

~~Top Secret~~

Special Analysis

YUGOSLAVIA: End of the Federal Experiment

The federal Yugoslavia created by Tito is unraveling; it appears headed toward a loose confederation of self-governing republics. Ethnic tensions and severe economic problems carry a significant potential for violence along the way. [REDACTED]

The decay of central authority now appears irreversible. Slovenia and Croatia for years have sought to limit federal power and now say they will consider only a loose confederation as an alternative to independence. They are jointly drafting a treaty that would make republics nearly independent in economic, foreign, and defense policy. They plan to present it to the other regions this fall but are threatening to sign it alone if necessary [REDACTED]

Most of the other republics are willing to discuss a confederation. Even the third major republic, Serbia, which fought for years to strengthen the federation, now increasingly views the federation as a hindrance to its top priority—control over Albanian-populated Kosovo Province. Serbia is preparing a new constitution of its own that will pave the way for independence. The Serbian president, for example, would have the power to declare war [REDACTED]

Several factors are driving the republics apart. Suppressed ethnic grievances have reemerged in the new democratic atmosphere. The first serious ethnic clashes since 1945 have hit Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia proper in recent weeks. Slovenia and Croatia want to regain their places in Europe and believe Serbia's brutal policies in Kosovo make this an impossible goal for Yugoslavia. Ideological differences between non-Communist Slovenia and Croatia and Communist-ruled Serbia also play a role. The Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe has removed the last security rationale for unity in common defense. [REDACTED]

Whose Hand on the Tiller?

The republics have taken control of the dissolution process by drafting treaties and constitutions; federal officials are divided and have been unable to reassert influence. Prime Minister Markovic, a Croat, is pushing constitutional amendments that would allow multiparty federal elections. He mediated a deal last month between Slovenia and the Army that may by yearend allow all Slovene recruits to serve at home, practically destroying the Army's Pan-Yugoslav character. [REDACTED]

continued

~~Top Secret~~

15 September 1990

President Jovic, a Serb, has announced a plan for a nationwide referendum this year to choose between federation and confederation. [REDACTED]

Outlook

While the disintegration of Yugoslavia appears irreversible, several factors could slow the process, perhaps for a few years. The republics' mutually beneficial economic ties will be difficult to give up abruptly. Yugoslavs also recognize that a rapid breakup would increase the danger of civil conflict; they fear a bloodbath is possible. [REDACTED]

Federal leaders appear inclined to negotiate rather than provoke system-busting crises. Western admonitions against secession also have made Slovenia and Croatia more cautious; both are now using diplomatic contacts with Western governments to explain possible future moves. The Slovenian-Croatian draft treaty will probably become the basis for broader negotiations, but neither republic would consider a countrywide referendum binding. And both appear to view a confederation as only a transitory arrangement on the road to full independence. [REDACTED]

Nevertheless, events may slip out of control and produce a more explosive outcome. In the next several months, Croatian efforts to deal with militants in the republic's Serb minority could provoke serious clashes. So, too, could the three-way split between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in Bosnia, which holds an election in November. Serbia's ironfisted policies in Kosovo also have ethnic tension boiling; another eruption there could give Slovenia and Croatia a pretext to secede. [REDACTED]

Regardless of the speed of dissolution, the process is likely to be messy and marred by ethnic violence. In the face of widespread unrest, the Army might try to assert control and might even temporarily succeed. But the Army itself is divided between a Serb-dominated officer corps and draftees who reflect the majority non-Serb population; military rule probably would fragment the Army. Moreover, the republics have large, well-armed popular militias that they could call up against the Army. [REDACTED]