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Years of Decision: An Explanation of the 1948 and 1949 Yugoslavian Conflicts

Stephanie McWhorter

Introduction

With the conclusion of World War II, the cementing of a strong bi-polar sphere of influence system appeared imminent. The two dominant powers, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, gathered their allies together, bolstering their military, economic and political strength. To the casual, or even informed Western observer, the Yugoslavian government’s commitment to the Soviet agenda seemed firm and unwavering. As late as April 12, 1948, Yugoslavian leader Marshal Josip Broz Tito relayed his commitment to Stalin, detailing his party’s achievements for the communist cause and past loyalties (Banac 1988, 117). Yet within three months, ties between the two countries would be strained and the Western world shocked by an apparently irreconcilable schism between the two strong Communist countries.

What led to the shocking severance of ties and Yugoslavia’s subsequent conciliatory actions toward Western powers? On the surface it might appear that the Yugoslavian government acted irrationally and against all norms. Both the USSR and Yugoslavia were Communist countries fully dedicated to the ideals of Marx and Lenin. Both iterated an intense hatred for the capitalist, imperialist West. Both advocated a world-wide Communist ideology and brotherhood. Yet the two countries sharply separated in 1948; one controlled the Communist sphere of influence, the other found acceptance in the Western camp.

This abrupt, seemingly illogical split can be explained by examining two decisions made by the Yugoslavian government. The first decision came in 1948, the second in 1949. To Western powers both decisions appeared to have been made to reach the same end, i.e. to find favor with the obviously stronger and more correct camp, the West. To the Soviets, both decisions seemingly attempted to separate, then distance the two countries. In the process Yugoslavia turned her back to the Communist brotherhood and became a hapless pawn for imperialist kings.

Both are powerful arguments, but with a closer examination of the actual situation, primary players, and the world political structure of the time, a different argument can be made. This will be discussed in greater detail later, but first the fascinating story behind these two momentous decisions must be told.

Historical Analysis

The Decision in 1948

On April 12, 1948 the Komunisticka partija Jugoslavije Central Committee (the Communist party of Yugoslavia, KPJ) convened at the Old Palace in Belgrade’s Dedinje section (Wilson 1979, 55). The primary purpose of the meeting was to formulate a response to Stalin’s First Letter, a harsh correspondence containing accusations, threats, and demands concerning Yugoslavian loyalty, actions, and state goals. Tito’s response posited a calm, collected reply, emphasizing shared ideology, equality and nationality. During the course of meeting’s discussion, Edvard Kardelj, the second man in the Politburo,
determined that "our party contributed quite a few new elements to the treasury of Marxism-Leninism. [We made a] contribution to the struggle against imperialism in the international arena. We supported the USSR in a creative way" (Banac 1988, 118). The participants confirmed the government’s commitment to the Communist agenda, but announced that other considerations had to take priority. As Tito firmly stated, "No matter how much some of us love the land of socialism, the USSR, he can, in no case, love his own country less, which also is building socialism" (Banac 1988, 118).

Stalin immediately issued his Second Letter, accusing the Yugoslavs, and Tito specifically, of equating the USSR with the imperialist great powers. He ridiculed the detailed achievements of the Yugoslavian government and proclaimed that no Communist government could come to power, or presume to stay in power, without Soviet military aid (Banac 1988, 123). He concluded by suggesting that the Yugoslavs present their case to the Communist Information Bureau, the Cominform, allowing all brother Communist states to hear both sides of the issue (Wilson 1979, 57).

Tito and Kardelj officially responded to Stalin’s Second Letter, rejecting the possibility of any Cominform arbitration. They charged the USSR with assuring the conflict’s outcome by lobbying other governments. They then reaffirmed their loyalty to socialism, the Soviet Union and Marxism-Leninism (Banac 1988, 124).

After receiving the third letter, Stalin and other leaders continued their attempt to persuade the Yugoslavs to attend the Cominform meeting. These efforts failed. When the official invitation arrived on June 10, 1948, Tito informed Cominform representatives that no Yugoslavian delegation would be present (Banac 1988, 125).

By choosing to not participate in this forum, Tito permitted several things to happen. First, by not allowing any type of official representation, the other Communist leaders were able to condemn all his actions, unilaterally. Their rationale assumed that since Tito chose not to defend his country’s actions, he was obviously guilty of all Soviet charges, and was therefore a traitor to the Communist party.

Second, his refusal to participate in an official Communist forum cast considerable doubts about his sincerity in the Communist cause. The Communist camp quickly doubted his faithfulness and loyalty while the Western powers eagerly began courting Yugoslavia as a prospective ally. This obvious breach in the balance of power further destabilized the international system temporarily while Yugoslavia attempted to resituate itself in the world’s structure.

Third, Yugoslavia’s future course of action appeared precarious. By snubbing, insulting, and even openly opposing the Soviet Union, any attempts at future reconciliation would be extremely difficult, and conceivably achieved only through many conciliatory gestures, economic sacrifices, and political sacrifices. After beginning negotiations for a possible alignment with the West, Yugoslavia set itself in a dangerous position. The Soviet Union was a formidable foe, even for the United States. What chances could a small, militarily insignificant country have against a nuclear-endowed superpower?

During the Cominform, representatives from the other Communist governments formulated the Cominform Resolution. On June 28, 1948 the Western world received a tremendous shock when made aware of the conflict between two Communist governments. The accusations listed in the Resolution included anti-Sovietism, practical and ideological errors,
party departures from Leninist theory, a lack of intra-party democracy, and repeated refusals to accept criticism (Banac 1988, 125). The most serious charge, made in point eight, held that KPJ leaders "have placed themselves in opposition to the Communist parties within the Information Bureau, have taken the road of seceding from the united socialist from against imperialism, betraying the cause of international solidarity of the working people, and have taken a nationalist position" (Banac 1988, 125).

