

Declassified
A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 19, 2008

Leadership Disarray

There was no question of ultimate authority in Yugoslavia as long as Tito remained in good health. His physical and psychological deterioration in recent years and the piecemeal distribution of his authority to subordinates have, however, clouded lines of authority. The impression is left of that decisions are frequently made on the spot, are often contradictory, and largely shaped by clashes between competing narrow interests.

Part of this arises from the fact that Tito's traditional style of rule has not been modified as his vitality has declined. He has characteristically invested trusted subordinates with power and has personally intervened only when his authority was either needed to resolve an issue or was being questioned.

The main elements of this ruling style continue, but without Tito's active participation as he has drastically reduced his work schedule and is concentrating on his role as a world statesman.

Where The Action Is

The conflicts in the hierarchy involve men to whom Tito has delegated specific functional duties and Stane Dolanc, the man who has assumed the responsibility for blending their actions into a coherent national policy. Dolanc is the senior secretary of the party executive committee and de facto deputy to Tito in the party. He has tried to take up the slack left by Tito's growing incapacitation but lacks the power to force his will on the others.

In June, Dolanc reportedly took the unusual step of criticizing General Franjo Herljevic, the interior minister, at a meeting of the collective state presidency. Herljevic received the interior portfolio in 1974, when Tito ordered an upgrading of the internal security mechanism. Dolanc complained that excessive zeal by the police under Herljevic was causing problems at home and hurting Yugoslavia's image abroad. Dolanc's complaints apparently fell on deaf ears because subsequent reports indicate that the ministry continues to go its own way.

Dolanc has similarly criticized -- in private -- Foreign Minister Minic, who has been inclined to recommend actions that would needlessly worsen US-Yugoslav relations. According to another report, Dolanc has recently assumed personal responsibility for all foreign policy briefings for the state collective

presidency. This may well be an attempt by Dolanc to extend his influence into the state executive, even though by statute he is forbidden any state post.

The ambitious party secretary is also wooing junior generals in a reported effort to undercut Defense Minister Ljubivic, who like Minic and Herljevic, is a Tito appointee. Dolanc's pitch to Ljubivic's subordinates is reportedly based on the promise of a more active effort to obtain sophisticated Western arms. Tito, through Ljubivic, blocked a proposed deal last spring for US anti-tank weaponry, and the decision does not sit well with the military.

Dolanc's Rivals and Reorganization Plans

Dolanc's increasingly aggressive expansion of his influence has predictably met opposition. His sharpest critic is Jure Bilic, a member of the party executive committee. Bilic has reportedly complained directly to Tito about Dolanc's unseemly ambition and has told friends that he is trying to accumulate evidence against Dolanc.

The antipathy toward Dolanc has also taken more complicated forms. The leadership has been studying a plan to tighten policy-making power in the party hierarchy, and Dolanc's rivals have seized this opportunity to try to undercut his power base in the executive committee.

Under a new scheme, the unwieldy and ineffective party presidium now consisting of 48 members, most of whom have demanding functional duties elsewhere in the regime, would give way to a smaller group. The new body would make and oversee policy and in the process relegate Dolanc's executive committee to a lesser role. One of the ploys used by Dolanc's rivals has been to try to boost Foreign Minister Minic to head the new organ and to push for Dolanc's reassignment to a lesser post.

Dolanc at first reportedly responded to this maneuver by arguing that the reorganization should be postponed until the next party congress in 1978. He had powerful support from Edvard Kardelj, a close Tito confidant and an opponent of excessive centralization of authority in Belgrade. We believe that Dolanc received help from representatives of special interests who also dislike concentrated executive authority in the capital.

Declassified
A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 19, 2008

This tactic apparently failed, presumably because Tito was persuaded that the current presidium was simply not effective. (There was one interesting report that claimed Brezhnev used his meeting with Tito at the European Communist Party Conference in June to nudge the Yugoslav leader toward tightening the Yugoslav party leadership).

The latest information on the proposed change suggests that Dolanc and his supporters have switched their tactics and are now trying to pack the new party organ. Dolanc would like the size of the body to be fairly large around 16 members, with the core of the group consisting of the eight members of the state collective presidency. The remaining members of the "coordination and political council" -- as it is tentatively named -- would represent the six republics. Tito on the other hand is holding out for a much smaller body (6 members) made up of his close cronies plus Dolanc.

The Soviets

We suspect that the Soviets have sought to exploit the squabbles to shape the post-Tito leadership along lines more to their liking. Such efforts could be highly advantageous and attractive if they resulted in gains such as greater Soviet access to Yugoslav naval bases on the Adriatic.

Moscow's record in dealing with Dolanc strongly suggests that the Soviets might favorably consider a curtailment of his political power. Dolanc has been particularly tough on the question of Soviet support for "healthy forces" -- pro-Soviets -- in Yugoslavia. Moscow has in turn indicated its distaste for Dolanc and its preference to deal directly with Tito, thereby ignoring Dolanc's status as the party's second-in-command.

This tactic, however, has served only to alert Dolanc and the other Yugoslav leaders to Soviet intentions. Moreover, Dolanc's readiness to talk tough to the Soviets and the Soviets' demonstrated aversion for him may have increased his stature in the leadership.

