate intra-Party opposition to the Politburo line.

2. Following the foregoing fragmentary reports, the next important relevant item received was Embassy Belgrade telegram #746 to State Department dated 13 June. This telegram referred to the apparent Yugoslav insistence upon Belgrade as the site for the Danube Conference. In this action Embassy Belgrade saw the first direct and irrevocable challenge of any satellite to the supreme authority of the Kremlin. In the light of events as they developed, this certainly called the turn. It is significant, however, that the matter was so puzzling to Embassy Belgrade that the same telegram concluded that should the Russians accept Belgrade (as the site) it would indicate that they (the Russians) felt that Tito's position was so strong as to require traditional undermining (rather than drastic action). A copy of the complete text of this Telegram is attached hereto.

3. In Embassy Belgrade telegram #756 to State Department, dated 22 June, bearing on the official Yugoslav Government release explaining the arrest of Hebrang and Dujovic, Embassy Belgrade was still not certain as to the exact relation between their arrests and the Cominform's bitter attack on Communists who "take measures against those who make critical remarks."

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It concluded that the Cominform's approach could merely reflect Kremlin exploitation of the purges as an opportunity to further castigate Tito Communists.

Enclosure: Copy of US Embassy Belgrade telegram #746, dated 18 June 1948.

[redacted]

cc: Central Records

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Enclosure A

Incoming State from Belgrade 746, June 18, noon Control 6714

Embassy feels Yugoslav response Soviet Danube conference note (EMBTEL 733 June 16) first direct and irrevocable challenge any satellite to supreme authority Communist overlords in Kremlin. Tito's apparent decision to challenge Stalin instead of recanting past errors may well be most significant political event here since US recognition and event presages possibility split in Soviet bloc if breach allowed to widen. For first time in history Soviet Union is faced with consolidated Communist regime in power outside own borders willing to risk independent or even contrary course.

Immediate issue Danube conference side itself unimportant since Yugoslavia has provided Soviet with possibility reasonable public explanation by exploiting Simic as scapegoat. But this alternative would evade (*) Tito's defection. How and when Soviets could or would react may well be of more immediate concern to them than to Tito.

At moment we cannot offer certain explanation factors contributing to yesterday's climactic decision Yugoslav Politburo. While decision undoubtedly made by Tito and probably based personal vanity it is inconceivable it could be made without assent Politburo leaders or at least Rankovics. Recently we have wondered at possible implications certain observations and rumors difficult to explain given presumed harmony between Kremlin and local regime. Embassy particularly noted in contrast previous year fact Tito received no congratulatory message from Stalin or any Soviet Union leader on occasion May 25 birthday celebration.

Last week [redacted] showed one of my officers letter from Moscow colleague commenting on noticeable decrease in Soviet press coverage devoted Yugoslavia. [redacted] told me yesterday he believes report Tito recently severely rebuked in personal letter from Stalin. Further confirmation this report seems afforded by June 12 BORBA article written by Pihade. CPJ theoretician defended his party's vanguard role in Yugoslav People's Front so vigorously as to suggest local regime subject even more direct and severe criticism than was expressed in general terms to non-Soviet CPs in June 1 Cominform editorial. (EMBTEL 680, June 3).

Climax this trend reached on June 15 when lead editorial latest Cominform journal significantly exempting leaders French and Italian CPs attacked Communist who "in fog eulogy and exaggerated self-praise" stifle criticism and fail recognize own shortcomings. By process of elimination this can apply only to Tito or Dimitrov or both. "Non-Marxist attitude towards criticism and self-criticism is often outcome concept and at time of non-understanding role self-criticism as vital method party work, desire restrict criticism stifle it to take measures against those who make serious critical remarks". Above suggests Kremlin's displeasure ranges beyond party tactics regarding

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People's Front and also includes abrupt arrest Zujovic and Mahrang. Embassy believes Zujovic only prominent personality accompanying Molotov to Moscow following San Francisco UN Conference and wonders if his dismissal unexpected shock to Soviet Politburo friends.

In final analysis it seems unlikely theoretical differences basic cause developing conflict. Tito's personal ambitions to lead own sphere in southeast Europe must have cumulatively irritated and perhaps alarmed Kremlin. Latter's January rebuke to Dimitrov may also indirectly have applied to Tito who had not opposed thesis Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation. Unlike Hungarian Premier however Tito made no public disavowal.

Conversely continuing Yugoslav frustration in foreign field and apparent Soviet disinterest or inability to assist five year plan may have discomfited Tito. It is significant that following Italian elections Government's economic planners stressed urgent necessity to develop internal resources and place minimum reliance on external assistance. Seemingly precipitate settlement US claims coupled with renewed expressions interest in expanding western trade could reflect decision to seek greater independence from Soviet economic bloc.

Whatever origins of conflict and scope present dissatisfactions Tito cannot be unaware experienced Communists who have opposed Kremlin. He may accordingly feel his own recent consolidation ranks party Army and Foreign Office have placed him beyond reach Stalin's punitive arm.

On basis available evidence I am convinced that definite split exists. Nature and extent split should become apparent soon on basis simple test location Danube conference. If Russians accept Belgrade it should indicate belief that Tito's position strong enough to require traditional gradual undermining. If Russians insist on other side it would be indication their clear belief that Yugoslav Communists can be brought back into line without too much difficulty. In evaluating Tito's ability to maintain separatist policy it should be noted that he occupies exceptional position. Other certain Communist leaders were in Russia during war and returned their countries accompanied by Kremlin picked teams. Tito led resistance and organized own team from ground up.

At moment it would seem energies Tito Communists will be focused on further buttressing their internal positions and preparing for whatever tactics Kremlin may use in meeting this challenge of opportunity which affords us to penetrate and disunite Soviet bloc. Pending clarification we can only reaffirm basic policy recommendations outlined EMBTEL 709 June 8 and urge prompt exploitation every occasion to intensify Yugo-Soviet differences such as present Danube conference issue (EMBTEL 738, June 17).

Department pass Moscow 143.