The Resolution issued a blanket condemnation, stating "The Information Bureau considers that, in view of all this, the KPJ CC has excluded itself and the KPJ from the family of fraternal Communist parties, the united Communist front, and consequently is outside the ranks of the Information Bureau" (Banac 1988, 125-126).

Needless to say, the international system changed dramatically, jolted from a relatively stable multipolar system into further chaos. Suddenly there was a small, but significant threat to one superpower's preeminence, which stunned both Western and Communist leaders.

The Decision in 1949

After almost one year of tense relations, the Yugoslavian government indicated its future direction with its action in a small area belonging to Italy. This decision further defined Tito's split with Stalin, and caused the Western powers to believe that soon Yugoslavia would be pursuing their agenda.

At the Paris Peace negotiations of 1946, the Yugoslavs had demanded the port and hinterland of Trieste, a demand resulting primarily from Soviet pressures. Under that Paris Peace Treaty in 1946, a Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) was constituted, to be administered by a Governor by the Security Council of the U.N. The Soviets had hoped to eventually render this plan unworkable, but even through 1949, an Anglo-American military occupation force continued to control the area under the FTT, along with increasing Italian participation (Wilson 1979, 85).

On 20 March 1949, to help the Italian Christian Democrat party in a crucial election, the US, British and French governments addressed a declaration to the Soviet and Yugoslav governments proposing that the whole FTT be given back to Italy (Wilson 1979, 85). Tito received the request; he found himself forced to follow either Soviet or Western demands.

This Tripartite Declaration pushed the Yugoslav leaders into a precarious position. Their strained diplomatic relations with the USSR forced them to realize that should they agree to the Declaration, their agreement might become a serious policy commitment to the West. Tito realized that by deciding to prioritize national interests above the Communist system of states, he would completely alienate the Soviet Union. Even with this realization, he decided that the best course of action would be to gradually change camps, easing out of the Communist structure into the Western camp, while optimizing Yugoslavia's current and potential position for Western aid.

The actual implementation of all points in the Declaration constituted a long, tedious series of diplomatic, economic and political maneuvers. The exchange concluded in October 1954 with the Italians receiving full control of the entire territory; Tito privately expressed great satisfaction with the outcome. The whole arrangement had been reached without Soviet participation or objection, Tito had demonstrated he was ready to stand up to his Western protectors for Yugoslavian national interests, and he had safeguarded Yugoslavia against any further effective
claim by the Italians (Wilson 1979, 90-91).

This historical recitation provides interesting details, but does not explain any of the reasons for the two implemented decisions. To fully understand the reasons for the two nations' split, other factors must be considered. Through detailed analyses of the leadership and governmental structure, as perceived by the international community, domestic opposition, and systemic influences, the two decisions are better understood on three other levels. Ultimately, however, an integrative attempt to combine the most important influences from all three areas will explain the decisions from one integrated level.

**Leadership and Governmental Structure**

When examining Yugoslavia's break with the Soviet Union and her subsequent conciliatory actions towards the West, including the voluntary relinquishment of Trieste, the prominence of two fundamentally important national actors arises: the players and their forum, the Yugoslavian governmental structure. The international system viewed these two actors as the dominant policy makers, and discounted the possibility of internal conflicts. Thus, from the international perspective, only the leadership and governmental structure influenced national foreign policy.

The primary national actors came from two opposing, yet cooperating, ideological groups, namely the "theoretical" group, led by Edvard Kardelj, Milovan Djilas, Boris Kidric, and Vladimir Bakaric, and the "pragmatic" group, led by Tito and Alexander-Leka Rankovic (Djilas 1980, 33-34). Tito occupied the dominant role, but Kardelj and Djilas also played significant roles in the decision-making process.

To better understand the processes of 1948 and 1949, the explanation and analysis of the actors and the arena must be intertwined. To effectively analyze the situation, Tito and the governmental framework will be accorded primary attention, with minor emphasis on Kardelj and Djilas. The latter two actors' roles should not be considered subordinate to Tito's; each actor contributed greatly to the process.

**Josip Broz-Tito**

Thus the CPY was able, immediately after the liberation, to carry out the second highly important and difficult task: to complete the organization of new Yugoslavia as a state, but as a state of a new type—a true people’s democracy, founded upon federal principles, with full equality for all the peoples of Yugoslavia. (Tito 1983, 121) So proclaimed Tito in June of 1948. But who was this curiously charismatic leader? Who was the great nationalistic statesman who challenged Stalin, and lived to see the rise and fall of both Stalin and his doctrine?

Josip Broz-Tito, the son of Croatian-Slovenian peasants, was born in 1892. He spent his first fifteen years in Kumrovec, an inconsequential Croatian village in the Austro-Hungarian empire. For the next three years he worked as a locksmith's apprentice until becoming a full-time Communist organizer. Tito spent the next six years wandering throughout the Empire, until 1913 when the Austrian Army demanded he fulfill his two year military commitment. During World War I, he gained the rank of a non-commissioned officer and fought with honor until he was captured by the Russians in 1916. He spent the next year in a Russian hospital, 500 miles east of Moscow. While in Russia, he became well versed in the Communist movement and its avowed hatred for all capitalistic, imperialistic powers. After returning to Veliko Trojstvo, a Croatian
village, he became heavily involved with local Communist politics. He moved through the ranks, from the local, through the regional, and finally into the national level. Tito won membership in the Central Committee of the CPY in 1934. After a 1937 party purge (ordered by Stalin), he became secretary general (Djilas 1980, 27). Throughout the war he continued to lead the Communist party, playing a dominant role in the Partisan military resistance group (Djilas 1991, 92). In November 1943, Tito convened the second meeting of the Antifasisticko vece narodnog oslobodjenja Jugoslavije - AVNOJ (Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia), a committee of communist and noncommunist Partisan representatives which acted as a Partisan political umbrella organization. This session built the basis for the postwar government of Yugoslavia, mandating four decisions:

