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“The War of Nerves.” The Role of the United Kingdom in Military Assistance to Yugoslavia during the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict, 1948-1953

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On 28 June 1948, at the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo Polje, the Informational Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform, Imformbureau) expelled the Yugoslav Communist Party from its organization. After the publication of the declaration, which condemned the Yugoslav Communist Party of its anti-Communist activities, the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union dramatically deteriorated. The Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites one by one denounced their treaties of economic cooperation, friendship and mutual assistance with Yugoslavia; expelled members of the Yugoslav diplomatic corps from their countries; imposed economic sanctions and organized monstrous anti-Yugoslav demonstrations within the framework of so called Titoist trials, among them the stage trial of László Rajk, former interior minister of Hungary. Propaganda warfare became permanent in the media and more and more border incidents took place, clearly with provocative aims. The border clashes, the military build-up of the armies in the countries neighboring Yugoslavia, which according to our current knowledge formed part of a general and essentially defensive plan, posed the possibility of a military attack against Yugoslavia.

The outbreak and the intensity of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict took the British Foreign Office, similarly to the foreign offices of other Western powers, by complete surprise. Therefore, the majority of the first reports dealt with the description of the events and the British stands. Still, even at this early stage of the conflict, the Foreign Office tried to analyze the real causes and the possible developments of the conflict and, by the summer of 1949, formulated the official British policy, namely to "keep Tito afloat." Namely, the Western powers were interested in keeping Josip Broz Tito, head of the Yugoslav Communist Party, in power. They wanted to avoid the possibility of coming into power of a Soviet-friendly Communist leadership after an unsuccessful Western experiment of democratization in Yugoslavia, plus, in order to further the defense of Italy, Austria and Greece, they wanted to break through the wall of the ostensibly monolith Soviet camp. The 32 divisions of the Yugoslav army, second largest in Europe after the Soviet Union's, was also of major importance in Western decision making. Therefore, it is understandable that numerous reports and analyzes were prepared on the war of nerves of the Soviet Union and the so called people democracies against Yugoslavia and its possible consequences.

In this article, my intention is to analyze the role the United Kingdom played in the Western military assistance to Yugoslavia. Because of the anti-Yugoslav stand of the Soviet Union and its satellites, the possibility of Tito's overthrow by military means, besides the propaganda warfare and the economic blockade, was raised at a relatively early stage of the conflict. First, therefore, I am analyzing the British perception of the possibility of such military attack, second, the role Britain played in military material assistance, and third, I take a closer look in Britain's role in tripartite military discussions with Yugoslavia. Although the British consistently rejected the possibility of a Soviet military attack against Yugoslavia, regardless of the Soviet note to Yugoslavia on 18 August 1949 or the outbreak of the Korean War, they did review the situation and the possible Yugoslav responses. Although the United Kingdom also realized that it is in its interests to supply Yugoslavia with military equipment, the extent and dimension of such assistance resulted to heated debates within and between the different departments, and with the Yugoslav delegations. Yugoslav-British military cooperation reached a higher level in 1951-1952 after the Yugoslav government had officially asked for military assistance and suggested the harmonizing of Western and Yugoslav military plans. Even if US General Thomas Hardy returned empty-handed from Belgrade in autumn 1952, later meetings took place to harmonize the Western (American, British and French) and Yugoslav military plans. Britain was interested in this process, too, especially because of the defense of Italy and Austria. Namely, it was generally thought by 1952 that if the Soviet Union attacked Yugoslavia, that would not be a separate attack against the renegade Yugoslavs but part of a general European war.

British archival sources and the possibility of a military attack against Yugoslavia

Based on the British archival sources, it can be stated that regardless of earlier indications, the possibility of Soviet and satellite military attack against Yugoslavia first appeared in detail in the confidential report of British ambassador to Yugoslavia, Sir Charles Peake (1946-1951) on 29 January 1949 as a possible consequence of the increasing border incidents. Although he stated that there was no sign of military maneuvers in Yugoslavia or in its neighbors, he mentioned that some divisions were replaced from Macedonia and the area of Trieste to the Danube and admitted that there had been rumors about such an invasion from the first days of the conflict. For example, he heard that Soviet troops had entered Yugoslavia as deep as Novi Sad and Soviet troops had been seen 50 miles from Belgrade. Despite these rumors, ambassador Peake stated that the British and American military attachés made reconnaissances every month and they had not seen any signs referring to the nervousity of the Yugoslav officials. According to Peake, such an attack would be

contrary to Stalin's cautious methods who would only launch an attack when he was sure he could reach his aim, such as in Poland or in the Baltics, or when the security of the Soviet Union would be at risk, such as in the case of Finland but none of the above mentioned criteria were present in case of Yugoslavia. Therefore, ambassador Peake suggested that other, alternative possibilities, for example calling for strikes and demonstrations or inciting internal unrest and rebellion, especially among the minorities close to the borders, must be taken into consideration. Military attack could only take place in case of serious strategic threat, for example if a Western military attack would launch against the Soviet camp through Trieste or a Western landing operations took place in the Dalmatian coasts.¹ This last option is clearly in line with Churchill's plans in 1943-1944 and are similar to the areas from where the Soviet Union expected a Western invasion, too.²

