

# DEATH OF THE YUGOSLAV PEOPLE'S ARMY AND THE WARS OF SUCCESSION

Robert Niebuhr

UDK: 355.1(497.1:497.5)=111  
355.01(497.1:497.5)=111  
355.4(497.1:497.5)=111

Stručni članak

Primljeno: 28.10.2004.

Prihvaćeno: 15.11.2004.

## Summary

*The death of Yugoslavia took place in tandem with the death of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). Initially, the JNA sought to maintain the integrity of the federation but soon unraveled along ethnic lines. The JNA's internal transition thus serves as a microcosm of the process of Yugoslav dismemberment. On a personal level, soldiers with mixed ethnicities had to choose allegiances. That struggle mirrored certain choices by civilians, but on a much more troubling level—namely, who to shoot at and why? Finally, no discussion of the breakup of Yugoslavia can go without mentioning the role of the League of Communists. The relationship between the army, party, and state helped create fissures and further confusion, especially with the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. How could a party-run army and state peacefully transition to some form of a multi-party state and mixed economy? The troubles that plagued former Yugoslavia and the JNA, especially during the 1980s, created a mixture that helped foster disaster and death at all levels.*

*Keywords:* Yugoslav People's Army, Yugoslavia, Milošević, Slovenia, Communist Party

---

The author is currently completing a PhD at Boston College in Modern Central and East European history. This work is from his Arizona State University MA thesis entitled, "Life and Death of an Army: Yugoslavia, 1945-1995".

*Since Tito's death in 1980, the country has been plagued by worsening political rivalries between Serbia and the more prosperous Croatia and Slovenia.<sup>1</sup>*

*Estimates are that the political situation in the army is good and stable because success is guaranteed through the army's role and work in defense which benefits the independence of the entire territory and constitution of the SFRY.<sup>2</sup>*

The death of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) began in 1991, when the Socialist Republics of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence and seceded. Shortly after these actions the republics of Macedonia and Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH) followed suit. The ensuing armed struggle initially to "save the federation" became so intense that it destroyed the notion of Yugoslavia for many people, including its army.

The dissolution of former Yugoslavia into ethnic republics wreaked havoc on the army and forced serious reorganization of the defense industries. During the Cold War, the Yugoslav armed forces had deliberately spread their men and materiel throughout the country in accord with a decentralized territorial defense paradigm. During the wars of succession, the JNA dissolved along ethnic lines, and in certain circumstances formed and legitimized paramilitary forces. War disrupted the continued procurement of resources by the JNA because the armaments factories, industry, and depots were located all over former Yugoslavia. The loss of certain factories and warehouses seriously handicapped the JNA's fighting capacity, although the JNA was still remarkably well-equipped and supplied, compared with the initial fighting forces of the breakaway republics.

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the JNA was renamed the Army of Yugoslavia (Vojska Jugoslavije, VJ) on May 21, 1992. The Republics of Serbia and Montenegro held on to the same name of Yugoslavia for their union until 2002, when their names officially changed to Serbia and Montenegro (SiCG). The name of the army was also altered to account for this change (Vojska Srbije i Crne Gore or VSCG).

While Slovenia confronted and defeated the JNA with its special police and territorial defense units, Croatia required the establishment of a broader armed force to meet the more determined JNA resolve there. Named the Hrvatska Vojska (HV), the Croatian Army fought the JNA and VJ until 1995, when the wars of secession paused in the wake of the U.S.-mediated Dayton accords.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Engelberg, "Yugoslav Factions Trade Blame for Deaths in Clash", *New York Times* (May 4, 1991): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Milana Daljevića, "Situacija u Armiji dobra i stabilna", *Borba* (March 25, 1983). "Ocijenjeno je da je politička situacija u armiji dobra i stabilna, što je garanci ja da uspješno ostvaruje ulogu i zadatke u obrani nezavisnosti i teritorijalne cjelokupnosti i ustavnog poretka SFRJ".

<sup>3</sup> The politics surrounding the JNA and later VJ participation in the wars of succession are murky at best. To satisfy legal impositions according to international law following the recognition of Croatia and Bosnia as sovereign nations, a separate Serbian army was created – the Vojska Republike Srpske Krajine, VRSK (The Army of the Serbian Krajina). This force benefited from not only the wealth of materiel left behind from the JNA, but also from the personnel ties as well. However, the level of direct wartime links remains a sensitive issue. It has been argued that the JNA and later VJ served to not only re-equip the VRSK, but trained soldiers and supplied reinforcements.

One important aspect of the wars of secession was the role of the successor armies. The domination by Serbs of the officer corps remained throughout the entire life of the JNA, including the period of Yugoslav collapse. The fact that all the non-Serb republics except Macedonia created independent armies and immediately sent them into combat is highly significant. The JNA naturally suffered from the loss of officers who were either purged or left to join the other republican armies on their own, but this also left the successor armies desperate for adequate manpower. While certainly in the best position throughout the conflicts, the JNA fighting for Serbia also suffered from desertions, mutinies, draft-dodging, and casualties that strained its ability to be effective in the field. Due to legal technicalities *Jane's Intelligence Review* noted that, "out of a total of 70,000 draftees the YPA [JNA] had in 1990, some 25,000 had deserted or left the service".<sup>4</sup>

This fact is striking when it is realized that the republics successfully achieved their goals after prolonged armed conflict. The initial disposition of the JNA gave them clear advantages. The non-commissioned officer corps (NCO) remained squarely in the hands of ethnic Serbs, which made the victory against Serbian armies even more remarkable. In combat, the non-commissioned officers possess direct control over soldiers and exhibit a great deal of influence regarding the actual combat readiness of an army. The NCOs fight alongside their soldiers and make the vital combat decisions, so the lack of NCOs of Croatian or Bosnian-Muslim heritage gave advantages to the Serbian armies.