1. The country would be reconstituted on a federal basis.

2. A national committee to act as a temporary government was elected.

3. Tito was named marshal and prime minister of Yugoslavia.

4. A declaration forbidding King Petar, the pre-war head of state, to return to the country until a popular referendum had been held on the status of the monarchy was issued. (Wilson 1979, 29)

The committee received full Western support for all four decisions primarily because the Western Allies believed the Partisans were the only Yugoslav resistance group opposing the Germans (Carter 1990, 23). Although Stalin was enraged by the committee's actions (Tito had conveniently been unable to inform Stalin of the session before the fact), he had no choice but to support his Western allies, which translated into public support for Tito's power.

The communist party, headed by Tito, emerged from the war as the only viable Yugoslav leadership. A detail which seemed inconsequential at the time, but would later manifest tremendous ramifications, was the lack of major Soviet support and backing during the Partisans' victory over Nazi Germany (Carter 1990, 25). On March 7, 1945 a single provisional Yugoslav government commenced with Tito as prime minister and war minister. On November 29, 1945 a newly elected constituent assembly dissolved the monarchy and established the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Two months later a Soviet-style constitution which provided for a federation of six republics under a strong central government was adopted (Rusinow 1979, 16-17).

The constitution established a "rubber-stamp" Federal Assembly and a presidential council to administer the federal government. The economy was officially centralized, but in actuality, the free market system incorporated governmental controls. Tito headed the party, government and armed forces. His party functionaries oversaw the industries and supervised republic and local officials (Rusinow 1977, 16-17). As a result of the new governmental framework, Tito held uncontested control over the government, the Communist party, and the allegiance of the Yugoslav people.

The Yugoslav government remained essentially the same from 1948 to 1954. The major players remained constant, although a much more concrete ideological split between the theoretical and pragmatic group increased as the years progressed. The actors functioned within the constraints of the governmental framework. During the
early months of 1948, the actors worked within very strict limits, subordinating their actions to the parameters of each specific role. However, during the critical months of the 1948 decision-making process and then subsequent processes (including the process involving Trieste), each actor redefined his role, expanding his power base, and created new parameters for future decision making. 4

As a leader, Tito was a curious enigma. He came from a decidedly humble background to become one of the most respected statesmen of the twentieth century. Yet he was not always the poised, self-controlled politician who calmly opposed Stalin. Often times he acted rashly, causing near disaster and chaos. 5 His actions followed no apparent consistency. Why did this man behave so inexplicably?

Tito succeeded in grasping and retaining political control because he was a gifted political performer. He lacked the education of an academic or military strategist. His knowledge was superficial, even his knowledge of Marxism. He studied the major works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, but was by no accounts a masterful theorist himself. His ability to quickly and somewhat accurately learn new languages aided him enormously, as he was able to directly communicate with the Russian, German, American, English, and French governments. He was also able to communicate with the various ethnic groups of Yugoslav directly, in their own language, although he often made serious grammatical mistakes (Djilas 1980, 10). However, each different ethnic group undoubtedly recognized his tremendous desire for acceptance and equality, manifested through his willingness to communicate in their language.

Tito’s experiences in World War I served as his basis for future military leadership during the resistance movement. He was not a profound military strategist, but his practical experiences gave him greater insight into the overall game of war. He accepted the horrors of war, the realities of army life, both as an officer and a "grunt," and the importance of the military organization. Because he knew the army from a common soldier’s view, he recognized the importance of an integrated officer corp. During the Fourth Offensive of 1943, he personally carried out the regrouping of troops that secured the rescue of the injured and a German defeat at Vilica Guvno (Djilas 1980, 12-13 and 24). His actions commanded the respect of his men. He never passively oversaw any conflict, but rather he actively pursued means to achieve his desired end. His many experiences developed a refined institutional response to crises which would serve him well, time and time again.

Although his experiences taught him poise, self-containment, and a controlled leadership style, he often became fretful, easily agitated and would suddenly display expressions of intimacy and warmth towards his closest and most trusted comrades, especially during extremely stressful conflicts (Djilas 1980, 31). A bit of personal history and informal psychoanalysis can help explain Tito’s curious character dichotomy.

During Tito’s time as a laborer, he often operated machines. While working as a mechanic, he sliced off the tip of his left hand’s index finger (Djilas 1980, 8). This lifelong mutilation served as a constant physical reminder of his humble origins and caused him to retain a strong mental imprint of his weaknesses. He aligned himself with the laboring class in much of his rhetoric, yet his latter lifestyle, which he constantly apologized for, was modeled after the flamboyant Latin American dictators (Djilas 1985, 61-62). 6 This inherent conflict between the shame he felt for his origins,
his pro-proletariate rhetoric, his lavish lifestyle, and obvious embarrassment for his material wealth, played heavily into Tito’s psyche, especially during intensely stressful situations.

Even with the brief account of Tito as a man, one cannot fully comprehend his power unless his position within the governmental framework is examined. As the Partisan leader, Tito demanded near dictatorship control (Beloff 1985, 61-62). Since the war time setting accorded him such control, his influence over the AVNOJ can be accepted as significant. The AVNOJ set the basis for the post-war government, and a natural manifestation of Tito’s war power was his control over the post-war government.