On 25 March 1949, the British Ministry of Defense prepared an analysis on the probable Soviet steps and on the possibility of a direct Soviet military attack against Yugoslavia. The analysts treated the subject in detail but finally rejected such a scenario. They found no proof for such Soviet military maneuvers that could be related to an invasion, neither did they see the Yugoslavs nervous. Moreover, Czechoslovakia was still shipping military equipments to Yugoslavia. Although the analysts were sure of an easy victory against the Yugoslav army and air forces if such an attack eventually took place, they expected the resistance of both the Yugoslav leadership and Yugoslav people. So the attackers needed to be prepared for guerrilla warfare. According to the Ministry of Defense, a further proof against a Soviet military attack would have been the public outburst as Yugoslavia was a member of the United Nations. Similarly to Peake's above mentioned report, the Ministry of Defense only considered a Soviet attack possible if something was threatening their security or they were sure of an easy victory.³

The Ministry of Defense also excluded the possibility of a satellite military attack, without direct Soviet participation, against Yugoslavia. Although it played with the thought that the Soviet Union might force Bulgaria and Albania, utilizing their existing hatred towards Yugoslavia and the pretext of the Balkan federation, to attack Tito, but in this case, so the report goes, the Soviet Union could not be accused of direct military aggression. Moreover, it did not consider any satellite attack potentially successful, regardless of direct or indirect Soviet participation. No signs indicating such a plan were observed, either. As a third scenario, the analysis took the possibility of a military coup against Tito and the Yugoslav leadership into account. Although the Ministry was sure of the

¹ The National Archives – Public Records Office, Kew Gardens, London. (In the followings: PRO) FO 371/78707 R2169/10338/92G

² CHURCHILL, WINSTON S.: *A második világháború*. [The Second World War] Budapest, 1989. Volume II., 309-311. and 351.

³ PRO FO 371/78707 R3675/10338/92G.

existence of internal opposition within the Yugoslav Communist Party and did not exclude the possibility of some misunderstanding in the higher ranks of the party leadership, Tito could count on the efficiency of the secret police. Therefore, they considered further economic and propaganda steps and, similarly to Peake's report, the creating of internal disturbances, most effectively among the minorities living close to Yugoslav borders, the only possible next scenario against Yugoslavia.⁴

Although numerous other reports were prepared by ministerial and embassy staffs on military attack against Yugoslavia, its possibility became more serious after August 1949. On 20 August, British ambassador Sir Charles Peake sent an urgent and confidential telegram to the Foreign Office in which he elaborated on his meeting earlier that afternoon with Yugoslav deputy minister of foreign affairs Aleš Bebler. According to the telegram, the Yugoslav diplomat was quite nervous and wanted to have separate discussions with the heads of the British, the American and the French diplomatic missions in Belgrade. In all likelihood, the discussions had the same purpose: Bebler wanted to inform the Western governments on the latest Soviet note, received by the Yugoslavs on 18 August: "M. Bebler then handed me a translation in Serbo Croat of the Russian original and in particular drew my attention to the final paragraph which read as follows: „[...] the Soviet considers it necessary to announce that it cannot reconcile itself to such practices and it will be obliged to *other more effective means* [emphasis added] for the protection of the rights and the interests of the Soviet citizens in Yugoslavia and to call to account the Fascist tyrants who have evaded responsibility for their action.”⁵

In his remark written on the margin of Peake's telegram, assistant secretary of the South Department of the Foreign Office, Talbot de Malahide considered a clear indication of the Yugoslav's nervousity that they had informed the Western governments on the content of the Soviet note and confidentially propounded the idea to put the question to the Security Council: "I think, therefore, that in these circumstances we might authorize Sir C. Peake to sound them informally to whether they would consider an appeal to the Security Council themselves or [...] whether they

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ PRO FO 371/78708 R8022/10338/92. The above note was related to the so called White-Guardist Emigrants in Yugoslavia. The number of the white guardians, who arrived in Yugoslavia in many waves after they had been defeated in the Russian Civil War, reached 20 thousand, including the members of their families. BANAC, IVO: *With Stalin Against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*. Ithaca – London, 1988. 218. Tito urges Stalin more than once to repatriate them to the Soviet Union but that was always rejected. Nevertheless, it was Stalin who, in August 1949, used their fate as a pretext in his propaganda war against Tito. The Informational Department of the British Foreign Office analyzed the Soviet note and concluded that its text was mostly written by Stalin himself. PRO FO 371/78710 R8347/10338/92. The text of the full note can be found in *White Book on Aggressive Activities by the Governments of the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania towards Yugoslavia*. Beograd, 1951. 124-126. Milovan Djilas mentions an interesting detail about its delivery in his memoirs: the Soviets simply left it at the door-keeper of the Yugoslav foreign ministry.. DJILAS, MILOVAN: *Die Jahre der Macht: in jugoslawischen Kräftspiel. Memoiren 1945-1966*. München, Oldenburg Verlag, 1992. 297-298.

would play up if some other power were to raise the matter."⁶ Talbot de Malahide's remark clearly indicates that the British diplomacy was fully aware of the danger the Soviet note referred to and wanted to formulate an adequate reply to it. Moreover, it means a moving away towards a more positive judgment of Tito's rule.