The disintegration of the JNA and the formation of republican armies reveal a great deal about the status of the Yugoslav army in 1990-1991. As long as the Communist Party ruled, the army could not stand alone as the final authority within Yugoslavia without clear political direction. That political direction was sorely lacking and the army found itself in the middle of a political vacuum and eventually found itself fighting for a corrupt political regime under Milošević.

The dismantling of Yugoslavia took some time to complete, but the disintegration began immediately following the recognition by Serbia's leader, Slobodan Milošević, of Slovene independence in June 1991. The JNA fought a limited effort to hold Slovenia, but eventually withdrew after sustaining minor losses and at the behest of Milošević. During the short battle for Slovenia, the commander in charge of the JNA was a Slovene, General Konrad Kolsek. Despite his ethnicity, he vowed to maintain the Yugoslav nation and quell Slovenian independence. Kolsek proclaimed, "We will act in accordance with the rules of combat. All resistance will be crushed".<sup>5</sup> Kolsek was clearly fighting a Yugoslav war and this represents the lack of clear path among elites in Yugoslavia in the

<sup>4</sup> See "Yugoslav Ground Forces", *Jane's Intelligence Review* (June 1, 1993), <http://www.janes.com>. Regarding mass surrender, "In one of the most humiliating episodes for the YPA [JNA], almost the entire 32nd Corps in Varazdin surrendered to Croatian forces in October 1991. The Croatian fortunes were considerably boosted because 150-185 tanks and armoured vehicles and large quantities of ammunition fell into their hands as a result".

<sup>5</sup> Kolsek quoted in Chuck Sudetic, "Face-Off Across a Road's White Line", *New York Times* (June 28, 1991): A10.

months prior to Milošević's consolidation of effective control. Regarding Milošević's goals in the ensuing conflict in former Yugoslavia, most scholars argue that he desired a greater Serb state after realizing that the SFRY was going to disintegrate. The recognition of Slovenia was not a problem for Milošević because it fell outside the scope of any potential greater-Serbian state. However, a large number of Serbs lived in Croatia and Bosnia. According to most scholars, in the effort to secure those Serbian-populated lands Milošević was inevitably drawn into a conflict that was motivated by ethnicity, specifically a greater Serbia.<sup>6</sup> By making such claims, Milošević helped to bring the SFRY to the brink and to unravel the federation.

The battle for Slovenia represented the last multi-ethnic act of the JNA. Captain Nevin Sojić of the Slovenian Territorial Defense noted: "There are guys in their [JNA] unit from all over the country, including a Slovene or two, and even an Albanian".<sup>7</sup> One important element of the army's operation in Slovenia was the ethnic composition of the officer corps in Slovenia and Croatia, which was part of the Fifth Military District. In July 1991, the officer corps there consisted of 57 percent Serbs, 12 percent Croats, 6 percent Slovenes, 5 percent Montenegrins, 4 percent Yugoslavs, and 16 percent other nationalities.<sup>8</sup> Surely, the predominantly Serbian ethnic composition of the officer corps stationed in Slovenia and Croatia would guarantee regime loyalty. Furthermore, in August 1990 it was reported that the police in Croatia was 67 percent ethnically Serbian.<sup>9</sup> The short battle for Slovenia spelled the end for Yugoslavia and its army by giving legitimacy to republican rights and making the right to secession a legal reality. During the fighting, Milan Kučan, the Slovene President, called for Slovene desertion from the JNA in the wake of the attempted occupation, which he characterized as "aggression against the sovereignty of the country".<sup>10</sup>

Many newspapers articles throughout the world saw the dilemma the multi-ethnic country faced in this breakup. One story, by the *New York Times* journalist David Binder, describes how a Serbian officer dealt with the predicament within his family as he flew an air-combat mission over Croatia:

*The pilot's Croatian wife had called him from Zagreb demanding that he take off his uniform and desert, or she would jump from their 14<sup>th</sup>-story apartment with their child. The pilot then called his Serbian mother in Novi Sad, who*

<sup>6</sup> See Ozren Žunec, *Rat i društvo ogledi iz sociologije vojske i rata* (Zagreb: naklada Jesenski i Turk, 1998): 110, and Danko Plevnik, *Rat i mir za Hrvatsku: Zapisi 1991.-1995.* (Zagreb: Naklada zavod Matice Hrvatske, 2002): 226. Both discuss the ideas of the "Greater Serbia" project as a modern concept and the means of Milošević's rise to power through the "anti-bureaucratic revolution" respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Nevin Sojić in Sudetic, "Face-Off Across a Road's White Line", A10.

<sup>8</sup> Davor Marijan, *Smrt oklopne brigade: Prilozi za istraživanje rata za Hrvatsku i Bosnu i Hercegovinu 1990.-1992* (Zagreb-Sarajevo: Naklada ZORO, 2002): 212.

<sup>9</sup> Milan Vego, "The Croatian Army", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, <http://www.janes.com>.