A transitional period between war and peace always allows greater latitude for a country’s dominant leadership. The Communist party, the only viable contenders for power, granted Tito almost unlimited latitude for his policies and politics. Kardelj and Djilas offered ideological opposition, which eventually culminated in a public split between Tito and Djilas, but did not offer public dissent during the early post-war years (Lustig 1989, 101). Tito was thus able to easily move into the primary decision-making role of a legitimate government, with both Soviet and the Western Allies’ approval. With Stalin’s seemingly staunch support, and the Allies’ temporary approval, Tito moved quickly to cement his dominance and build a strong power basis.

In 1947 the establishment of the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) in Belgrade further strengthened the image that Yugoslavia was the strongest Soviet ally in Eastern Europe. This image was far from the truth since Stalin’s primary motivation behind the creation was to increase the ability to manipulate the political, military, and economic sectors of Eastern Europe to benefit the Soviet Union (Banac 1988, 26-7). Stalin’s disapproval for greater Yugoslav independence created hidden resentment between the two countries, causing fledgling tensions which erupted in 1948. When the conflict came to the fore, Tito was in such a preeminent position that he was able to challenge Stalin directly and commandingly.

**Domestic Influences**

Yugoslavia was officially a closed Communist state governed by the Socialist Federal Republic. As the party and government commander, Tito’s power and influence were not questioned. Even to this day, few contest Tito’s power derived from his positions. But I question whether Tito truly held absolute power over his country’s actions. His two right-hand men, Kardelj and Djilas, played important roles throughout the Communist party’s history. They were present at the party’s inception, they actively resisted the Nazis, and they joined together to fight Stalin. In fact, both were present when all important decisions were made, and played important roles during the decision making processes. Kardelj was a very intelligent, well-educated man. Djilas proved to be an eloquent author of prose, poetry and political speeches. Kardelj powered the Politburo as the second-in-command. Djilas acted as Tito’s official speech writer for many years. I believe that these two men worked quietly behind the scenes to control all governmental decisions, using Tito as a front so that the international system would credit Tito and his government with international legitimacy. This legitimacy translated into national power which Djilas and Kardelj then used to further their own specific agendas. Tito merely played the part of a charismatic statesman to woo the West and repudiate the East.
Milovan Djilas

Milovan Djilas was born in 1911 into a Montenegrin clan. Djilas explained his class origins as growing up in "an environment of peasant civil servants, more peasant than anything else, like so many Montenegrin intellectuals of my generation" (Lustig 1989, 75). His father’s generation encountered a difficult question, whether Montenegro would unite with Greater Serbia or remain independent, whereas Djilas’ generation had to decide whether to side with the Nazis, the Fascists, the Communists, or the West (Lustig 1989, 76).

At the age of seven, Djilas decided he was a Communist. While attending the University in Belgrade, he became actively involved in the student Communist movement. He was arrested and imprisoned after leading a protest over student elections (Lustig 1989, 87). His activities attracted the attention of Party leaders, including Tito, and after his imprisonment, he was contacted and persuaded to join the great Yugoslav brotherhood. During the war, he continued working within the party, remaining a staunch supporter of Stalinist principles and ideologies. However, after the completion of the war, his way of thinking changed. Djilas envisioned a different type of world Communist order than did Stalin. He wanted to pursue a more democratic, socialistic ideology rather than accept Stalin’s doctrines (Clissold 1983, 209). This was especially true once Stalin began concentrating completely on growth and development within the USSR. Djilas realized that should Yugoslavia follow Stalin’s plan, eventually the country would be little more than a European colony for mother Russia (Pavlitch 1971, 194). This idea was so unacceptable to Djilas that he convinced Tito to reject Stalin’s policies and accept Western aid offers.

As an educated ideologue and theorist, Djilas better understood the ramifications of a political separation with Stalin. Tito viewed the proposed split as completely political in nature, having only ramifications for Yugoslav economic, military, and agriculture systems. Djilas realized that the separation signified an ideological split that would result in a Western versus Eastern Communist ideology battle. Nevertheless, Djilas was willing to assume this new battle because he refused to accept Stalin’s response to Yugoslav national problems (Lustig 1989, 99-101).

As Tito’s official speech writer, Djilas held tremendous power. So long as the overall content of a particular speech was acceptable, details were not that important to a very busy, non-ideologically driven man. Whereas for Djilas, an intellectual and political theorist, ideological details were everything (Sulzberger 1989, 80-81). The Party Central Committee ultimately expelled Djilas from both the party and the government in 1958 because he advocated a dissolution of the party (Carter 1990, 44). Until that point, his ideology crept into Tito’s official statements. While Stalin was pursuing policies according to strict Communist policies, Tito began speaking about a new brand of Communism. This new movement was more of a socialistic and democratic governmental attempt to achieve Communism. Djilas personally promoted three issues:

1. Revolution in Yugoslavia had to be defended by more democracy.

2. Stalinist principles and policies were incorrect.

3. Dogmatism and opportunism were dangerous. (Lustig 1989, 101)

The government officially banned him for
promoting these three issues, but oddly enough, they bear a striking resemblance to Tito’s policies and official statements made during 1948.8

Edvard Kardelj

Edvard Kardelj remained a staunch supporter of Tito until his death. Because he worked primarily behind the scenes supporting Tito, very little is actually documented about his influence and power. The information known and accepted as fact includes the following:

1. Kardelj wielded great power within the party and the government since he remained the highest ranking official, second only to Tito, for several decades (Clissold 1983, 312-313).

2. Kardelj came from a humble background and relative obscurity as a school teacher to great political prominence during the war. He understood well the plight of the common man and sympathized strongly with the laborers and other blue-collar workers (Rusinow 1977, 8).

3. Kardelj was Tito’s intellectual superior, he was well versed in the Communist doctrine, and he supported the party emphatically throughout his life (Clissold 1983, 32-33).

4. Kardelj was Djilas’ equal, both intellectually, economically, and socially, and the two shared a close working relationship during their time together in the Party (Djilas 1985, 162, 170).

