

Mercenaries of a Phantom War The “Hostile Emigration” in Yugoslavia’s Globalized Ideology of Insecurity

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“We are being attacked.
We have of late felt unbelievable pressure, unbelievable pressure.”
Josip Broz “Tito” in a speech aired on May 1, 1971¹

Abstract: Yugoslav state security services became infamous for organizing dozens of targeted killings against hostile emigrants abroad. What can be regarded as an interlinked chain of violence and counter-violence has more to it. First, there is the experience of external threats (not only) common to Communist leaders. But in the Yugoslav case, the global non-aligned position of the country strengthened the insecurity felt by the leadership. This was caused by a close identification with Third World countries affected by Cold War interventions. Officials and politicians concerned with security matters interpreted the continuing aggression of the “hostile emigration” as part and proof of a subliminal “Special War” against the socialist self-administration system. As a response, the state security stepped up the lethal operations in the host countries of the “hostile emigration”. The study starts with the development of anti-Communist and pro-Soviet exile activism in the post-war period. It traces the reinforcement of the danger posed by hostile émigrés back to the early 1960s, when Yugoslavia became a prominent member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Also, it analyses the roots of the “Special War” and shows how this idea of external intervention was transferred to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The consequences of the adaptation to the Yugoslav conditions are addressed as well as the outcome for the treatment of the “hostile emigration.” A critical assessment of émigré terrorism is followed by the presentation of exemplified cases. This essay seeks for a better comprehension of the mental disposition behind the drastic measures applied by Yugoslav secret services. Therefore, it is focused on the importance of the antagonistic emigration for the concept of the “Special War.”

Keywords: Special War, Specijalni rat, UDBA, SDB, targeted killings, Croatian exiles, Serbian exiles, Kosovo-Albanian exiles, terrorism, history of emotions, state security

¹ Quoted after “Analysis of Yugoslav Party Presidium Meeting and Tito’s Speech,” Radio Free Europe (Slobodan Stanković), May 3, 1971, OSA 300-8-3-10634. Open Society Archive [OSA], Budapest.

Introduction

Criticism on Eurocentric approaches prepared the ground for scientific works on South-East Europe with a wider analytical frame in global dimensions.² For the SFRY, which was ideologically and politically entangled with the Third World, an access through the global perspective promises valuable new insights. Scholarly attention for “terrorism” outweighs other aspects of the very heterogeneous political emigration from Yugoslavia.³ However, especially in the case of the “hostile emigration” vis-à-vis the security system, the global approach has been neglected so far.⁴ My contribution goes beyond Yugoslavia’s “security dilemma,” i.e. the strategic position between the two Cold War blocs,⁵ by placing the ideological influence from non-aligned countries at the centre of the security policy. While the “hostile emigration”, after the early 1970s, encountered the state security, in the background it also had an abstract encounter with a so-called “Special War,” a category of hostilities in view of U.S.-American interventions in formerly colonized countries. In the SFRY, however, which was not directly affected by superpower aggression so typical for the Third World, the concept of a “Special War” developed into a perpetuated scenario of threat. Without the recurrent appearances of the “hostile emigration” it would have been unlikely for this scenario to reach such wide repercussions.

This contribution, based on sources from nine public archives including documents of the Yugoslav state security service (Služba državne bezbednosti, SDB), highlights the imagined role of the “hostile emigration” in the “Special War.” It is dedicated to the memory of Natalija Bašić, a pioneer in this field of research.⁶

From West to the East and Back: Enemies in Emigration

It was a hard-won victory for the Yugoslav Partisans in May 1945. The hardcore of the Communists now at the top of the country had gone through a tough school as un-

² Andrew Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Marie-Janine Calic, *Südosteuropa. Weltgeschichte einer Region* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016).

³ Valentina Perušina, “Hrvatska politička emigracija – sigurnosna prijetnja socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji,” *Polemos* 22, no. 1–2 (2019): 13–37. Cf. Matthias Thaden, *Migration und Innere Sicherheit. Kroatische Exilgruppen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945–1980* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

⁴ Cf. Srđan Cvetković, “Terorizam i jugoslovenska politička emigracija,” *Istorija 20. veka* 32, no. 2 (2014): 171–97.

⁵ Marko Milivojević, John B. Allcock, and Pierre Maurer (eds.), *Yugoslavia’s Security Dilemmas – Armed Forces, National Defence and Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

⁶ Natalija Bašić, “Jeder Tag war „Allgemeine Volksverteidigung“ (ONO). Zur militaristischen Kultur und Gewalterziehung im sozialistischen Jugoslawien (SFRJ) 1945–1990,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 4, (2002): 69–90, footnote 61.

derground activists in royal Yugoslavia, survivors of the Stalinist party purges, in many cases as volunteers on the republican side in the Spanish Civil War and – last but not least – as anti-Fascist fighters during the Second World War. Resistance was turned into revolution and a historic chance for implementing a socialist system opened up. On the other side, the unexpected rise to power of the Communists provoked widespread disagreement. An estimated 180,000 people left Yugoslavia at the end of the war or stayed abroad as Displaced Persons.⁷ Josip Broz "Tito," president of the People's Front, sounded way too optimistic when, in 1945, he spoke of "only a handful of refugees [and] reactionaries abroad,"⁸ A report of the State Security Administration (Uprava državne bezbednosti, UDB, colloquially called "UDBA", after 1966 officially SDB) of early 1947, however, pictured a very serious situation: Thousands of former prisoners of war from royalist Yugoslavia, who refused to be repatriated or demobilized, and Chetnik forces at the strength of whole regiments, maintaining their wartime structures of command, remained in Austrian, Italian and German refugee camps. Especially the information about monarchist military personnel as auxiliary police in Western occupation zones of Germany sounded the alarm in Belgrade.⁹ According to the Yugoslav press, the Western Allies "enabled and assisted the formation of militant and openly Fascist organizations" in territories under their control.¹⁰ The failure of the Western Powers in meeting the demands of the Yugoslav government to hand over hundreds of individuals wanted for war crimes underpinned the growing distrust towards the former allies.¹¹

The anti-Communist forces outside the country appeared as a grave problem when, for example, domestic defenders of the old order reinforced rumours that the exiled leader of the popular Peasant Party in Croatia, Vladko Maček, would return to power with British support and assisted by the army of Władysław Anders in nearby Italy.¹² Obviously the young Partisan government was not yet fully consolidated. One challenge

⁷ Leszek Kosinski, "International Migration of Yugoslavs During and Immediately after World War II," *East European Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1982): 183–98, 194.

⁸ Quoted in *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici SFRJ 1945*, edited by Savezni sekretarijat za inostrane poslove (Belgrade: Jugoslovenski Pregled, 1988), 226 f.

⁹ *Srpska politička emigracija u analima jugoslovenske diplomatije (1945–1971). Prilozi za diplomatiju i diplomatsku istoriju*, vol. 1, ed. Dragan Subotić (Belgrade: Inst. za Političke Studije, 200), 215–48.

¹⁰ Quoted in Branko Pavlica, "Migracije iz Jugoslavije u Nemačku. Migranti, emigranti, izbeglice, azilanti," *Međunarodni problemi* 57, no. 1–2 (2005): 121–58, 127. Cf. Marco Cuzzi, "The Refractory Community. Yugoslav Anti-communists in Post-war Italy," *Balkanica* 52 (2021): 159–78.

¹¹ Cf. Bernd Robionek, "'Bleiburg' and the British Treatment of Croatian Collaborators 1945–48," in *1945. Kraj ili novi početak?*, ed. Zoran Janjetović (Belgrade: INIS, 2016), 277–308.