<sup>10</sup> Kučan in John Tagliabue, "Yugoslavia Battles Breakaway Republic", *New York Times* (June 28, 1991): A10.

*told him that if he took off the uniform of the Yugoslav Army, he could never cross her threshold again. He flew that night.*<sup>11</sup>

JNA Colonel Ivan Matović described the pain that many of the army families were having during the breakdown of the federation: families felt unable to even “defend themselves” much less their nation.<sup>12</sup>

Military analysts had assumed for years that the multi-ethnic composition of the JNA would impede internal conflict. Nevertheless, military professionals noted how the JNA seemed to have its hands tied during the period of dissolution. Some saw the JNA as bluffing military control or the imposition of martial law since, as one *New York Times* reporter noted, “the troops are conscripted from all regions of the country and cannot necessarily be counted on to follow the largely Serbian officer corps in battle against fellow Yugoslavs”.<sup>13</sup> However, some observers noted that martial law and revitalized JNA authority might have been a reality for Yugoslavia if certain generals had had their way.<sup>14</sup>

One thing that kept the Slovene independence movement alive was its high spirits in the face of destruction. When interviewed, a Slovenian militiaman guarding the border remarked on the Slovene resolve: “They are strongest at the moment. We are trying to hold what is ours, not to take anything. This land is ours”.<sup>15</sup> Slovenes, by and large, described the JNA battle for Slovenia as an act of occupation and not a civil war. Furthermore, Slovenes believed that they were, “defending Slovenian independence” and the West had known of how the JNA handled operations, it would not support Yugoslav territorial integrity.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> David Binder, “Ethnic Conflict in Yugoslavia Tearing Apart Its Army, Too”, *New York Times* (October 1, 1991): A1.

<sup>12</sup> Matović in Binder, “Ethnic Conflict”, A1.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Engelberg, “Yugoslav Forges Ethnic Peace Plan”, *New York Times* (May 10, 1991): A3.

<sup>14</sup> See “Watch the Yugoslav Generals”, *Jane's Foreign Report* (February 5, 1991), <http://www.janes.com>. “These generals and admirals may be itching for the right moment, while the world's attention is on the Gulf war, to declare martial law and seize power. Their frame of mind was revealed in a secret “topical brief” prepared by the army's political directorate and read out to selected groups of officers on January 24th. It noted that, in spite of the efforts of “western anti-socialist strategists”, socialism had not yet been defeated in any of the countries where the revolution had been home-grown and not imported (Yugoslavia, for instance). It welcomed the “ever more resolute action” by the Soviet army to counter separatism. In Yugoslavia, it said, western attacks were concentrated on the communists still in power (like Milosevic). The main task, therefore, was for the ruling communists to become the “main political force” in the country”.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Kinzer, “In Slovenian Villages, a Fierce Determination but a Shortage of Firepower”, *New York Times* (June 29, 1991): 4.

<sup>16</sup> Chuck Sudetic, “Despite Their Setbacks, Slovenes Remain Defiant”, *New York Times* (June 30, 1991): 8.

The strength of the Slovene resolve to gain independence was not necessarily a recent phenomenon in Yugoslavia. Namely, sentiment that ranged from poor enthusiasm and ambivalence towards the regime to outright desires for dismemberment with independence had a considerable history in Yugoslavia. Stipe Šušar, a high-ranking member of the Croatian League of Communists, and former Sociology professor at the University of Zagreb, commented that the frustrations in former Yugoslavia had larger meanings. The initial wave of Communist success following the Second World War in bringing people together and dispelling prior differences simply had fallen victim to time:

*After having been drunk on ideology, which was destroying everything that was old and which promised the rapid creation of happiness on earth; after having become disappointed by the results of such a radical ideology, people have started sobering up and trying to return to the old, lost values: the religious and ethnic communities.<sup>17</sup>*

While this referred to the Croatian autonomy movement in the 1970s, it represents the dissatisfaction that leaders of Yugoslavia tried desperately to combat. Such complaints grew over time for many reasons, including the economic conditions and ethnic tensions. The regime possessed many adherents, but the forces of dissent grew with time.

As the historian James Gow argues, Tito stood at the center of the SFRY and wielded his personal authority: his "diffuse system left nobody with enough power or authority to act decisively and had nobody who could be responsible for crisis, chaos, and the lack of an adequate political response".<sup>18</sup> While a single person did not succeed Tito, many saw the armed forces as the custodian of the revolution and guarantor of the state, as was manifest in the changing nature of civil-military politics. As Tito lay on his deathbed in 1980, the government discussed plans for the armed forces assuming a posture of military preparedness.<sup>19</sup> When Tito drafted the last Yugoslav constitution in 1974, he had deliberately made the federal president a rotating position, based on a consensus voting system. Tito's system failed to weather the storms that followed his death in 1980. Perhaps any country, conditioned to dictatorial rule, finds succession difficult apart from normal economic, political, and social problems. The difficulties following Tito's death spelled trouble for the SFRY and forced the new system to adapt quickly. Economic stagnation and regression had left many people worse off than in prior years and with little confidence in a recovery. When in 1988 Ante Marković became prime minister, his economic austerity program drew little widespread, domestic support and further weakened the

---

<sup>17</sup> Šušar in Gary Bertsch, *Values and Community in Multi-National Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976): 113.

<sup>18</sup> Gow, *Legitimacy and the Military: The Yugoslav Crisis* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992): 7.