As the second highest ranking official in the Party, Kardelj undoubtedly advised and guided Tito while serving in a position similar to that of a National Security Advisor. Since Kardelj was better versed in political ideologies, it is easy to speculate that he, as did Djilas, better understood the ideological significance of the government’s actions (Clissold 1983, 32). After the government decided to terminate relations with the USSR, Kardelj fashioned international and domestic policies. With this in mind, it must be accepted that Kardelj had to begin preliminary work with the Western powers to secure support and aid for his country. These negotiations must have begun several months prior to the actual separation. Once Kardelj invested so much time and interest into a possible future alliance with the West, he probably felt extremely committed to secure a Yugoslavian and Western alliance. Since he held great influence over Tito9, he undoubtedly presented several national options, focusing on and strongly emphasizing the benefits of an alliance with the West.

Djilas also favored this option because of the national benefits he believed would come with the alliance. It is not unreasonable to believe that the two men coordinated their efforts to persuade Tito to accept the suggested alliance. Perhaps part of their persuasion involved presenting biased information, giving the West a new validity, conceiving a new brand of ideology which appealed to Tito, or even making decisions within their jurisdiction which forced Tito into a position where he could not reconcile his government with the USSR.10 At this point in time, only speculative answers can be given, but it must be accepted that the two men greatly influenced the nation’s behavior.

As the two men were far more involved with ordinary, day-to-day national problems, they understood the importance of Western aid much more than did Tito. Kardelj helped to quickly implement land collectivization programs in 1947, so he must have been very concerned with the
agriculture system. This system stood to receive invaluable technology and aid once an alliance with the West commenced. Djilas concerned himself with the political ideology of the country more than anything else, and this too would gain from a Western alliance. Since the West pursued policies of democracy and socialism, the leaders would more willingly accept Djilas’s ideology, thus crediting him greater national legitimacy and power through acceptance of Yugoslav international policies.

Other Domestic Forces

Although the major individual governmental actors wielded the greatest amount and influence, other domestic forces helped shape the international policies. It is well documented that a country suffering economic hardships will reject moderate politics in favor of wild solutions offered by extreme political groups (Carter 1990, 21). The government was pressured by anyone involved, directly or indirectly, with the economic system. Additionally, the ethnic disunity throughout the country forced the government to actively pursue unifying policies so the country would not disintegrate. The government understood that the economy must stabilize so the entire country would accept a specific ideology. When Tito’s party first embraced Communism, they believed the ideology would unify the country into an international brotherhood, transcending all ethnic conflicts (Djilas 1985, 32). But realities set in after the war, and the government had to control inflation, unemployment and food shortages. Very quickly, the advantages of Western aid and the mandated free market system became attractive. Consequently, the government replaced ideology with economics to achieve national unification.

Systemic Influences

During 1948, the international system was a fluid, multi-polar system, although the United States and the USSR had begun moving into their superpower, polarized positions. Since there were still many countries sharing tremendous power and influence, a smaller, dependent and relatively powerless country would not be secure in that type of system. This insecurity forced the Yugoslavian government into a precarious position once the events of 1948 snowballed.

As a smaller, relatively unimportant country with a history of domination (eg. Austro-Hungarian empire), the many Yugoslav ethnic groups were not unified and did not share particularly strong ties with other countries, with the notable exception of the pan-Slavic sentiments shared with USSR slavs. The country was not geo-strategically important since it shared the Adriatic Sea with Italy. During World War II, the Allies demonstrated their preference when the Fascists in Italy took precedence over German-occupied Yugoslavia. Naturally, the West would use Italian ports rather than Yugoslav ports. The rest of the country shared borders with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria. By 1948, the first four countries were firmly allied with Stalin’s Communist party while Austria, an Allied-controlled country, maintained little contact with Yugoslavia (Beloff 1985, 148).

Before World War II, most of the country was neither modernized nor industrialized. After the war, the few industrialized sectors were completely destroyed. The agriculture system could not support all of the country, so the government relied heavily on economic and agriculture aid. Yugoslavia had a
substantial natural resource base, but it was not being maximized (Wilson 1979, 44-45).

National interests forced the government to find answers within the international system. The Yugoslavian government had to secure close ties with powers that could support the country with substantial amounts of aid. Also, once Stalin repudiated Yugoslavia's importance to the Communist order, the government was forced to reassess its standing among its Communist allies.

Yugoslavia's actions during 1948-49 can be partly explained by the systemic influences on the nation. Maurice A. East, a systemic expert, theorized that nations' actions directly result from systemic pressures exerted through the international community (East, 143). His theories help explain the inconceivable: why Stalin's disciples would abandon the Communistic world order and side with the "evil," capitalistic West.

Complexity

The complexity of the system directly affects a nation's actions. Two defining complexity characteristics to consider are:

1. The number and type of actors.
2. The number and type of issues.

In 1948, during the months leading to Tito's split with Stalin, the huge number of players flooded the international system. Since the system was still a fluid multipolar system, many more actors held overinflated amounts of power relative to their capabilities.15 Since there were so many international actors, the Yugoslavian government had to be much more concerned with its every action and the subsequent consequences. Also, the type of relationship between it and the various other national governments had to be considered. To facilitate my analysis, I classified these relationships into three categories. The following is a list of the important countries in their respective categories.

1. Direct: USSR, Eastern European Communist Governments
2. Indirect: US, England, Italy, France
3. Off-shoot: Western European Countries, Mediterranean countries.