¹² *Hrvatska u izvještajima partijskih komiteta 1945–1948*, eds. Marina Štambuk-Škalić and Marijan Jukić, *Fontes* 17 (2011): 13–132, 80. For the ruling Communists this was a reason to worry about 120,000 anti-Communist Polish soldiers in Italy (Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 30. 1. decembar 1945 – 18. avgust 1946 (Beograd: Izdavački centar Komunist, 1989), 67, 177).

consisted in hundreds of dispersed guerrilla groups, attacking state officials and looting collective farms.¹³ An effective linkup of the insurgents with opponents outside the country was considered a worst case. At the cost of more than 1,000 security operatives killed, the armed resistance was mostly defeated by 1948.¹⁴

But there was no pause for the state security organs. Yugoslavia's exclusion from the Moscow-obedient Cominform organization in June 1948 was followed by a small-scale war with the Socialist neighbouring countries and a hunt for Soviet sympathizers among the party members.¹⁵ A by-product of the conflict was some 5,000 "informbirovci" émigrés, i.e. comrades who escaped to the Soviet sphere or remained there.¹⁶ Many of them participated in the psychological warfare against their homeland. With the rapprochement between the East bloc and Yugoslavia after Stalin had died in March 1953, however, the anti-Tito activities of their host countries ceased. This was facilitated since these political refugees were under effective control of the authorities.¹⁷ Meanwhile, with an increase of illegal emigration to the West – unstoppable by reinforced border guards – another problem appeared in front of the Yugoslav leadership.¹⁸

What had turned out quite well in the East caused disappointment towards the Western countries, where adolescent migrants from Yugoslavia, who escaped by tens of thousands in the late 1950s and early 1960s, joined separatist organizations like the Croatian National Committee (Hrvatski narodni odbor, HNO) or the Ustasha-inclined United Croats (Ujedinjeni Hrvati), the anti-Communist Serbian National Defence (Srpska narodna odbrana, SNO) or the militant Serbian Youth Movement 'Homeland'.¹⁹ Their activities provoked a high frequency of Yugoslav government protests, expecting from

¹³ Aleksandar Jakir, "Anti-Communist Guerilla in Croatia 1945–1951," in *Protikomunistički odboj v srednej a vzhodnej Európe. Zbornik z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Bratislava 14. – 16. novembra 2011*, ed. Peter Jašek (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2012), 434–49.

¹⁴ Cf. Milan Milošević, "Organizacija bezbednosno-obaveštajnog sistema FNRJ (1946–1966)," *Bezbednost*, no. 3 (2007): 168–81.

¹⁵ Dmtar Tasić, "Kontraobaveštajna služba (KOS) i rezolucija IB. Prilog istraživanju istorije vojne službe bezbednosti," *Istorijski zapisi* 86, no. 1–2 (2013): 151–70.

¹⁶ Cf. László Ritter, "Der geheime Krieg zwischen dem Sowjetblock und Jugoslawien 1948 bis 1953," in *Die Alpen im Kalten Krieg. Historischer Raum, Strategie und Sicherheitspolitik*, eds. Dieter Krüger and Felix Schneider (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 277–311. At home, 30,000 members of the party and army staff were purged (among them 1,500 persons belonging to the security organs).

¹⁷ Vladimir Cvetković, "Obustavljanje antijugoslovenske propagande u susjednim "informbiroovskim" zemljama 1953–1954. godine," *Tokovi istorije*, no. 1 (2012): 135–49.

¹⁸ *Zapísnici Politbivoa Centralnoga Komiteta Komunističke Partije Hrvatske*, vol. 3, 1952–1954, ed. Branislava Vojnović (Zagreb: HDA, 2008), esp. 176. Cf. Tatjana Šarić, "Bijeg iz socijalističke Jugoslavije. Ilegalna emigracija iz Hrvatske od 1945. do početka šezdesetih godina 20. stoljeća," *Migracijske i etničke teme* 31, no. 2 (2015): 195–220.

¹⁹ For an overview see: Brigitte Le Normand, "Yugoslavia," in *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War. A Handbook*, ed. Anna Mazurkiewicz (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019), 368–95; and Mario Jareb, "Hrvatska politička emigracija od 1928. do 1990. Godine," in *Hrvatska politika u XX. stoljeću. Zbornik*

the host countries a definite suppression of the opponents abroad. From time to time the diplomatic pressure fell on fruitful grounds, but often it led to a clash of political cultures. For the Yugoslavs it was hard to accept that the liberal democracies tolerated political activities of immigrants even in contradiction to the international relations.²⁰ Reluctant reactions from the official representatives of major migration destinations like the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) fuelled suspicions among Yugoslav leaders who accused the West of supporting the exile organizations. According to Spehnyak and Cipek only a small part of the political emigration can be regarded as democratic opposition. Most of the emigrants kept on as “prisoners of the past” and were not able to overcome their greater nationalist aims.²¹

In the Communist way of thinking, the massive emigration was fostered by foreign secret services. It did not fit the self-image of a People’s Republic that thousands of young people, most of them belonging to the working class, left Yugoslavia on their own initiative. Only on very few occasions admitted the rulers of the one-party state that it was a mistake to deny the offspring of families with a pro-Fascist wartime background equal access to scholarships for higher education.²² And, first of all, the highly acclaimed self-management system was unable to offer sufficient job perspectives for the entire youth. In America, West Germany, Sweden or Australia the newcomers, who – for reasons of social company and employment opportunities – were seeking contacts to experienced immigrants, became an easy prey for the organizations of the older exiles.²³

Surrounded by Enemies

Pupils learned to list Yugoslavia’s neighbours with an inflected variation of the word “worries” (Bugarska, Rumunija, Italija, Grčka, Austrija, Mađarska, Albanija = “brigama”). “They say Yugoslavia is surrounded by worries, but Yugoslavia is surrounded by friends!” is what the kids made of it.²⁴ This mockery encapsulates the essence of the ex-Partisan

radova sa znanstvenog skupa održanog u paliči Matice hrvatske od 27. do 29. travnja 2004., ed. Ljubomir Andrić (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2006), 307–36.

²⁰ “Yugoslav Emigre Activities in Britain,” Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Bullard) to East European and Soviet Department (Sparrow), London, July 24, 1972, PRO FCO/28/2153.

²¹ Katarina Spehnyak and Tihomir Cipek, “Disidenti, opozicija i otpor – Hrvatska i Jugoslavija 1945.–1990.,” ČSP 39, no. 2 (2007): 255–97, 267.

²² “Zapisnik sa sastanka sa sekretarima Općinskih komiteta SKH-e, sa područja kotara Karlovac održanog 5. travnja 1963 god.,” HDA 1220/663.

²³ Vladimir Ivanović, “Ekstremna emigracija u SR Nemačkoj i Jugoslavija,” *Istorija 20. Veka*, no. 1 (2009): 139–47.

²⁴ “Kažu da je Jugoslavija okružena brigama / ali Jugoslavija je okruženima [sic...] prijateljima!” Quoted after Iris Adrić, “Brigama,” in *Leksikon YU mitologije* (Belgrade, Zagreb: Postscriptum & Rende, 2023), accessed

mindset. On the one hand, troublesome experiences with bordering countries had occurred frequently; but after the mid-1950s, Yugoslavia established regional partnerships in both ideological camps. Against this background, the paranoia became schizophrenic. Foreign rule as a historical theme – which could be dated back to the Middle Ages and had reached a climax in the Fascist invasion of 1941 – was engraved on the collective memory. After the Ustasha, returning from the Italian exile, had been installed at the top of the Croatian state in April 1941, the fear of a defeat by foreign powers – assisted by the hostile emigration – did not come out of the blue. Having this in mind, the appearance of violent acts by militant émigrés in the 1960s had a retraumatizing effect.²⁵

Around 1962/63, two trials in Ljubljana against twelve persons accused of involvement in firearms trafficking for the “Organisation of Slovenian Anti-Communists,” which had a stronghold in the FRG, did obviously not succeed in bringing the underground group down. After the arrest of three other members who had clandestinely entered Yugoslavia in the summer of 1963, two more were apprehended in 1964 by the West German police on charges of conspiracy and illegal possession of weapons.²⁶ Moreover, separatist organizations in the spirit of the Ustasha tended to “liberate” Croatia (enlarged by Bosnia-Herzegovina) from the “Serbian yoke.” Apart from interethnic conflicts and harassments against loyal Yugoslavs, some emigrants carried the violence to their homeland.²⁷

The Yugoslav side tended to deescalate by announcing an amnesty for oppositional émigrés who had not committed grave offences and were willing to return on goodwill. Not only was this offer widely rejected, clandestine cells of adversaries abroad appeared like a boomerang. In the summer of 1963 nine members of the Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo, HRB) sneaked into Croatia for

April 21, 2023, <http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/brigama/>.