<sup>19</sup> John Darnton, "Yugoslav Military Alerted as Tito's Condition Worsens", *New York Times* (February 14, 1980): A10.

regime.<sup>20</sup> The historian Robert Hayden contends that force was necessary once the constitution broke down in 1990:

*Each of these republics began increasingly to ignore federal authority and to veto federal activity. With the erosion of federal authority, the "combative federalism" that had [been] obtained since 1974 was transformed into a series of grim zero-sum games, in which each republic sought its own momentary tactical advantage without any recognition of the benefits of cooperation.*<sup>21</sup>

What happened during the late 1980s and early 1990s? While the army had been drawn into politics by none other than Tito himself in the 1970s, its political role continued until it became the most significant post-Titoist embodiment of the Yugoslav federation and disdained all separatism. The nationalist politics practiced in Croatia and Serbia, as well as the separatism in Slovenia undermined the role of the army in Yugoslavia. The army had enjoyed the patronage of Tito, who recognized it as supporting the regime against anti-Yugoslav change. Following Tito's death, the army was forced into the position of supreme guarantor without any popular pan-Yugoslav civilian base of support. The 1980s witnessed a loss of support for the Communist Party throughout Eastern Europe. In the wake of the Second World War the Party was filled by members of the former Partisan army, but that demographic base could not be sustained. By 1945, when the Party had 140,000 members, a reasonable fear of militarization of the Party emerged.<sup>22</sup> While the army-party ties remained strong, the Party looked outside of the soldier's realm to realize legitimacy and succeeded for many years. Importantly, the officer corps participated greatly within the LCY and the two institutions grew interconnected.<sup>23</sup> That interconnectedness helped to spell disaster for both institutions and by extension for the entire Yugoslav idea.

One way to help understand the civil-military relationship is the tie between the army and the party. The two were under the command of Tito during the Second World War, and stood for national liberation. The explicit goal of the fighting forces was to secure a new state and a new system through the liberation of the country from the Axis forces. Furthermore, Tito had secured his victory popularly and sought to maintain it. The maintenance of popularity remains one explanation for the Yugoslav system changing to fit the different times. Change was one characteristic favorably attributed to the Yugoslav system as it remained outside of Moscow's paternalistic grip. Valerie Bunce has argued that such popular support explains one reason why Yugoslavia also died in the violent manner that it did. While it is logical to assume that popular support would afford the regime freedom of movement,

<sup>20</sup> Elez Biberaj, "Yugoslavia: A Continuing Crisis?" *Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism* 225 (October 1989): 5.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999): 48.

<sup>22</sup> A. Ross Johnson, *The Role of the Military in Communist Yugoslavia: An Historical Sketch*, (San Diego, CA: RAND, 1978): 3.

<sup>23</sup> Gow, *Legitimacy*, 141.

just the opposite was true because the state had to cater to its relatively politicized populace for fear of losing support and creating mini-Tito's, republican leaders who could wield local support and affect change.<sup>24</sup> This created a situation in which the state needed the party as much as the party needed the army.

The army recognized that problems of nationalism and liberalism endangered the army as well as the state. The army recognized the need to adapt to the changes in Yugoslav politics by allowing for the Territorial Defense and similar self-management systems. When the military leaders realized that further decentralization could hinder the federal bonding agents that had kept Yugoslavia a viable state, the army rebuffed challenges to its institutional autonomy and sought instead to strengthen the central JNA's role in the state.<sup>25</sup> The army put forward a plan of recentralization called Jedinstvo, which tried to marginalize and derail the power of the TDFs. The Chief of Staff and later Yugoslav Defense Minister, Admiral Branko Mamula, commented that "It is difficult to understand how any reasonable person could conceive of how a collective high command of 30 people could be anything but problematic after Tito's departure especially if met by the JNA and armed defense".<sup>26</sup> The instability in the country was so worrisome because of the apparent failures of the post-Tito federal government to contain such challenges. As the military historian Davor Marijan has noted, "the work of the armed forces, in particular the peaceful part, was prepared for the energetic and fast containment of all challenges to the constitutional order of the country and the revelation that to defeat these forces a special war and military intervention were necessary".<sup>27</sup> The very actions of the JNA, which had sought to hold the country together and quell internal agitation, actually served to break apart the country. Military action thus fostered more radical reactions from those groups seeking reforms in- or outside of Yugoslavia.<sup>28</sup>

Yugoslav President Borislav Jović believed that central control needed to be strengthened in order to prevent the republics from breaking away. In 1990, he declared that "violations of the constitution and law have reached such proportions that they threaten certain vital functions of the state". He anticipated that "the coming to power of extreme right-wing and revanchist forces would create great

<sup>24</sup> Valerie Bunce in *State-Society Relations in Yugoslavia, 1945-1992*, eds. Melissa K. Bokovoy, Jill A. Irvine, and Carol S. Lilly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997): 347.

<sup>25</sup> See Johnson, *The Role of the Military in Communist Yugoslavia*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Mamula in Davor Marijan, "'Jedinstvo' – posljednji ustroj JNA". *Polemos* 6:1-2 (January – June 2003): 14.

<sup>27</sup> Marijan, "'Jedinstvo' – posljednji ustroj JNA", 34.