The Soviets also during their party congress last March pointed up Dolanc's lack of experience. The Kremlin invited Dolanc to an informal gathering at the opera and later billed the conclave as a meeting of representatives from fraternal parties. The ensuing embarrassment was shortlived, but the impression on Dolanc was not. In June, for example, he reportedly

Declassified
 A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
 E.O. 12958, as amended
 June 19, 2008

disagreed with Tito's decision to attend the European Communist Party Conference in East Berlin, probably out of a belief that the Soviets would once again convey the impression of a Yugoslav return to the fold.

Brezhnev's recent visit to Yugoslavia provided new opportunities to influence Tito and others against Dolanc. Several sources indicate that the Soviets were visibly unhappy that Dolanc -- and not Tito -- met Brezhnev at the Belgrade airport.

The Soviets, however, must be careful not to overplay their hand or else they may inadvertently strengthen Dolanc's position. The prospect that Dolanc will play a leading role in the post-Tito era should also recommend a cautious Soviet tack.

The Testing Time

The Yugoslav leadership has been fairly stable since the purges in 1972-73. More than three years of political stability in Yugoslav practice is highly unusual. The party currently numbers nearly 1.4 million members. Yet there are approximately 700,000 ex-members -- that is, people who since 1960 have lost or turned in their party cards.

When the Yugoslav leadership is reshuffled next year, the changes will be billed as a personnel "rotation" -- a euphemism used by Belgrade for the regular transfer of portfolios to prevent the development of bureaucratic fiefdoms. The political artillery is now being drawn up for duels over the allocation of good jobs to henchmen and exiling political enemies in remote posts.

As with everything else in Yugoslavia, the task will be considerably complicated by the complex mixture of nationalities in the country. By tradition and out of hard political reality, the regime has evolved a system of proportional representation that loosely assures all ethnic groups a roll in Belgrade. With eight major nationalities and subsidiary regional ethnic groups to take into account, the process is extremely complex. Furthermore, the political impact of personnel changes is not always immediately evident. This reflects another aspect of the Yugoslav political scene -- principals in power struggles usually are not humiliated. They instead merely lose influence and tend to fade slowly from the scene.

Declassified
A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 19, 2008

Both Foreign Minister Minic and Defense Minister Ljubicic are widely rumored to be candidates for new jobs. Minic, so the rumors go, may become premier and thus be placed in the wearying and thankless position of overseeing the economy -- the primary role for the head of government. The job has traditionally been a poor platform for anyone with higher party aspirations.

Other rumors assert that Defense Minister Ljubicic is destined to take over new duties, perhaps as a leader in the Serb republic. As in Minic's case, Ljubicic will be removed from an important functional role for broader responsibilities outside of his normal realm of experience and away from his base of power. In addition, the Serbian political scene is in such disarray that it offers the next appointed leader more a headache than a career advancement.

Interior Minister Herljevic may survive the thrusts made against him by Dolanc. Following a recent private meeting between Tito and Herljevic, press releases indicated that Tito unequivocally endorsed the minister. To prevent this action from being read as a rebuke to Dolanc, however, Tito subsequently took Dolanc with him on a well-publicized tour of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Dolanc was also prominent in meetings with Brezhnev and at a recent joint session of parliament.

Prospects and Variables

The rivalry between Tito's subordinates will intensify as the time for final personnel decisions nears. The current balance of forces appears generally favorable to Dolanc, and we expect him to emerge with a clearer mandate for enforcing his will in the overall direction of policy.

There are, however, several variables that could undo him. The pivotal factor is likely to be Tito himself. His personal reaction to the squabbling in the leadership currently appears to be to let the contest run its course. He can thereby influence the selection of a first-among-equals without appearing to force his own wishes on those who survive him. There are, however, limits to his restraint. Tito is not likely to permit any of his cronies to be driven from Belgrade in disgrace. Nor will he -- or the Yugoslav generals -- permit a protracted, bitter fight that disrupts the conduct of necessary business.

Declassified
A/ISS/IPS, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 19, 2008

Given these restraints, an all-out vendetta is not likely. In this atmosphere we tend to think the highly pragmatic and organized Dolanc will be best able to consolidate his position. We also believe that his chances will dim if the power struggle causes restiveness at lower levels of the apparatus.

Dolanc must be especially alert to efforts by others to manipulate the vocal and politically active veterans' organization. The representatives of the old guard in the leadership -- Minic-Ljubivic-Herljevic, for example -- might use the veterans, who jealously guard their privileged status in society, by casting the younger Dolanc as an upstart intent on bringing the next generation to power. Dolanc's success or failure in winning the support of the Yugoslav military -- which has considerable influence over the veterans -- will be a key factor in blocking attacks from this quarter.

If, in Tito's estimation, Dolanc appears to over reach himself, the aging President could react sharply, particularly if he felt that he was being shunted aside in an unseemly fashion. Dolanc showed some concern about this as early as the last party congress in 1974, when he angrily denounced Western press articles that touted him as Tito's heir. Recently there has been a spate of similar press speculation. There are also rumors in Belgrade -- probably unfounded -- that point toward an early Tito retirement. These stories might be used as "evidence" that Dolanc is impatient for Tito's mantle.

In a speech to a recent joint session of parliament Dolanc appeared to deny the rumors of his growing ambition. He did this by noting the danger "if someone were to try to impose his partial, egotistical interests on the workers" by means of his party post. At the same time, however, he argued that communists alone cannot build socialism, a seeming allusion to his rivals' idea of setting up a new power center in the party leadership.