²⁵ While discussing the activities of extremist émigrés, Maksimilijan Baće, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and the anti-Fascist struggle from 1941 to 1945, stated towards his comrades of the inner party circle that “history appears in front of us.” (“Autorizovane stenografske beleške sa 77. Proširene sednice Izvršnog biroa Predsedništva Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, održane 23. III 1971 god.,” PSKJ (Executive bureau), Belgrade, March 29, 1971, AJ 507 IV/139, 1–5).

²⁶ British Embassy (Morgan) to Foreign Office, Belgrade, February 13, 1963, PRO FO371/169665; “Activities of Yugoslav Émigrés,” Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, [Cologne], summer 1964, PRO FO371/177807.

²⁷ “Ausschreitungen kroatischer Emigranten im Sammellager Zirndorf b. Nürnberg am 6./7.1. 1962 – Tätigkeit der kroatischen HOP in der BRD,” Forschungsdienst Osteuropa (Mende) to AA (Starke), Düsseldorf, January 18, 1962, PA AA B42/94. Cf. Christopher Molnar, “Croatian Émigrés, Political Violence, and Coming to Terms with the Past in 1960s West Germany,” in *German-Balkan Entangled Histories in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Mirna Zakić and Christopher A. Molnar (Pittsburgh: Univ. Press, 2020), 216–30. The official representations in Australia were almost literally besieged by offensive protesters (“Aide-Mémoire, Annex No. 4,” Yugoslav Embassy, Canberra, July 1972, PRO FCO28/2158).

sabotage strikes. All of them were captured in the early stage of their mission, which had been initiated in Australia. A delicate detail turning up in the subsequent trial was a coincidental meeting of an Ustasha training camp with an army squadron near Wodonga in early 1963, posing together for photos. Although the Australian government did its utmost to avoid the impression that its military had been involved in neo-Ustasha activities,²⁸ the incident reinforced the suspicions of the Communist leadership.

The Croatian minister for internal affairs held West German and U.S. intelligence services as particularly supportive of anti-Yugoslav activities.²⁹ Officially, there was little reason to believe this. Even with normalizing relations between Yugoslavia and the East bloc, the State Department still excluded "Yugoslav exile groups" from Cold War assistance.³⁰ Not only had Anglo-American agencies in late 1951 consented to refrain from subversion against Yugoslavia, at that time the CIA and UDB (together with the MI6) started to cooperate in destabilizing the Albanian regime. Another liaison had been the exchange of military intelligence until August of 1955, when the Yugoslav side closed this channel due to the improving relations with the socialist camp.³¹ However, as intelligence services not only enable governments to pursue an informal foreign policy, but process data obtained from public and secret sources in the first place, refugees from Yugoslavia were still of interest in this aspect.³² Noting that Western intelligence services conducted systematic interrogations in the reception camps, the assumptions gained some substance.³³ However, operatives of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) regarded exposure to Yugoslav secret services by public exile activism as an additional risk in the dangerous intelligence business. The exiles of Yugoslav extraction under surveillance of the West German domestic secret service "Verfassungsschutz" ("Protection of the Constitution") or those observed by the FBI surely outnumbered Yugoslav spies in service of the BND or CIA.

²⁸ Frank Cain, "The Australian Security Organization. An Unofficial History," Ilford/Es., Portland/Ore.: Cass, 1994, 207

²⁹ *Zapisnici Izvršnoga komiteta Centralnoga komiteta Saveza komunista Hrvatske 1959. – 1963*, vol. 5, ed. Marijana Jukić (Zagreb: HDA, 2018), 756.

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Eastern Europe; Finland; Greece; Turkey*, vol. 10, Part 2, eds. Ronald D. Landa, James E. Miller, William F. Sanford, and Sherrill Brown Wells (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1993), 355–421.

³¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, vol. 20, Eastern Europe, eds. Carl Ashley and Mircea A. Munteanu (Washington DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 2015), 857. Cf. Jurij Hadalin, "Načrti Jugoslavije in Zahoda za menjavo albanskega režima v času po resoluciji informbiroja," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 51, no. 2 (2011): 91–104.

³² Norman Goda, "The Ustaša. Murder and Espionage," in *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis*, eds. Richard Breitman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 203–26.

³³ "Sprovođenje Zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima i stanje u Službi državne bezbednosti," SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, November 4, 1967, ARS 1931/2304.

For the capitalist countries the formula was quite simple: As long as Yugoslavia remained independent from the Soviets, it could count on their support. To this end, a close monitoring of Yugoslav politics – providing opportunities for concealed interference – was necessary.³⁴ That the Communists in charge looked with circumspection on the West was also a heritage of the immediate post-war years, when Western Allied military and intelligence staff maintained friendly ties with anti-Communist Croats, Slovenes and Serbs abroad, among them Chetnik intelligence officer Andrija Lončarić (killed in 1969) who was “on mission to Serbia to organise [a] Nationalist Nucleus in touch with and directed by Right wing exiles.”³⁵ Moderate exiles like the royalex-ambassador to the U.S. Konstantin Fotić or Croatian Peasant Party primus Maček were sponsored by the CIA in the late 1940s.³⁶ That Yugoslav officials afforded the enemy émigrés – whose organisations often followed in the tradition of the wartime collaborationist regimes – hardly any own capability, derives from the name of the “State Commission for the Investigation of the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Helpers(!).” The latter were reduced to an appendix of the invaders. Without the Axis attack in 1941 there would have been at most just a tiny chance for their takeover. From the Communist point of view, this was logical because ordinary people would betray their own interests by joining reactionary forces. Only misguidance by “traitors” could make them act against liberation by the Partisans.³⁷

After 1945, this scheme was modified and adapted to the relations with the West, which had challenged the Soviet state from the outset. During the Cold War, Western aggression continued against the states behind the Iron Curtain, giving East European spokesmen the foundation for widespread suspicions against “imperialist agents.”³⁸ The spy scare among Communists developed a dynamic on its own. For instance, Soviet leaders clung to the claim that the Poznań uprising of 1956 had been an “imperialist plot,” despite statements of Polish politicians to the contrary.³⁹ By externalizing the causes for opposition, the responsible rulers sought to immunize themselves against criticism

³⁴ “Kontakte KPdSU-BdKJ auf ideologischem Gebiet“, BND (Schaefer), February 5, 1973, PA AA R112617.

³⁵ General Staff Intelligence (XIII Corps) to Allied Forces Headquarters, May 14, 1946, PRO WO 204/12835.

³⁶ British Embassy to Foreign Office (Reilly), Washington D.C., July 8, 1950, PRO FO 371/88233.

³⁷ Quoted after “Excerpts from Transcript of Interview with Tito in Advance of His Trip to the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 1978: “Frankly speaking, I would not like to live in America. True, there is democracy, in some respects even too much while in others there is none. Whenever I visited America as head of state there gathered at the place where I stayed a whole bunch of the Ustashi and Chetniks who [had] escaped from our country as traitors and collaborators of the Fascist occupiers. In America they are free to do what they please. They disturbed me day and night, shouting the most derogatory insults.”

³⁸ Cf. David S. Foglesong, *America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism. U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin. America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

³⁹ In this case, the emphasis on domestic origins of the unrest was intended to avert Soviet intervention (Mark Kramer, “Soviet-Polish Relations and the Crises of 1956. Brinkmanship and Intra-Bloc Politics,” in

and protests from outside their ranks. Yugoslav Communists applied the same mechanisms and developed a similar paranoia of hostile conspiracies. Therefore, the enemies in emigration played the role of a “sixth column” (in conjunction to the “fifth column,” i.e. the domestic enemies), which was seen as the decisive link between opponents within the state borders and foreign hostile powers.⁴⁰ Included into such a united front, even marginal groups like the Danube Swabians in the FRG appeared as a danger.⁴¹

Balkan Vietnam: The “Special War”

According to Yugoslavia’s position between the blocs, the suspicions of the security staff were directed against both sides.⁴² Of course, the decision-makers knew about the friendly relations with NATO member states, but an outlet was found in the distinction between official politics and the work of “reactionary circles” like intelligence services combined with émigrés.⁴³ Ronald Reagan provided possibly the most prominent case of this divergence: As Governor of California in the late 1960s he signed a proclamation condemning the alleged “terror exerted by Yugoslavia” against Croatia.⁴⁴ Almost sixteen years later, the U.S. president “reiterated the resolve of the United States administration to prevent the terrorists and other hostile activities against Yugoslavia which are, at the same time, directed against the good Yugoslav-American relations and cooperation.”⁴⁵

The supposed “entanglement of the political emigration and the external factor” was not a sideshow. Even the specialists of the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry believed to observe “very obvious oscillations in the intensity of terrorist-diversionist activities depending

Kommunismus in der Krise die Entstalinisierung. 1956 und die Folgen, ed. Roger Engelmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 61–126).