<sup>28</sup> See, Franjo Tuđman, "All We Croatian Want is Democracy", *New York Times* (June 30, 1990): 23. For example, after Franjo Tuđman became president of Croatia he noted that the JNA was not allowed to disarm Croatian paramilitary units and would be treated as an occupying force and enemy if it pursued such goals. Also see Franjo Tuđman in Chuck Sudetic, "Yugoslavia Warns Croatia to Disarm Its Forces", *New York Times* (January 22, 1991): A3. "In fact, if Belgrade does not cause a civil war by military intervention, there will be no civil war". However, "If the army goes into action tonight as Mr. Jovic said, it would lead to catastrophic consequences".



difficulties. This could lead to civil war and open the possibility of foreign military intervention".<sup>29</sup> Military and the political leaders recognized the problems of decentralization and desperately tried to contain them.

The army-party relationship proved very revealing in this intricate situation. The LCY organization in the army declared that its basic organizations, forums, and operatives directed the activity toward the strengthening of ideological and political awareness and moral and political unity, including the development of the combat readiness and the revolutionary and popular character of the JNA.<sup>30</sup> The members of the LCY organization in the army were seen to be vital to the health of the state and its eventual success in economic and political socialist self-management.<sup>31</sup> This organization also sought institutional integrity and compatibility with other aspects of society, but still took all direction from the LCY organ within the JNA, which derived its function, character, and mission from the greater LCY.<sup>32</sup>

There existed numerous reports about the various conferences of the LCY organization in the army, each describes insights into what the military elites thought and worried about. In 1971, Tito himself declared that "We must vigilantly watch all those negative effects on the security, integrity and sovereignty of our country and our self-managing social system". He attached much responsibility to the army:

*A great responsibility rests with the Communists for the preservation and strengthening of brotherhood and unity, and equality of the people and nationalities of our country ... The Communists in the Army have always had a sense of responsibility for the implementation of the fundamental questions and principles of policy of the LCY, because, as Communists and soldiers, they have grasped and understood their importance to the future of our community and its prosperity.*<sup>33</sup>

At the same conference, Colonel Veljko Miladinović, editor of the Party journal *Komunist*, emphasized the army's plans to accept everything that the party deemed necessary for Yugoslavia: "In this respect, we neither have, nor can have, other interests, because this also contains our specific objectives, since such solutions secure the most favorable conditions for an even greater moral strength of the Army".<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Borislav Jović in Timothy Heritage, "Yugoslav Leader Calls for New Constitution to Prevent Civil War", *Reuters* (May 28, 1990), [http://global.factiva.com/en/arch/print\\_results.asp](http://global.factiva.com/en/arch/print_results.asp) (accessed on October 14, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> "League of Communists Organization Within [The] Armed Forces", *Narodna Armija* (April 25, 1974): 15-16. Accessed at the Open Society Archives, Budapest (OSA). This same goal was articulated in many articles, including "Nastavlja se Titovo revolucionarno delo", *Politika* (June 27, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> "Armija – pouzdan oslonac radničke klase". *Borba* (December 21, 1982).

<sup>32</sup> "League of Communists Organization Within [The] Armed Forces", *Narodna Armija* (April 25, 1974): 15-16. OSA.

<sup>33</sup> Josip Broz Tito in "Session of the Conference of the LCY in the Yugoslav People's Army", *Borba* (January 16, 1971): 1. OSA.

<sup>34</sup> Veljko Miladinović in "Session of the LC Conference in the YPA", *Borba* (January 16, 1971): 5. OSA.

Such rhetoric did not change much over the course of the 1970s, when the army continued to declare that its success and ties to the Party were the very strength that kept the army morally healthy.<sup>35</sup> Such statements indicate the army's very real fear about the future viability of the state. Admiral Branko Mamula stated that the military-political situation in the world was troubling for Yugoslavia:

*In addition, our serious internal difficulties, which are both the consequence of the above-mentioned international troubles and of our own weaknesses, are a warning that we have to appraise our international position realistically ... we must especially strengthen our armed forces ... Our armed forces have never been meant exclusively for the protection of the independence of our country against possible foreign intervention, but they have also at the same time been the guardian of our socialist system.*<sup>36</sup>

Mamula's statement reaffirmed Tito's views of the army to fight internal and external enemies, but added that Yugoslavia suffered from *serious internal difficulties* partly due to *our own weaknesses*.

In 1979, the political role of the army was increasingly denied. The Slovene journalist, Primož •agar, published a series of articles that chastised observers in the West who thought that the army was planning to take over leadership of the country. The apolitical nature of the army was cited along with of the "recognition" that Yugoslavia was managed by the working class. The masses managed themselves and were not run by the army but merely protected not it.<sup>37</sup>

•agar does not accurately represent the politics of the time. In 1979, in the 166-member LCY Central Committee, there were 23 high-ranking officers or 14 percent of the total membership of 90-100,000 communists in the 250,000-man JNA. Not only was the defense minister a military officer, but many other leading offices in Belgrade were staffed by officers. For example, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Federal State Attorney, Secretary-General of the SFRY State Presidency, and the Executive Secretary in the Central Committee Presidium were all

<sup>35</sup> See B. Popović, "SFRY: Belgrade Army Communists Discuss Ideological Work", *Borba* (October 20, 1979): 14. OSA. "The ideological-political work has directly contributed to strengthening the military organization, the leadership and command system, the conscious military discipline and the sense of duty and responsibility.' This work is an integral part of the entire life and work of members of the Yugoslav People's Army and for this reason 'cannot and must not be separated from the overall practical work, from the combat training and education, from the struggle to strengthen the internal work, discipline and responsibility and from the struggle to form the working and moral character of all members of the Yugoslav People's Army.'"