Direct Relationships

During the months immediately preceding the split, Tito and his high ranking officials were directly involved in all intra-Comintern negotiations (Djilas 1985, 199-204). This relationship dominated the government's foreign policy agenda since once they defined this relationship, their domestic agenda would be prioritized. That is, once they determined that Yugoslavia would not participate in Stalin's world Communist movement, the government abandoned its former strict Stalinist policies to pursue a moderate, Yugoslavian brand of Communism.16 The direct relationship with other Eastern European counties, including Hungary and Romania, also changed. Instead of maintaining these countries as partners for economic ventures and political unity, Yugoslavia turned its attention to Western European Communist movements, especially in Greece (Pavlowitch 1971, 205).

Indirect Relationships

The Yugoslavian government communicated with the West during the critical months, but this relationship was not a primary concern to Tito until right before
The split. Nevertheless, these relationships were considered important because of possible ramifications for future alliances and aid.

The West primarily encouraged Tito's split by overlooking certain governmental practices it felt were unacceptable. Western aid was promised and even began arriving en masse prior to the split (Carter 1990, 27). The Allies hoped that if they offered aid and support to Tito, Yugoslavia would defect from Stalin's stronghold. By indirectly influencing Yugoslavia through promises of future aid and alliances, the West gave Tito the confidence he needed to terminate relations with Stalin.

Off-shoot Relationships

Yugoslavia's indirect relationship with the major Western powers dramatically affected its off-shoot relationships once negotiations for Western support began. While communicating with the major Western powers, Yugoslavia encountered opposition over its blatant attempts to foster and cultivate Western communist movements. The Allies made it clear that if Yugoslavia wanted aid, all open challenges to Western-styled governments must stop. Yugoslavia obliged, toning down their insurgent activities during the next few months (Wilson 1979, 63). Once allied with the West, Tito's aspirations for a Western Communist brotherhood vanished along with the open and strong support needed by the insurgent movements for survival. This effectively paralyzed the movements, abruptly halting the Western Communist march.

Number and Type of Issues

The dominant issue of the day was the Communist versus the Western style of government. Many other topics were discussed and negotiated, but ultimately every issue traced its resolution back to that one conflict. In this sense, the international system was less complex, since ideology replaced such things as nationalism, ethnicity, and neo-colonialism in importance. During 1948, several topics discussed, including national rebuilding plans, economic plans and future national security, fell into this quandary. Two of these issues had major ramifications on Yugoslavia's course of action. The question of occupational forces in Trieste and the Marshall Plan forced the government to chose between the West or the USSR. Tito realized that by cooperating with the West over the Trieste question, a more favorable aid package could be secured from the Marshall Plan. This decision required a rejection of the Communist order in favor of the Western capitalists. Since Tito realized that his decision would ultimately answer the question of where his true allegiance lay, his decision making-process was simplified. He could not view each decision as a single, independent decision with an endless possible number of consequences. Rather, he understood each decision to be an action which would logically lead to the next decision. Ultimately, his decisions would culminate in a final pledge of allegiance to either the Western or Stalinist ideology.

Structure of Interaction

The structure of conflict during this critical time was strictly bi-polar. The USSR and Yugoslavia remained stringent centers around which the conflict revolved. This structure simplified the system tremendously since the other international actors were able to quickly determine their position within the conflict. The Eastern European countries aligned themselves with the USSR while the West emphatically
supported Yugoslavia. Since these other players did not wander from side to side, the national leaders were able to recognize and name their primary enemy, without diverting important resources to fight other insignificant players.  

Distribution of Resources

This aspect of the international system was very important in influencing Yugoslavia's actions. The East did not have an efficient, well-run resource distribution system. Even though the USSR had supported Yugoslavia with economic, military, and material aid, by 1948 the sources dried up. Since the governments had been receiving less from the Soviets, the leaders had begun national programs for self-sufficiency (Beloff 1985, 147). A collectivization land program began in 1947 to ease food shortages. Industrialization and modernization continued through private and Western foreign direct investment (Beloff 1985, 149). Basically, the leaders realized that if they were to achieve equal standing among world leaders, they needed new economic partners. For this reason, the Western capitalists became attractive allies. Evidence of the West's efficient resource distribution was abundant throughout Western occupied territory. Food shortages were easing back into relative abundance. New technology was imported from the United States, furthering rapid modernization. Shattered economies were slowly being pieced together with the Marshall Plan. When confronted with the option of a future working relationship with either the West or the East, it is very easy to understand Tito's sudden acceptance of the capitalist "pigs."

Degree of Organization

The international system was not highly organized since it was not yet a strict, bi-polar type. Rather, it was characterized by disunity and confusion. Each national actor was attempting to find their place within the new system. This confusion created a looser, less threatening environment for change since every country expected change. Although Yugoslavia's split with Stalin shocked the international system, many leaders expected dramatic changes during the transition from the post-World War II era into the new world order. It is understood that countries act in their best national interest, and for many, Yugoslavia's defection into the Western camp was little more than that. The obvious gains Yugoslavia stood to reap caused many to credit the switch to reasons for national security as opposed to ideological reasons. The 1948 system willingly accepted this rationale since it was not very rigid. Had this same defection occurred a mere five years later, it is conceivable that a crackdown, similar to the response to the 1958 Hungarian rebellion, would have happened.

Integrative Attempts

Of the two presented decisions, the 1948 split between Yugoslavia and the USSR is the dominant action while the 1949 Trieste problem followed as a logical continuation. Since no action is truly isolated from the events leading up to and following it, the official separation must be considered as the central action, with the Trieste conflict as an off-shoot of the original problem.
Explanations for the conflicts have been offered at four different levels: historical, international, domestic and systemic. Each explanation provides excellent rationale for the decision, albeit purely one-dimensional. Since all four explanations are inseparably intertwined, the previously offered analysis does not sufficiently justify the conflicts’ roots. Therefore, an integrative explanation must be presented.

Presented Hypotheses

Based on the presented analysis and information, I have devised three hypotheses which explain a mid-sized country’s actions. So long as the country is a player in the international system, the following will apply.