⁴⁰ Cf. Novo Seratlić, *Šesta kolona. Terorističke akcije jugoslovenske neprijateljske emigracije* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački i Novinski Centar, 1989).

⁴¹ Bernd Robionek, “Hybride Identitäten in der Emigration. „Volksdeutsche“ und die jugoslawische Staats-sicherheit,” *JKGE* 3, (2022): 227–40.

⁴² “Discussions in Yugoslavia. Record of Conversation,” Commonwealth Police Force (Manton), [Canberra], September 10, 1974, NAA A5034/2136.

⁴³ Cf. Dan Morgan, “Belgrade Begins Crackdown on Croat Nationalism,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1972: “Several Yugoslav officials have claimed that the CIA was backing the Croats without the knowledge of the U.S. government.”

⁴⁴ Quoted after “Akcija ustaške emigracije u S. Francisku,” DSIP (Uprava za konzularne poslove), Belgrade, May 10, 1968, HDA 1409/IV/106, 62.

⁴⁵ “Remarks of President Reagan and President Mika Spiljak of Yugoslavia Following Their Meetings,” February 1, 1984, accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-president-reagan-and-president-mika-spiljak-yugoslavia-following-their>.

on the international situation.”⁴⁶ Shortly after the Six-day War, state security servants thought the conflict in the Middle East to be a motivator of exile hostilities, especially the installation of six simultaneous time bombs at Yugoslav missions in North America.⁴⁷ There was, however, hardly any probability that the Serbian suspects were actually agents of the Mossad.

Despite common ideological roots, the Soviet Union was also blamed for assisting emigrants in anti-Yugoslav activities.⁴⁸ Using a great deal of abstract imagination, an internal memo of 1970 presented a recent series of violent attacks by emigrants in or from the West, among them explosions at the main station and a cinema in Belgrade, as a reaction to Tito’s open sympathies with the Czechoslovak reformers who toppled over the Soviet intervention.⁴⁹ Probably, the assumption alluded to the appearance of the “New Platform” around the HNO president Branimir Jelić, hoping that – after the suppression of the Prague Spring – the Soviets might intervene in favour of Croatian national independence. But references to Soviet-supported militancy collected by the SDB were only based on “unconfirmed information.”⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the exile propaganda produced severe psychological effects.

The deep impact of external developments can be seen by the Total People’s Defence (Opštenarodna odbrana, ONO), an institutionalized partisan army of all citizens, which was introduced after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Treaty states.⁵¹ In the same move, however, the staff of the Foreign Ministry in Belgrade summarized that the political emigration “certainly plays a specific role in the plans of the NATO countries.”⁵² Beyond the bipolar confrontation of ideological systems, this official interpretation of the exile scene was influenced by Yugoslavia’s prominent position in the Non-Aligned Movement. The orientation towards the Third World contributed to the paranoia of

⁴⁶ “Problemi vezani za aktivnost političke emigracije i potreba stalne i koordinirane protuakcije,” DSIP, Belgrade, June 5 1970, HDA 1409/IV/108, 78.

⁴⁷ “Sprovođenje Zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima i stanje u Službi državne bezbednosti,” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, November 4, 1967, ARS 1931/2304.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XXIX Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969–1972*, eds. James E. Miller, Douglas E. Selva and Laurie Van Hook (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 562.

⁴⁹ “Problemi vezani za aktivnost političke emigracije i potreba stalne i koordinirane protuakcije,” DSIP, Belgrade, June 5, 1970, HDA 1409/IV/108, 78.

⁵⁰ “Neki podaci iz emigrantskih izvora o navodnim kontaktima Jelić dr Brankasa SSSR-om,” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, May 19, 1972, ARS 1931/1177.

⁵¹ Zdenko Čepić, “Politične okolišine uvajanja vojaške doktrine splošne ljudske obrambe,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 50, no. 3 (2010): 79–100. Cf. Viktor Bubanj, *Doktrina pobjede* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1972), 35.

⁵² “Problemi vezani za aktivnost političke emigracije i potreba stalne i koordinirane protuakcije,” DSIP, Belgrade, June 5, 1970, HDA 1409/IV/108, 78.

hostile encirclement. Since it played a leading role in the organization of non-aligned states, the country found itself isolated from the new faraway friends overseas.⁵³

Not only politicians were sympathetic over anti-colonial movements in other parts of the world. In 1961, the same year when the first congress of non-aligned states in Belgrade was celebrated as an epoch-making event in world politics, mass protests in major cities broke out as a reaction to the assassination of the Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and the failed invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro émigrés in conjunction with the CIA. The aggravation of the U.S.-intervention in Vietnam led to further public outrages in the SFRY.⁵⁴ Along with 16 other non-aligned states, Yugoslavia appealed for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.⁵⁵ Because the socialist state was founded on the heritage of the anti-Fascist liberation struggle, this historical background played an important role for the identification with anti-imperialistic movements in former colonies. Hence, Yugoslav military men paid a lot of attention to the ongoing armed struggle in South-East Asia.⁵⁶ The conflict in the style of David vs. Goliath reminded them of the anti-Fascist resistance in their region. And, in accordance with Yugoslavia's global positioning, they followed the North Vietnamese perspective.⁵⁷

A key interpretation of the U.S. intervention in South-East Asia was the concept of "Special War" coined by North Vietnamese defence minister Vo Nguyen Giap. It ranged from the covert "special war," which was carried out by South Vietnamese troops under the auspices of U.S. instructors and secret services, to the "limited war" with regular U.S. forces in the region. The last stage would have been a "general war" – the global clash actually avoided by the superpowers (as could be seen during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962).⁵⁸ The Special War (actually Special Warfare) was not an invention of Giap. In fact, it existed in the shape of the U.S. Special Group, a governmental body in charge of anti-Communist counterinsurgency in Third World countries. In addition to the initial target area (Thailand, Laos and Vietnam), the scope was expanded to Burma, Cambodia,

⁵³ Cf. Alvin Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁵⁴ Péter Apor, James Mark, Piotr Osęka, and Radina Vučetić, "'We Are with You, Vietnam.' Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 439–64.

⁵⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume II, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, eds. David C. Humphrey, Ronald D. Landa, and Louis J. Smith (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 507.

⁵⁶ At a discussion of army experts, General-Major Rajko Tanasković noted that "the experiences from this war [in Vietnam] have a great significance for us" (quoted after „Teritorijalna odbrana," *Vojno delo* 22, (1970): 12–74). Cf. Dušan Vilić and Mihajlo Vučinić, "Specijalni rat' u Vijetnamu," *Vojno delo* 25, (1973): 120–46.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jovan Čavoški, "U potrazi za novim smislom. Jugoslavija i kriza globalne nesvrstanosti 1965–1970," *Istorija 20. veka* 39, no. 2 (2021): 353–74.

⁵⁸ Cf. U.S. "Special War" in South Viet Nam, ed. Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964).

Cameroon (which was soon replaced with Bolivia), Iran, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala and Venezuela.⁵⁹ From its establishment during the Kennedy administration until February 1967, the Special Group supervised more than 300 covert operations.⁶⁰ A “Special Warfare Center” for counterinsurgency training was set up in Fort Bragg.⁶¹

The “special war” became a blueprint of U.S.-interventions in the Third World.⁶² The term was disseminated to a broader public through the Vietnam reports of the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett.⁶³ A Serbo-Croatian edition of his reports, published in 1966 as “The Truth about the War in Vietnam,”⁶⁴ had a strong influence on Yugoslav security officers.⁶⁵ As can be seen by the example of Viktor Bubanj, chief of the General Staff and architect of the ONO, who addressed the Special War as a prelude to a large scale armed conflict,⁶⁶ the expression advanced to a great career in the SFRY. After, in October 1982, a conference on “The Special War as a Substitute for Armed Aggression” had been held in Belgrade by the People’s Army, the military journal “Vojno delo” dedicated three issues to the “Special War” topic.⁶⁷

At the beginning of the 1970s, however, the term “special war” (in Serbo-Croatian: “Specijalni rat”) was not yet so well-established. Until then, it was mostly used by specialists concerned with national defence, among them Tito’s personal security advisor General Ivan Mišković. At an internal session on security matters in March 1972, he repeatedly mentioned a “special war” in the shape of CIA’s counterrevolutionary “Contingency”

⁵⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volumes VII, VIII, IX, Arms Control; National Security Policy; Foreign Economic Policy, Microfiche Supplement*, eds. Evans Gerakas et al. (Washington DC: Department of State, 1997), 987.

⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume VII. Vietnam July 1970–January 1972*, eds. David Goldman and Erin Mahan (Washington DC: Office of the Historian, 2010), XXXV.

⁶¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume VIII, National Security Policy*, ed. David W. Mabon (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 254.

⁶² Nguyen Van Hieu, ‘*Special War*’ – *an Outgrowth of Neo-Colonialism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Pr., 1965): „The peoples of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are well aware that the U.S. imperialists are testing their “special war” in South Vietnam in order to apply it to the suppression of the national liberation movements in other parts of the world.” Cf. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2007).

⁶³ Cf. Angelika Bator, *USA-Politik gegen Asien. Die strategischen Grundzüge nach dem 2. Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Militärverlag der Dt. Demokrat. Republik, 1986).

⁶⁴ Vilfred G. Barčec, *Istina o ratu u Vijetnamu* (Beograd: Kultura, 1966).

⁶⁵ Mihajlo Vučinić, “Dve strategije rata u Vijetnamu. Neka gledišta o američkoj vojnoj strategiji u Vijetnamu,” *Vojno delo*, no. 2 (1967): 69–91; Petar Knežević, “Specijalni rat – međunarodnopravni aspekt i nastanak doktrine,” *Vojno delo* 29, (1977): 120–8, fn. 13.

⁶⁶ Viktor Bubanj, “Osnovi vojne doktrine i strategije oružanih snaga SFRJ,” *Vojno delo* 23, (1971): 3–23.

⁶⁷ In the late 1970s, the ministry of defence was entrusted by the federal security council with a research project “on the special war against the SFRJ” (“Kratkoročna i dugoročna programska orijentacija istraživanja neprijateljske i druge društvenostetne delatnosti (nacrtni)”, SSUP (Uprava za istraživanje, analize i informisanje), Belgrade, June 19, 1978, ARS 1931/3093).

plans which – like other non-aligned countries – allegedly affected his homeland.⁶⁸ Obviously, the escalation of the war in Vietnam manipulated his perception. In view of the prevailing conditions there was no credibility to his claim. Principally, the doctrine of “U.S. Overseas Internal[sic!] Defense Policy” aimed at assisting “friendly countries” against “subversive insurgency.”⁶⁹ As a consequence of friendly U.S. relations with the SFRY, an inclusion of the country into the programme of the “Special Group” would have meant for the Americans to prop up socialist security forces in resistance against anti-Communist attacks.⁷⁰ Even the overtures of the “Agency for International Development”, encompassing training to indigenous police cadres “to improve riot control,” were limited to Asia, Africa and Latin America.⁷¹ Hence, the scenario of a “Special War” against the only European member of the Non-Aligned Movement was still missing a breeding ground on which it could flourish. But only three months after Mišković had made his remarks, this changed dramatically when Yugoslavia experienced its own “Bay of Pigs” in miniature.

On June 20, 1972, 19 heavily armed anti-Yugoslav Croats crossed the wooded border from Austria in order to stir up a rebellion in the Croatian parts of Yugoslavia where a nationalist reform movement – the so-called Croatian Spring – had been suppressed earlier that year. Eventually, the intruders fought their way through central Bosnia, killing 13 members of Yugoslav forces before being stopped. Although the efforts of the security apparatus had been enormous, it took the defenders more than four weeks to corner all the enemies. The subsequent state security report stressed that “the infiltrated diversionist-terrorist groups” were “based on the well-known principles of the strategies and tactics of the special war,” emphasizing that one of the aggressors had done service

⁶⁸ „Magnetofonski snimak sa sednice Saveta za poslove državne bezbednosti, održane 21. marta 1972. Godine na Brionima,” Presidency of the SFRY (Savet za poslove državne bezbednosti), Belgrade, March 21, 1972, ARS 1931/1404.

⁶⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962*, eds. John P. Glennon, David M. Baehler, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), 48. Cf. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume VIII, National Security Policy*, ed. David W. Mabon (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 464.

⁷⁰ One document points to U.S. efforts directed against Croatian exiles: At the end of 1971 “[West German Chancellor Willy] Brandt noted that German intelligence indicated that the Soviets were working with nationalist anti-communist [!] Croatian forces abroad and were hopeful of imposing Soviet hegemony. Brandt urged that the United States undertake some measures to assist Tito without appearing to interfere. Tito needs an image of good relations with the United States and Western Europe. President Nixon instructed [his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs] General Haig to follow up on this issue.” (*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XL, Germany and Berlin, 1969–1972*, ed. David C. Geyer (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2008), 949.)

⁷¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volumes VII, VIII, IX, Arms Control; National Security Policy; Foreign Economic Policy, Microfiche Supplement*, eds. Evans Gerakas et al. (Washington DC: Department of State, 1997), 1684.

in the Australian army.⁷² In a twist of perceptions, an article in “The New York Times” suggested that the intruders had imitated “Fidel Castro’s small band that landed in eastern Cuba in 1956.”⁷³ Paradoxically, militant exiles – as noted by the SDB – indeed found a replacement of the outworn Ustasha style with the fashion of anti-imperialist fighters like Ernesto “Che” Guevara.⁷⁴ Although a strong current of the political emigration was still directed against the socialist system, with the rise of the “Croatian spring” – headed by a new generation of Croatian top Communists – many exiles found themselves ready to side with the Communist compatriots provided that they followed nationalistic aims.⁷⁵ Thus, especially the younger adherents of the Croatian political emigration in the 1970s and 1980s can rather be called anti-Yugoslav than anti-Communist.⁷⁶

The guerrilla action gave Yugoslavia’s leading ex-Partisans a confirmation of their “Special War” theory. It had a far-reaching effect on security politics as it contributed to the establishing of the “Social Self-Defence” (Društvena samozaštita), i.e. the public defence measures in the civil sector complementing the paramilitary-style ONO.⁷⁷ In response to the raid of 1972, Tito issued a directive in which he asserted that the SFRY was in the same manner affected by a subtle “Special War” as other countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁷⁸ He held agitated speeches, demonstrating his anxiety to the public.⁷⁹ Directly concerned with the events was General Franjo Herljević, the Bosnian territorial defence minister in command of the counterinsurgency operation. In May of 1974 he became the interior minister on federal level and as such a staunch advocator of operations against the extremist emigration.⁸⁰ His personal union of the military and

⁷² “Akcija ‘Raduša,’” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, May 4, 1973, ARS 1931/1160.

⁷³ Raymond Anderson, “Rebel ‘Invasion’ Stirs Yugoslavs,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 1972: 18.

⁷⁴ “Akcija ‘Raduša,’” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, May 4, 1973, ARS 1931/1160.

⁷⁵ On the Croatian Spring see: Ludwig Steindorff, “Der Kroatische Frühling. Eine soziale Bewegung in einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft,” in *Der Balkan. Eine europäische Krisenregion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Jürgen Elvert (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 197–210.

⁷⁶ Bernd Robionek, “Outsiders of the Cold War? Changing Attitudes towards anti-Communism within the Croatian Political Emigration (1945–80’s),” in *Politický exil z krajín strednej a východnej Európy. Motívy, stratégie, aktivity a perspektívy na Východe a Západe, 1945–1989*, ed. Peter Jašek (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2017), 84–94.

⁷⁷ Davor Marijan, “Konceptija općenarodne obrane i društvene samozaštite – militarizam samoupravnoga socijalizma,” *ČSP*, no. 3 (2021): 953–87.

⁷⁸ „Direktiva. 21. jula 1972. godine,” President of the Federation and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces (Tito), Brioni, July 21, 1972, ARS 1931/1404.