<sup>36</sup> Mamula in *The Role of the Army in Post-Tito Yugoslavia*, (Radio Free Europe Research: RAD Background Report/40, February 11, 1982). OSA.

<sup>37</sup> Slobodan Stanković, *Yugoslav Paper Denies Army's Political Role* (Radio Free Europe Research: RAD Background Report, November 12, 1979). OSA.

army generals in 1979.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, army leaders had become so frightened by the end of Tito's presidency that they began to take their perceived role in politics very seriously indeed. The LCY organization in the army was just one of the ways that the army tried to realize the integrity of the federation. As JNA Colonel Boško Stojanović, noted:

*Communists in the Army have always been in progressive positions in the struggle for social self-management and for the programs and measurements which contribute to the position and role of the working classes, as well as the economic, political, and social stability of society. They are actively participating in the ideological-political struggle of the LCY and other organizations in defense of society against nationalism, bourgeois-liberalism, bureaucratic dogmatism and other agents at work against the ideology and constituents in the LCY.*<sup>39</sup>

As the politics of the 1980s turned towards plural nationalisms, and witnessed the important changes in Europe, the Communist Party lost much support among the population. The formal disbanding of the Communist Party's monopoly in Yugoslavia took place on January 22, 1990, when the party leaders recognized the changes outside of Yugoslavia. Stefan Korosec, the Yugoslav party secretary, admitted that communism "has no historic future", and that Yugoslavia needed "to catch up with the pace of democratic reforms" in Eastern Europe.<sup>40</sup> At this very momentous meeting, the Slovene delegation walked out on the remainder of the party, commenting on the death of Yugoslavia and the birth of new nations at the congress.<sup>41</sup> While the Serbian delegation also recognized the need to accept the end of the communist monopoly, they envisioned a slower and more centrist pluralism. The self-imposed decision to disband the monopoly of the Communist Party also broke with the constitution, which had guaranteed it such power in Yugoslavia.

<sup>38</sup> Stanković, *Yugoslav Paper Denies Army's Political Role*. Also see Slobodan Stanković, *Changes in the Yugoslav Army Party Organization*, (Radio Free Europe Research: RAD Background Report/1, January 2, 1979): 1-3. OSA. This report examines the ethnicity of the army officials in the Central Committee. This report cites 21 high-ranking officers in the Central Committee of which 8 were Serbs, 5 Croats, 2 Slovenes, 2 Montenegrins, 2 Macedonians, 2 Yugoslavs, 1 Albanian, and 1 Moslem. The report also contents that Serbs and Montenegrins were beginning to occupy key posts in the LCY organization in the JNA.

<sup>39</sup> See Dušan Pejanović, Josip Karavanić, Mihajlo Golubović, Ernest Mezga, Boška Stojanović, Božo Šašić and Čedo Stanković, *Organizacija SKJ u JNA*, vol. 2, *Razvoj oružanih snaga SFRJ, 1945-1985*, (Beograd: Vojnoizdavačka i novinski centar, 1986): 286. "Komunisti Armije su uvijek bili na progresivnim pozicijama borbe za socijalističko samoupravljanje i za programe i mjere koji doprinose jačanju položaja i uloge radničke klase, ekonomskoj, političkoj i socijalnoj stabilnosti društva. Oni su aktivno učestvovali u idejno-političkoj borbi SKJ i ostalih organizovanih snaga društva protiv nacionalističkih, buržoasko-liberalističkih, birokratsko-dogmatskih i drugih shvatanja i postupaka suprotnih ideologiji i stavovima SKJ".

<sup>40</sup> Marlise Simons, "Yugoslav Communists Vote to End Party's Monopoly", *New York Times* (January 23, 1990): A9.

<sup>41</sup> Simons, "Yugoslav Communists Vote", A9.

Following this decision, Prime Minister Ante Marković, declared that the Party and the state were still intertwined, "But the process of disassociating of the two has begun. If parties have a real chance to take part in free elections, then everything else is rhetoric".<sup>42</sup>

The fact that the army and party stood close together meant that their fates were linked. The constitution guaranteed the army a role in the state, but that role stood in jeopardy following the January 1990 decision by the LCY to discontinue its monopoly. While unquestionably supporting the party in the past, the army now needed to make its own decision. The withdrawal of LCY monopoly, including its influence within the JNA, opened the door to unknown consequences. Would true democracy come to Yugoslavia as a united country? Would a postcommunist trend in Europe be realized in six post-Yugoslav states? Would the military depoliticize and allow the state to become a *rechtstaat*, one based upon law rather than party hegemony?<sup>43</sup>

Indeed the death knell for the army had been rung but it cannot be pronounced dead until armed conflict began. Issues of democratization challenged the military's traditional political profile and ran contrary to the JNA's intended purpose. A democratic or multiparty Yugoslavia meant that the erstwhile Communist generals would have no place in the new state. The possibility of democratization meant the LCY losing in any election. The fall from grace of the army as a unifying force in Yugoslavia meant the end to the careers of thousands of officers. Everything Yugoslav lost legitimacy in 1990. Even the refashioned Communist Party (renamed the League of Communists-Movement for Yugoslavia in November of 1990) outwardly called for the maintenance of the status quo and the preservation of the SFRY. Several prominent retired generals supported this new party, including Mamula, Buncić, Mirković, and Gračanin, the federal interior minister.<sup>44</sup>

The army wished to maintain the status quo and keep Yugoslavia united by clinging to the old party line of brotherhood and unity and by downplaying the ethnic differences in the Yugoslav state. Wishing to remain an arbiter of power and a model of representation among the various nationalities, the army pushed itself into a corner and allowed for little room to disengage from political activity and step aside as the Yugoslav state changed into a multi-party democracy.