1. If the international system is rigid, the country will form strong alliances with other nations. The country will attempt to find, and then maintain, a strong alliance with one of the dominant international system’s players. Once it cements a strong alliance, the state’s government will become less rigid since the international security level is high. This internal relaxation will allow more movement within the government by different players. The individual will be emphasized over the role. Since this type of internal environment is conducive to change, roles will be re-defined according to the abilities and energies of the individual currently occupying that specific role. Additionally, a domestic multi-political party system will develop, although factions and extremists will not flourish. The international security affords greater national security, so the government will not feel threatened by the presence of several strong political parties.

2. Should the international system be flexible, the nation’s government will pursue many alliances and friendships, but not for long term purposes. The government will approach the international system with a more pragmatic agenda. That is, the government will pursue policies that will best serve national interests at that specific time. The domestic system will become more stringent since the international system will not assure long term security. The government will have to compensate for that security by tightening domestic policies and restricting behavior that could hurt the nation. This will result in loss of diverse players moving throughout the government. The role will replace the individual in importance, although the individual will still influence the role. Because the government will be less secure, the top few leaders will actively work to cement their control, thereby shutting out weaker domestic opposition. The domestic scene will still be relatively free for those players already within it, but those on the government’s periphery will be effectively shut out.

3. If the international system is chaotic, the nation will pursue isolationist policies to withdraw from the system. The domestic leadership will become authoritarian so that the country can be stabilized internally, thereby lessening the effects of a chaotic international system. There will be little movement within the government since those already within the structure will not voluntarily relinquish power. Control of the country will be held by only a few political elitists. The role will replace the individual completely because the individual will fear expulsion from the government, and therefore will not try to increase their power base or the parameters of their role.

Practical Explanation

The three presented hypotheses explain Yugoslavia’s behavior at three
different times.

1. After 1948, the international system was a rigid bi-polar system.20

   a. The rigidity permitted critics and dissenting governmental players to continue playing an active role in the government since the government did not fear national insecurity. The greatest example of this is the work of Djilas. From 1948-1953, he continually wrote critical essays, fictionalized fact, and opinions which charged the Party with abandoning the true socialist ideals. The Party did not respond officially until 1954 when he was put on trial. Tito and Kardelj launched an intensive attack, arguing that Djilas’ primary sin was his call for the liquidation of the Communist League (Lustig 1989, 108). Djilas emphasized throughout his writings the necessity of immediately extending democracy so that socialism could be achieved. Tito and Kardelj emphatically rejected that idea because, as they understood the situation, the government depended on coercion to maintain its rule and carry out its social and political program. Kardelj went so far as to announce "We are forced to retain even in economic relations, let along in political life, certain elements of coercion in order to get away from the old and backward ways as soon as possible." Tito declared that to extend democracy to the bourgeoisie would lead "to anarchy, to a terrible uncertainty... If we permitted this, in a year's time our Socialist reality would not exist: it would not exist, I tell you, without a bloody battle" (Lustig 1989, 108).

   These are harsh accusations, yet Djilas’ actions went unchecked for five years. The reason for the government's quick condemnation was the change within the international system. 1954 marked the year that the system moved from a rigid to a loose structure. Consequently, the head governmental leaders forced Djilas from their ranks only after the international system had moved from the strict, rigid bi-polar system into a loose, changing bi-polar system. Until the international system changed, creating greater insecurity for a nation in the international arena, critics and dissenters like Djilas worked with relatively few constraints. However, once the system changed, so did the internal politics of the nation.

   b. Greater freedom for change, including that of the specific governmental roles was permitted. Since the government was in a transition mode during this time, political actors were able to incorporate new power and influence into their roles. Especially since the government had just been established, the nation did not possess democratic traditions, and neither superpower truly dominated the country, the political actors were able to shape their role with very little effort.

   c. A strong, multi-party political system flourished, although it existed within the Communist Party. Originally, this system was led by two dominant groups, the theoretical and pragmatists. Within the two groups were several fractionalized offshoots, as well as multiple ethnically-powered political groups. This diversity continued until the government grew insecure in the international system and believed that, to remain powerful, it had to consolidate its power within current leaders.

2. The international system from 1946 to 1948 can be characterized as a loose multi-polar system since power was shared by many nations, without domination by a select one or two countries.

   a. The national government followed stringent domestic policies due to the lack of international security. During these two years, the Communist party was unified with all high-level officials pursuing the same national agenda. Critics and dissenters outside of the "legitimate" government were
silenced, while those within the government were either muffled or forgot their criticism (Pavlowitch 1971, 201).

b. The role replaced the individual in importance, although the individual still influenced the power associated with the role. Tito’s role as party and governmental president had set parameters and limitations which he could not challenge. This is because his role had direct contact with the international system and he could not take the chance of upsetting the system by trying to expand his power. Once the international system became more rigid, he had firm, committed international allies so he could re-define his role. However, until this happened, he had to work within the constraints of his role.

c. The few high-level governmental officials cemented their control. As a result of the international insecurity, high-ranking officials moved to close their ranks to condense all power into their hands. As the positioned leaders, they had a vested interest in preserving their power and control so that the nation would be unified and secure enough to withstand the international insecurity. This would happen only through a firm maintenance of control over the internal scene by the government (Clissold 1983, 201-202).

3. From 1941 to 1945 the international system was chaotic since the World War did not allow any type of security and the states maintained purely necessitated alliances.21

a. The Yugoslav government was authoritarian during this time since it had to unify the country to fight the Germans. Necessity demanded that any means to expel the enemy be employed, so human rights and democratic ideals were not priority items for the government.

b. Within the resistance movement itself, which recognized itself as the only true government, role completely replaced the individual in importance. This was because the individual not only feared international instability, but also national instability so all actions had to be within the parameters of their role so that the government would not suspiciously watch their every action.

c. Once the resistance leaders seized power, they were reluctant to share power with other actors that were not deemed essential within the governmental framework. Consequently, few others were brought into the elite leadership; the small number of leaders already in power maintained complete control.