⁷⁹ “Tito Threatens Domestic and Foreign Enemies of Yugoslavia,” RFE (Stanković), September 12, 1972, OSA 300/8/3/10802.

⁸⁰ Pero Simić and Zvonimir Despot (eds.), *Tito strogo poverljivo. Arhivski dokumenti* (Belgrade: Službeni Glasnik, 2010), 494.

state security contributed to the establishment of the “Special War” scheme among the SDB personnel.⁸¹

Faking “Terrorists” – Breaking “Terrorists”

With the opening of the summer season in 1975, Tito announced a state of emergency to leading security circles. His updated directive, asserting that the country was “permanently exposed to pressure and attacks from the external and internal enemy,” was followed by a vigilance campaign with reinforced border controls.⁸² While millions of tourists spent their vacation on the eastern Adriatic, the authorities were deeply concerned about public safety. Since the SFRY was a highly frequented transit route, complete control of border traffic seemed impossible.⁸³ In addition to public protests and a great variety of propagandistic papers, which were occasionally smuggled into the homeland,⁸⁴ the exile violence continued. However, it is doubtful whether the “terrorism” was really as massive as quantified by Yugoslav sources.

In relation to a detailed compilation of 148 violent incidents from exiles of different origin, the 120 “terror acts” exclusively attributed to the HRB seem out of proportion.⁸⁵ There were, of course, sensational events like the homicide on the Yugoslav ambassador in Stockholm (1971), the hijacking of a Swedish plane in order to negotiate the release of the two perpetrators (1972),⁸⁶ the hijacking of an airliner in New York – intended to catapult the issue of “an obscure Balkan province” to the headlines of the daily news

⁸¹ “Sprovedjenje zaključaka Izvršnog biroa PSKJ i odluka i stavova drugih nadležnih tela i organa /oblast unutrašnjih poslova/,” SSUP, Belgrade, April 29, 1974, ARS 1931/1362. Cf. “Jugoslawiens Furcht vor inneren und äußeren Feinden,” *Osteuropa-Archiv*, no. 3 (1979): 190–5.

⁸² “Direktiva za organizaciju i pripreme aktivnosti i mera na suzbijanju eventualne krize situacije u zemlji,” President of the Federation and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces (Tito), Belgrade, June 27, 1975, ARS 1931/2233; “Zusammenarbeit in der Verbrechensbekämpfung mit Jugoslawien. Besprechung mit Vertretern des Bundessekretariats für Innere Angelegenheiten der SFR Jugoslawien am 6. Oktober 1975 im BMI,” BMI (Kranz), Bonn, October 8, 1975, PA AA ZA 116705.

⁸³ Cf. William Zimmermann, *Open Borders, Nonalignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton NJ: Univ. Pr., 1987), 79.

⁸⁴ “Émigré Publication,” British Embassy (Rennie) to FCO (Research Dept.), September 7, 1972, PRO FCO28/2158.

⁸⁵ Milenko Doder, *Jugoslavenska neprijateljska emigracija* (Zagreb: Centar za Informacije i Publicitet, 1989), 263–74; cf. Milo Bošković, *Antijugoslovenska fašistička emigracija* (Belgrade, Novi Sad: Sloboda, 1980), 88, fn. 141.

⁸⁶ “Croat Hijacking of a Scandinavian Airlines Aircraft,” British Embassy (Millard) to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Stockholm, September 26, 1972, PRO FCO28/2158.

(1976)⁸⁷ – and, in 1978, the hostage-taking in the federal German consulate general in Chicago with the aim of blackmailing the government in Bonn to release Stjepan Bilandžić, held in custody pending a decision on his extradition to the SFRY. At that time the official Belgrade presented Bilandžić as Public Enemy Number One. But his militant organization “Otpor” (“Resistance”, short for “Croatian National Resistance”) – originally founded by Vjekoslav “Maks” Luburić, ex-commander of the Croatian concentration camps – attracted only a few members in Europe.⁸⁸

In the late 1960s, the SDB assessed the global manpower of the HRB, which had the reputation of being the biggest and most aggressive militant organization, realistically at fifty.⁸⁹ One decade later, however, Vladimir Bakarić frightened his comrades in the Central Committee by speaking of some 2,000 “terrorists” abroad.⁹⁰ An explanation for this inflation can be found in the broad definition of “terrorists,” laid down by Herljević for the SDB as “all persons in Yugoslavia or abroad who are involved in the preparation [!], attempt or execution of diversionist-terrorist acts.”⁹¹ The Croatian ministry of internal affairs lumped together “the leaders of all extreme organizations” as preparing terror acts.⁹² For a Yugoslav top diplomat the oppositional organizations in the West were not the actual perpetrators but “always moving on the edge of terrorism.”⁹³ In this logic, the umbrella organization “Croatian National Congress” (Hrvatsko narodno vijeće, HNV), with almost 7,000 members worldwide in the early 1980s, was denounced as “terroristic.”⁹⁴ The SDB emphasized that outspoken militant members like Bilandžić belonged to the HNV and the moderates around Ivan Jeličić also not expressively rule out violent

⁸⁷ Quoted in Jeffrey D. Simon, *The Terrorist Trap. America's experience with terrorism*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), 116.

⁸⁸ “Verbotsverfügung”, BMI to HNOtp (Bilandžić), Bonn, June 1, 1976, PA AA ZA 116705.

⁸⁹ “Sprovedjenje Zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima i stanje u Službi državne bezbednosti,” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, November 4, 1967, ARS 1931/2304. Cf. Josip Mihaljević, “Aktuelno stanje posle 21. Sednice Predsedništva CK SKJ i ocene bezbednosne situacije u Jugoslaviji u 1971. godini, SSUP (SDB),” *Fontes* 27, no. 1 (2021): 735.

⁹⁰ “Yugoslav Central Committee Discusses Internal and External Threats,” RFE (Stanković), December 27, 1978, OSA 300/8/3/11443.

⁹¹ “Uputstvo o vođenju centralizovane evidencije lica koja su predmet rada Službe državne bezbednosti”, SSUP (Herljević), February 17, 1976, ARS 1931/2236.

⁹² “Prikaz situacije i sadašnja djelatnost hrvatske neprijateljske emigracije prema SFRJ,” RSUP SRH, Zagreb, October 21, 1969, HDA 1409/IV/106.

⁹³ “Protokoll über die Besprechungen zwischen VLR I Frau Dr. Finke-Osiander und dem Leiter der Westeuropa-Abteilung Maksić im jugoslawischen Außenministerium am 8. und 9. Mai 1974,” AA (Dpt. 214), Bonn, May 13, 1974, PA AA ZA 116707.

⁹⁴ For a general outline on the HNV see: Tanja Trošelj Miočević, “Hrvatsko narodno vijeće od 1974. do 1990.,” *Obnovljeni Život* 75, no. 2 (2020): 229–45.

methods.⁹⁵ Following an anti-Yugoslav display in "The New York Times" in which the HNV, shortly after Tito's death, prophesied that Yugoslavia would be finished soon, the official Belgrade accused the HNV of causing an explosion with material damage in front of the Yugoslav Bank in New York. The HNV, however, clearly distanced itself from this bombing.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the Communist party organ "Borba" ("The Struggle") in Belgrade branded the HNV as a front organization for terrorism.⁹⁷

Whereas Herljević, at a session of the Yugoslav parliament, presented an impressive record of almost eighty averted "terroristic acts" from 1975 to 1978 and over two hundred persons indicted for "terrorism," in a confidential exchange with his West German counterpart he failed to give any details on "14 terrorists" who – according to him – had been arrested in Yugoslavia after having received "terrorist training" in the FRG.⁹⁸ Information on organizational ties to specific crimes was mostly vague.⁹⁹ Yugoslav state security officers held different exile group leaders responsible for the very same act of violence.¹⁰⁰ Seeing that the accusations lacked substance, criminal investigators in the West harboured doubts whether certain crimes were really initiated by Croatian exiles or in fact "activities of the Yugoslav intelligence service."¹⁰¹ Exile organizations were infiltrated by Yugoslav secret agents at a ratio of about ten percent, providing a potential for provocations and false flag operations.¹⁰² Already in the late 1960s, the SDB claimed to have a crucial part of the hostile groups abroad "under control."¹⁰³ Furthermore, there are

⁹⁵ "Hrvatski narodni odbor – Jelićevci," SSUP, Belgrade, June 29, 1984, ARS 1931/3093; "Ergebnisvermerk über die Besprechungen im jugoslawischen Bundessekretariat am 29./30. September d. J. in Belgrad," BMI (Werthebach), Bonn, October 3, 1980, PA AA B83/1314.