What the army could not combat was the popularity with which nationalist politics took center stage in two major republics. Both in Croatia and Serbia a popularized rhetoric that focused on the past and created new ethnic labels after over 40 years without such labeling became fashionable. Slobodan Milošević stayed in power far too long apart from the obvious ruinous effects his leadership meted

<sup>42</sup> Marlise Simons, "Yugoslavia on the Brink", *New York Times* (January 24, 1990): A11.

<sup>43</sup> Gow, *Legitimacy*, 140.

<sup>44</sup> Gow, *Legitimacy*, 140. In fact, it was widely held that the new party was led by the JNA and such military involvement was resented by certain politicians. The military in fact tried to resist the death of socialism. See Milan Vego, "The Army of Serbian Krajina", *Jane's Intelligence Review* (October 1, 1993), <http://www.janes.com>. "The president of Knin Krajina, Mr. Babic, had great problems with the "League of Communists – Movement for Yugoslavia" whose plan was to preserve 'socialism' and the federation. The league was the principal tool of the army's top leadership and of Tito's "Partizans" to preserve political influence".

out to Serbia. Franjo Tuđman stayed in office in Croatia by taking politically risky moves that isolated him and his state from much of Europe. Croats recognized that his power corrupted his goals becoming dangerous for Croatia. Many Croats still express the view that if Tuđman had given up power before the HV incursion into Bosnia, prior to the Dayton Accords, he would have remained a truly great Croatian hero.

To place all responsibility on a leader of a group or nation, denies the agency of other actors. Tito did exert undue influence over elites in Yugoslavia, but he does not alone explain why the SFRY remained intact. Nor is it prudent to assume that Milošević or Tuđman wielded total influence in propagating their policies. Like Tito, both used their influence as powerful party leaders to control the media, to maintain their close advisors through nepotism and favoritism, as well as to defeat the opposition. The references to their influence among the people of Croatia and Serbia in this paper do not assume that other actors failed to play a role. Mentioning both leaders assumes that their influence played a role in motivating other similarly-minded people to assume positions of action. Moreover, their rhetoric played to certain prejudices, insecurities, and the general ignorance of the populace.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding the effects within civilian society, were the continued debates over the role of the army both in the dissolution and any post-war government(s).

The primordialist argument is used by authors who see the Yugoslav conflicts as steeped in ancient hatreds or the resuscitation of old quarrels among the ethnic groups. Such an argument is not based on realities that faced communist Yugoslavia and its successor states. Tensions between the various ethnic groups vis-à-vis the parent republics took on a pragmatic character; while sprinklings of ideological nationalisms raised their heads, such radical behavior must be put into broader context. Nonetheless, fear of nationalism drove Yugoslav leaders to maintain an overall balance and accommodate all the people. The Second World War, with all its divisive civil conflicts and massacres, forced Tito to downplay the past and simply label wartime victims as "victims of fascism", and "domestic traitors" instead of blaming any particular group.<sup>46</sup> Such fears also drove army leaders to demand more equitable national representation in the army during the life of the JNA.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Srdja Pavlovic, "Understanding Balkan Nationalism: The wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time". *Southeast European Politics* 1:2 (December 2000): 122. Pavlovic further argues that, "I am of the opinion that the insufficient knowledge of that *other*, poor level of communication and exchange between the different groups in the region constitute the core elements of nationalistic fear and hate". I would go a step further and say that rather than constituting "the core elements" insufficient knowledge and poor communication and exchange were symptoms that allowed nationalistic propaganda to flourish. I would argue that most people lived their lives concerned with their own existence and failed to worry extensively about other ethnic groups and wrongs committed in the past. When pursued with half-truths and lies such people can more easily fall victim to committing nationalist-driven acts.

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 99.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, equitable representation was demanded at "ALL levels". See "3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the YPA Conference at the LCY: Only a Strong Yugoslavia can Define her Independence", *Borba* (November 12, 1971): 6. OSA.

In contrast, the divisive politics practiced by Milošević involved the reawakening of ethnic identity and emphasizing Serbia and its unique history. Reburials, such as that of Tsar Lazar on monastic land, deemed to be Serbia proper, became important. As the Serb nationalist Vuk Drašković noted, "Serbia is wherever there are Serbian graves".<sup>48</sup> Thus the religious spirit of Orthodoxy was used for political purposes to motivate Serbs. The Serbian patriarch even participated in singing liturgy for those killed in war. Religion thus played a big role in the death of Yugoslavia. The Serbian Orthodox church took the lead in revitalizing myths, such as the Kosovo myth, following Tito's death. The church remained critical of the anti-religious stance of the LCY, but focused more attention on the Serb abandonment of Kosovo to the Albanians. Church rhetoric gave the Party more fuel for the nationalist fire.<sup>49</sup>