Conclusion

Within the field of foreign policy analysis, there exists a tremendous gulf between theory and country expertise. While many theorists have attempted to bridge this gulf, few have been successful. It is imperative that more work be done to integrate the two sectors of the field because one does not offer a thorough and viable explanation without the other. Although the presented analysis and theory is little more than an inexperienced attempt to combine the two sectors, within the presented information is a cause, an effect and a link between the two. This is the type of work which needs to be pursued so that the inexplicable may become comprehensible.
WORKS CITED


NOTES

1. Although he fought against Russia, Tito willingly gave his allegiance to the Russian Communist movement. He felt no conflict because Tsar Alexander II’s capitalistic government led the country into World War II. So, in effect, Tito fought against an imperialistic, pro-Western government and not against his brother Communists.
2. The new government based its power on four sources of legitimacy, which are the following:

1. Power per se.
2. International recognition and legal continuity with the old Yugoslavia.
3. The Partisan war as the national myth of political founding.
4. Moscow’s recognition as the legitimate proletariat protector (Rusinow 1977, 13).

The third source was unique because it was based on the government’s own power, and not on the USSR’s power. Ultimately, this power source gave the national government enough confidence to place its goals and objectives for the state ahead of the world-wide Communist goals advocated by Stalin.

3. The results of the election showed that 90% of the 74 million Yugoslav voters supported the single list presented by the People’s Front. Although there were no presented opposing candidates, the voters could vote against the candidate (Rusinow 1977, 12-13).

4. In his book, Essence of Decision, Graham Allison used his organizational process model to explain how individual actors will create power. The actors will use any means available to expand their power base, cement their control, and further their role’s parameters.

5. During Operation Weiss, and especially in the battle on the Neretva, in early 1943, Tito rashly changed orders and battle plans. His premature decision to destroy a bridge across the Neretva substantially impeded and complicated his troops withdrawal, endangering their survival (Djilas 1980, 12).

6. Djilas, and other officials, often criticized this excessiveness.

7. Djilas’ godfather, Mihailo Vickovic, impressed him by the fact that "he was a Communist because he loved justice, like Christ", something which greatly appealed to his gentle nature (Lustig 1989, 84).

8. Once Tito declared the Soviet-Yugoslavian separation, he began speaking of a new road to socialism. He employed democratic rhetoric, praising some Western ideals, while denouncing Stalinist Communism.

9. This relationship parallels that shared by Nixon and Kissinger throughout the Nixon administrations. At times it was difficult for policy experts to determine which man was actually leading the country because of Kissinger’s active and dominating presence within national and international policy making.

10. Part of Graham Allison’s organizational process model explains how individual actors, below the highest officials, will manipulate, change or even fabricate information. This effectively makes subordinate actors the true policy makers since their agenda is followed because of presented information.

11. Many would disagree with this statement, but consider the United States’ President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his programs created by the New Deal. For the first time, Americans paid an income tax and collected welfare benefits. Both economic programs must
be accepted as socialistic in nature.

12. The classic example of this is Germany and the Weimar Republic. While Tito's government was not necessarily moderate (as defined from a United States' perspective), the actual national and international policies pursued by the government were indeed moderate. Even the "shocking" land collectivization programs were not that different from the United States' distribution of Japanese land during MacArthur's reign.

13. The unification of Yugoslavia was a tremendous task for any government. Especially when considering the current Yugoslav situation, it is amazing that any government managed to unify, and preserve this unity, for more than thirty five years.

14. The pan-Slavic sentiments which helped bring Russia into World War I remained through this point. Ethnicity transcended geographical lines once calls for Slavic brotherhood and unity began.

15. Consider the power granted to France compared to her actual capabilities. No reasonable or logical explanation exists for de Gaulle's equal standing among Roosevelt, Truman, Stalin, and Churchill. Since the victorious powers, primarily the United States and Great Britain, voluntarily credited De Gaulle (and others) with power because of anti-fascist programs during the war, the international power scene was far from reflecting reality. Partial reality, relative to actual power capabilities, set in only with the commencement of the bi-polar structure.

16. This new form of communism became a type of socialism intertwined with democracy. Many other Western European countries grasped some of the Yugoslav-promoted government ideals and implemented them into their own government. For example, France's quick entry into socialistic practices can be traced to Yugoslav influences.

17. B. Sundelius, a country expert theorist, maintains that a nation's memory, i.e. an inherent memory mechanism which links all national actions together, must be considered when explaining any type of national action.

18. V. Hudson, et al. theorize that determining a government's primary internal opposition must occur so that the international system may more clearly understand the conflict. Since the 1948 conflict was initially viewed as a conflict within the Soviet system, this theory explains why other nations had to determine whether Tito's insurgent movement was really valid.

19. Hans Morgenthau, as a representative of realism, would offer this explanation of the conflict.

20. The two superpowers had cemented their alliances by this time and their respective power and influence. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commenced in 1948-49, while the Warsaw Pact was born in 1955. The Marshall Plan had incorporated most of Western Europe, excluding Eastern Europe at Stalin's insistence. After the United States "lost" China in 1950, ideology replaced all other issues in importance. Once this happened, every national government had to pledge complete allegiance to either the United States or
the USSR. There was no way to remain in both camps.

21. For example, the alliance between Stalin and Hitler was not made for any reason other than short-term national interest. The same can be said for the relationship between the Allies and Stalin. Obviously, the wartime system did not contain inherent stability and long-term allies.