⁹⁶ Chuck Sudetic, "Yugoslavia Will Not Survive. A Statement by the Croatian National Congress," *The New York Times*, March 14, 1980: 11; John Darnton, "Yugoslavia Asks U.S. to Curb a Croat Exile Group Suspected of Violence," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1980: 3.

⁹⁷ "Der Kroatische Nationalrat im Exil (KNR)," BND, April 7, 1982, BA B206/1105. Cf. Petar Dragišić, "Hrvatska politička emigracija i Jugoslavija početkom osamdesetih godina. Pripreme za završni obračun," *Istorija 20. Veka* 38, no. 2 (2020): 203–18.

⁹⁸ "Ergebnisvermerk über die Besprechung der Minister Baum und Herljevic am 24. März d.J. im BMI von 10,30 – 12,00 Uhr," BMI (PI 1), Bonn, April 14, 1981, PA AA B83/1314.

⁹⁹ Vladimir Vodinić, *Deset verzija više jedna jednako istina. Zapisi o bonskom i stockholmskom procesu ustaškim teroristima* (Split: Marksistički centar, 1973).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Dragan Marković, Nikola Milovanović, and Đuro Rebić, *Ratnici mira, Volume 3. Specijalnimat* (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1979), 207; Đuro Rebić, *Teror Crne Internacionale* (Belgrade: Sloboda, 1979), 113.

¹⁰¹ "Zusammenarbeit mit Jugoslawien bei der Verbrechensbekämpfung. Politisch motivierte Ausländerkriminalität," BMI (PI 1), Bonn, July 2, 1981, PA AA B83/1314.

¹⁰² "Die nationalistischen Organisationen der Ostemigranten, III. Teil. Jugoslawische Emigration." Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, [Munich], January 15, 1963, PA AA B42/99; cf. Ivica Lučić, "Security and Intelligence Services in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *National Security and the Future* 2, no. 1 (2000): 80.

¹⁰³ "Sprovedjenje Zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima i stanje u Službi državne bezbednosti," SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, November 4, 1967, ARS 1931/2304.

strong indications that some militant appearances were actually fabrications of Yugoslav secret services.¹⁰⁴

Often the strategy of the extremists was aimed at preparedness for “Day X.”¹⁰⁵ This implied the avoidance of attacks on Yugoslav representations abroad, lowering the repression by the authorities of the host states. Instead, it seemed more appropriate to carry out pinpricks against Yugoslavia proper.¹⁰⁶ But in expectation of “Day X,” this was also disputed. Because damage to the Yugoslav state was the primary intention, it was particularly inconvenient when citizens of the host countries were affected as bystanders. During the hostage-takings, the perpetrators tried to avoid excessive harm to the random victims.¹⁰⁷ At the beginning of the 1980s, a Bosnian top security officer stated that “the Fascist emigration has committed over 200 grave acts of terrorism and has attempted many more.”¹⁰⁸ Although this high frequency is obviously exaggerated, the security officers were caught up in the self-cultivated demon of the “Special War.”

After the armed attacks of the early 1960s, Yugoslav state security services performed the task “of liquidating at least some of the most prominent emigrant organizers” as a means of preventive counterterrorism.¹⁰⁹ In concurrence with this principle, not only the actual perpetrators but also their real or alleged backers were targeted.¹¹⁰ To some extent the registration as a “terrorist” relied on hearsay reports from informants on the spot. Collected data on militant underground activities was forwarded with high priority to the SDB headquarters. Another criterion was the subjection to law enforcement by the authorities of the host states. Most of the Croats killed abroad had been sentenced for offenses like the illegal possession of weapons or submitted to restrictions due to other militant behaviour. Because the penalties were mostly mild at first, the problem reappeared

¹⁰⁴ “Kroatische Emigrantengruppen,” AA, (II 5), December 5, 1963, PA AA B42/94; cf. Branko Pavlica, *Antijugoslovenska aktivnost neprijateljske emigracije u SR Nemačkoj (1951–1984)* (Smederevo: Naš Glas, 1990), 68; Milo Bošković, *Šesta kolona. Nastanak, organizacija i delovanje antijugoslovenske fašističke emigracije* (Zagreb, Novi Sad: Birotehnika, 1985), 428, fn. 8.

¹⁰⁵ “Kriminalpolizeiliche Erkenntnisse über das Verhalten jugoslawischer Emigranten und Gastarbeiter in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” BKA (Sicherungsgruppe), Bad Godesberg, July 18, 1963, PA AA B42/99.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling. Exile Patriotism & the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), 71.

¹⁰⁷ With the intention of “no bloodshed or anyone to get hurt,” Bilandžić persuaded the hostage-takers via phone to give up (quoted after John O’Brien, “No Blood Is Shed. Chicago Passes 1st Test of Terrorism,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 20, 1978: 5).

¹⁰⁸ Andjelko Maslić, “Terrorism by Fascist Emigration of Yugoslav Origin,” *Socialist Thought and Practice* 21, no. 3 (1981): 54. Even an academic publication is based on fantastic figures like these (Mate Tokić, “Landscapes of Conflict. Unity and Disunity in post-Second World War Croatian Émigré Separatism,” *European Review of History* 16, no. 5 (2009): 739–53).

¹⁰⁹ Quoted after Wollfy Krašić, “A Failed Assassination Attempt on the Deželić Family in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1965 by the Yugoslav Security Service,” *Zbornik Janković*, no. 5–6 (2021): 263.

¹¹⁰ „Borivoje Blagojević und seine Organisation,” BND (v. Weiterhausen), March 14, 1975, PA AA ZA116705.

on the agenda as soon as they were released from prison. While Yugoslav appeals for stricter punishment usually fell on deaf ears, the SDB took matters into its own hands. By the mid-1980s, federal German criminal investigators arrived at 28 killings and 16 attempts most likely ordered by Yugoslav secret services.¹¹¹

On the one hand, state security operatives considered the “liquidation” of a (potentially) dangerous exile principally “as a last resort,”¹¹² given that nonviolent attempts of “passivization” (e.g., persuasion by relatives or recruitment as an informant) would be in vain. But the elements of the “Special War” propelled the high frequency of “liquidations.” Before Ratko Obradović of the Serbian ultranationalist “Zbor” organization in Munich was assassinated in 1969, the SDB had deemed him a „leader of diversionist bands“ with foreign intelligence connections.¹¹³ Internally, however, the SDB admitted that it lacked “sufficient data and evidence of a direct connection between the activities of the emigration and the domestic enemies with the work of foreign intelligence services.”¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the presumed links of exiles to foreign forces were an integral part of the imagined “Special War” against the SFRY.¹¹⁵ After a series of targeted killings abroad had taken place, the violence faded at the beginning of the 1970s.¹¹⁶ In view of Yugoslavia’s tainted reputation, the drastic measures became a matter of controversy among the Communist leadership and probably would have ended.¹¹⁷ But in the aftermath of the incursion in the summer of 1972, the SFRY waged an undeclared war of low intensity similar to Israeli or U.S. counterterrorism after 9/11.¹¹⁸

How much the construct of a „Special War“ contributed to the perpetuation of lethal operations turns out in the case of Dušan Sedlar, president of the royalist “Serbian National Defence.” Although West German intelligence categorized this organization as non-violent, the 72-year-old émigré was shot in broad daylight by two unknown perpetrators

¹¹¹ “Aktivitäten jugoslawischer Dienste in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” AA, Bonn, May 15, 1985, PA AA B150/618.

¹¹² Quoted in Tomislav Krolo, *Hrvatski politički emigrant 1941.–1991.*, ed. Ivan Čizmić (Zagreb: self-published, 2009), 451.

¹¹³ Quoted after Ratko Lompar, “Prilog istraživanju borbe jugoslovenskih vlasti protiv pokreta Zbor u zemlji i emigraciji 1944–1974.” *Istorijski zapisi* 94, no. 3–4 (2021): 118.