According to historian Vesna Pešić, "the Yugoslav state lacked the integrative potential necessary to create institutional frameworks and workable procedures of democratic rule that could accommodate the problematic relations among its different national groups".<sup>50</sup> Keeping in line with the hegemonic nature of communism, Yugoslav communism forcefully attempted to quell ethnic rivalry purporting that such concepts as ethnic differences would wither away along with the state. Furthermore, Pavlović argues that,

*the communist elite in the former Yugoslavia was as nationalistic as their royalist predecessors had been but the manifestations of their nationalist sentiments had acquired new ideological frameworks, thus, creating a new form of nationalism that combined the elements of the old nineteenth century nationalist thought together with the new ideology of the Yugoslav supranationality.*<sup>51</sup>

The notion of a Yugoslav ethnic identity served the regime with a broader-based legitimizing notion that could advance the goals of communism. The expression, "national in form, socialist in content", allowed the state to express socialist patriotism in terms of Yugoslav ethnic identity.<sup>52</sup> Yet, this idea only helped to further the conflict when identity became such a bigger issue. Identity for some came to symbolize the greatest problem facing Yugoslavia. As the Serbian political writer, Mihailo Marković

<sup>48</sup> Drašković in *Verdery*, 98.

<sup>49</sup> Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 196. In addition to addressing the Kosovo myth, Duijzings chronicles, for example, the case of the Kosovar Croatian village of Letnica that was prompted by the nationalist rhetoric of Tuđman to flee Kosovo for Croatia in the early 1990s, despite the fact that their Catholicism and their community interests were arguably being better served in Kosovo. Duijzings also points out in his book that particularly during historic moments of violence patterns of ethnic and confessional identity are most subject to fluctuation.

<sup>50</sup> Vesna Pešić, *Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis* (Washington, DC, U.S. Institute of Peace, 1996): 3.

<sup>51</sup> Srdja Pavlović, "Understanding Balkan Nationalism: The wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time", *Southeast European Politics* 1:2 (December 2000): 118. Emphasis in original.

<sup>52</sup> Pešić, 10.

wrote, "Our problem is not a crisis of ideology; it is a national identity crisis".<sup>53</sup> The army officer corps stood as a vital institution behind the concept of a Yugoslav identity. As Gow argues, the middle and junior ranks during 1990 encompassed a 5.4 percent Yugoslav ethnic component. Of that 5.4 percent, most were likely Serbs. This last point should not color the fact that a "Yugoslav" identity existed within the officer corps and outnumbered Albanians, Muslims, Slovenes, and others.<sup>54</sup> The role that identity played in the death of the JNA was not insignificant and stands in line with the kind of ethnic tension within an ethnically-fragmented military. Yet, the existence of officers who identified so closely with the regime as to consider their ethnicity Yugoslav under the social constructs of the regime, proves that certain members of the JNA would go to great lengths to preserve the union.

Throughout the entire process of transition, the Yugoslav succession by means of armed conflict played a large role in helping to fuel destabilization. Such violence still stands as a principal reason for the economic, political, and social troubles currently plaguing Southeastern Europe. With the tremendous increase in size of its fighting force, the JNA and its successors all used violence to solve problems. The breakdown of civilian Yugoslav political authority, which legitimized the JNA, helped to a new, virulent national ideology that embraced military intervention but that undermined the authority of the JNA. The legacy of this violent separation also hindered the development of the post-Yugoslav states, whether they experienced fighting on their territory or not. The death of the JNA began many years prior but when it finally succumbed it stood as the last remnant of a united Yugoslavia that itself became caught up in intrigue and chaos. With the army's fall in Slovenia an entire ideology fell from grace and no one can speak about a "third" Yugoslavia – that notion died somewhere along the way.

<sup>53</sup> Marković in Marlise Simons, "A Sign of Bad Times in Yugoslavia: Trade War Between Two Republics", *New York Times*, (January 28, 1990): 14.

<sup>54</sup> Biberaj, "Yugoslavia...", 15.

## SMRT JUGOSLAVENSKE NARODNE ARMIIJE I RATOVI ZA NASLJEĐE

Robert Niebuhr

### Sažetak

*Smrt Jugoslavije odvijala se istodobno sa smrću Jugoslavenske narodne armije (JNA). U početku, JNA je željela sačuvati integritet Federacije, ali se ova ubrzo raspala po etničkim linijama. Promjene koje su se dogodile unutar JNA predstavljaju mikrokozmos procesa raspada Jugoslavije. Na osobnoj razini, vojnici dvojih nacionalnosti trebali su birati kome će se prikloniti. Ta unutarnja borba bila je slična izboru civila ali mnogo složenija – u koga pucati i zašto? Konačno, raspad Jugoslavije se ne može opisivati bez spominjanja uloge Saveza Komunističke Jugoslavije. Odnosi armije, partije i države pomogli su u stvaranju dodatne konfuzije, posebno kad uzmemo u obzir pad komunizma u Sovjetskom Savezu i Istočnoj Europi. Kako su se partijski vođena armija i država uopće mogle na miran način transformirati u neki od mogućih oblika višestranačkog društva i tržišne ekonomije? Problemi koji su pogodili bivšu Jugoslaviju i JNA, posebno tijekom osamdesetih godina 20 stoljeća, zajedno su doveli do propasti i smrti na svim društvenim razinama.*

*Ključne riječi:* Jugoslavenska narodna armija, Jugoslavija, Milošević, Komunistička partija