¹¹⁴ “Bezbednosna situacija i sprovođenje Direktive Predsednika Republike,” SSUP, Belgrade, September 16, 1972, ARS 1931/1362, 1179-1212.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Vladimir Brdar, “Snage za vođenje specijalnog rata,” *Vojno delo* 35, no. 3 (1983): 69–74.

¹¹⁶ “Aktivitäten der kroatischen Emigrantenorganisationen in der BRD,” MfS (HV/A), Berlin, December 6, 1971, BStU, MfS, HV/A 398.

¹¹⁷ Bernd Robionek, “State Security out of Control? The Influence of Yugoslavia’s Political Leadership on Targeted Killings abroad (1965–84),” *OEZB Working Paper*, March 2020.

¹¹⁸ John Schindler, “Defeating the Sixth Column. Intelligence and Strategy in the War on Islamist Terrorism,” *Orbis* (2005): 705: “Belgrade secret police’s counterterrorism strategy stands as a model of how to wage a vigorous covert war against terrorists living abroad in de facto safe havens.”

in Düsseldorf, North-Rhine Westphalia, on April 16, 1980.¹¹⁹ Stanko Čolak, chief of the anti-emigration department in Belgrade, implicitly justified this targeted killing by pointing to a „Sedlargroup,“ said to prepare “measures against Yugoslavia” on bases of the British Army on the Rhine.¹²⁰ Placed into the context of a “Special War,” this groundless suspicion – reminding of the British contacts maintained by Serbian exiles immediately after the Second World War – seems plausible.

Other incidents letting us wonder why Yugoslav authorities applied lethal methods occurred when nationalist riots in the Albanian-inhabited Kosovo broke out in 1981, shifting the attention of the SDB to exiles from that region.¹²¹ Some of them called for more autonomy of the province, while the irredentists advocated a Greater Albania. This was particularly problematic, because – after the experiences with the “hot” border during the Cominform conflict – the Albanian intelligence service was perceived as the most aggressive.¹²² Herljević blamed a dubious “Red Front” organization, consisting of Kosovo-Albanian “guest workers” in the West supported by Albanian secret agencies and right wing circles (!), on pulling the strings behind the uprising.¹²³ Since the Kosovo-Albanian nationalists took the place of the “Ustasha emigration” as prime troublemakers, it seemed necessary to apply countermeasures in their countries of residence.¹²⁴ In 1981 and 1982 five Kosovo-Albanians in the FRG and Belgium became victims of assassination attempts with obvious traces to Yugoslav security services.¹²⁵ But except for rhetorical statements in favour of militant means, there was no evidence of an involvement of Kosovo-Albanians abroad in terrorist activities.¹²⁶ Here again, the transnational constellation reinforced the threat. Yugoslav leaders were afraid that the unrest in Kosovo would spread across the country.¹²⁷ According to the theory of a “Special War,” the emigration and

¹¹⁹ “Anschläge und sonstige Gewaltaktionen in der Zeit vom 1. Januar 1978 bis 31. Dezember 1981,” BfV, January 6, 1982, BA B141/83654.

¹²⁰ “Ergebnisvermerk über die Besprechungen im jugoslawischen Bundessekretariat am 29./30. September d. J. in Belgrad,” BMI (P I 1), Bonn, October 3, 1980, PA AA B83/1314.

¹²¹ Cf. Jurij Hadalin, “Odnos varnostno-obveščevalnih služb do albanske manjšine v Jugoslaviji po izbruhu demonstracij na Kosovu leta 1981,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 51, no. 1 (2011): 313–28, esp. 324.

¹²² Cf. Zoran Janjetović, “Sticking to Guns. The Disarmament Action in Kosovo 1955/56,” *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, no. 1 (2021): 73–90.

¹²³ “The Kosovar Dilemma,” RFE Background Report (Louis Zanga), May 20, 1981, OSA 300-8-3-276.

¹²⁴ Cf. Branko Pavlica, *Jugoslavija i SR Nemačka 1951–1991* (Belgrade, Smederevo: B. Pavlica, 2002), 134.

¹²⁵ “Ermittlungsverfahren gegen Unbekannt wegen Mordes an jugoslawischen Staatsangehörigen albanischer Volkszugehörigkeit am 17.1.1982 in Untergruppenbach, Krs. Heilbronn,” Leading Supreme Public Prosecutor Heilbronn (Koch) to the General Public Prosecutor at the Supreme Provincial Court Stuttgart, Heilbronn, January 21, 1982, PA AA B83/1314.

¹²⁶ “Bezbednosneocene,” SSUP (SDB), Belgrade, January 1983, HDA 1561/4.0/95.

¹²⁷ Barney Petrovic, “Tourist Plans Hit by Yugoslav Riots,” *The Guardian*, May 30, 1981: 7.

domestic enemies were forming a union.¹²⁸ Under these conditions, Kosovo-Albanian exiles appeared as extraordinary dangerous adversaries.

Concluding Remarks

The SDB was well aware of the “psychological pressure” from hostile émigrés.¹²⁹ But did this also apply to the effect on the mentality of Yugoslav stakeholders? Having experienced situations of serious insecurity, the leadership was highly sensitive about threats from abroad. Since the early 1960s, the new international constellation went along with an increase of exile activism.¹³⁰ This synchronicity gave the false impression of causality. Instead of searching for the causes of rising exile militancy in the personal backgrounds of the troublemakers, i.e. the disadvantageous environments surrounding them, the official Yugoslav side preferred to link the hostile activities to international tensions. Whereas the international context first served as an explanation for exile hostilities, with the shock provoked by the armed incursion of 1972, this relation turned around. From now on, the increased significance of anti-Yugoslav activities, heightened by the cultivation of a permanent threat, served as an affirmation of the “Special War” scenario.

It was common practice among Communists of various countries to perceive hostilities by emigrants as a result of encouragement from foreign forces. On these grounds, the Yugoslav comrades developed their own type of paranoia determined by the global political position of the country. The identification with the Third World updated the conflict situation. Exile activism – for want of other open hostilities from outside – was the decisive cornerstone on which the construct of the “Special War” was built. It provided a continuous confirmation of endangerment and eventually the frame for a multitude of inimical forces.¹³¹

As an object of subtle war, Yugoslavia’s decision-makers felt entitled to apply measures of strict self-defence. This contributed to an overreaction in the form of targeted killings abroad. Therefore, it is open to debate if the extent of lethal operations was rooted in

¹²⁸ “Notiz über ein Gespräch zwischen dem Bundessekretär des Inneren der SFRJ – Genossen Generaloberst Herlevicz – und dem Minister für Staatssicherheit der DDR – Genossen Generaloberst Mielke – im Zusammenhang mit dem Besuch der Partei- und Staatsdelegation der DDR unter Leitung des Generalsekretärs des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR – Genossen Erich Honecker – am 12. 01. 1977 in Belgrad,” MfS (HA X, Damm), Berlin 1977, BStU (Zentralstelle), MfS Abt. X/246, 489-493.

¹²⁹ “Sprovodjenje zaključaka Izvršnog biroa PSKJ i odluka i stavova drugih nadležnih tela i organa (oblast unutrašnjih poslova),” SSUP, Belgrade, June 1974, ARS 1931/1362.

¹³⁰ Cf. Nenad Đorđević, *Bezbednost i Jugoslavija* (Zagreb: Jugart, 1985), 231.

¹³¹ Cf. “Hostile Activities Increasing, Yugoslav Interior Minister Complains,” RFE (Slobodan Stanković), May 17, 1983, OSA 300-8-3-12050.

Communist ideology or rather an outcome of Yugoslavia's placement into world politics. The "Special War" represented by the "hostile emigration" certainly increased the nervousness inside the Yugoslav security system. How much the chimera became a factor in the outbreak of the dissolution wars would be a subject for further examination. At least in a session of Yugoslav counterespionage experts, held on the brink of the federation's break-up, the "Special War" was still prevalent.¹³²

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¹³² „Zbornik sa savetovanja o kontraobaveštajnom i obaveštajnom radu SDB i drugih službi koje vrše poslove državne bezbednosti“, SSUP (SDB), Belgrade 1988, ARS 1931/2411. Cf. Christian Costamagna, "Yugoslavia and the Special War in Late Socialism. New Research Perspectives," *Serbian Studies Research* 8, no. 1 (2017): 121–52.

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