The Soviet note and the accompanying rumors on military maneuvers induced the Western powers to re-evaluate their previous policy towards Yugoslavia. This first happened in the United States. In his urgent and highly confidential telegram on 2 September, British ambassador to the US Oliver Franks (1948-1952) reported on the analysis of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), which elaborated the four possible alternatives of the Soviet policy and the American counter moves: direct Soviet military attack, military attack of the neighboring satellites, guerrilla warfare, and the intensification of current methods, supplemented with organizing an attack on Tito's life. The PPS considered the first alternative as the least likely scenario. Nevertheless, if the Soviet army did invade Yugoslavia, the United States would support Yugoslavia's plea to the Security Council and would participate in the preparations of a resolution condemning the attack but would not help the survival of Tito's regime with American military forces, surely to avoid direct US-Soviet confrontations. In case of the second scenario, which was also considered unlikely, the United States would again support bringing the case to the agenda of the Security Council, but – and this is a new element in American foreign policy in regard to Yugoslavia – the White House would allow the Yugoslavs to buy American arms and armory. The PPS considered the third and the fourth alternatives as the most probable scenarios: guerrilla warfare at the Albanian and Bulgarian border area or the transfer of Yugoslav dissidents through the Hungarian and Romanian borders. The American strategists expected Tito to cope with guerrilla warfare, but in case of its protraction, he would surely run out of military equipment. Therefore they suggested the granting of economic and financial aid to Yugoslavia and, strictly by Yugoslav request, the supply of military equipments. In case of the fourth scenario, the PPS only suggested limited economic assistance to Yugoslavia. However, as Franks emphasized, the above mentioned could not be regarded as the official American view-point because in order to do this, George F. Kennan, head of the PPS, and then the National Security Council had to approve of the draft statement.⁷

The American suggestions were immediately debated in the Foreign Office and the ministry informed the British embassy to the US in three telegrams, on 6 and 10 September, on their stand.

⁶ PRO FO 371/78708 R8022/10338/92.

⁷ PRO FO 371/78693 R8534/1023/92G. The recommendations of the National Security Council were approved on 14 September. The final version of the communiqué contained no reference to the Security Council. CEH, NICK (ED.): *U. S. Diplomatic Records On Relations With Yugoslavia During The Early Cold War, 1948-1957*. New York, 2002. 105-116.

Similarly to the Americans, the Foreign Office did not fear of a direct Soviet military invasion. They again considered the intensification of border incidents, at this time at the Yugoslav-Romanian border, as part of the war of nerves against Yugoslavia, and for the mounting of a successful offensive, their highly necessitated the further strengthening of the Soviet troops in Yugoslavia's neighbors. They did not seriously expect a military attack of the satellites, either, but rendered the third and fourth alternatives of the PPS likely. In this case, contrary to the American expectations, they subjected the British support of the Yugoslav case in the United Nations to certain conditions. Moreover, the Foreign Office opposed the shipment of arms to Yugoslavia. This negative stand was explained partly by the minimal availability of British arms, and partly by different and more important priorities of British foreign policy. Therefore, the Foreign Office rather expected the United States to help Tito's survival by shipping military equipment to Yugoslavia.⁸

The Russian Committee of the Foreign Office also dealt with the possibility of a military attack during its meeting on 27 September and modified its previous view point in numerous respects. The members of the committee thought that the unsuccessful Soviet economic and political steps might be followed by an "active promotion for rebellion, but to stop short of actual armed intervention by the Red Army". At the same time, the committee could not exclude for certain that the military attack would take place at a later date, but only if Stalin considered it the only possible way of overthrowing Tito and was sure of avoiding the outbreak of another world war: "the possibility of the intervention of the Red Army at some later stage could not, however, be entirely excluded if the Soviet Government came to the conclusion that by only this means would an end be put to Tito's regime, and if they were reasonably sure that it would not lead to a general war, for which we still believe them to be unprepared". Therefore, the committee only suspected the next move of the Soviet Union and considered that as "the political cards have by now nearly all been played", the Soviet note of 18 August could refer to an invasion against Yugoslavia or a preparation for a coup against Tito. This last consideration was scarcely conceivable even for the committee itself as "Yugoslavia is just as much of a police state as the others" and as the Soviet Union, plus the police and the armed forces were incredibly loyal to Tito. The committee did not even see any satisfying signs indicating the invasion of the Soviet army in the near future. They were, at the same time, aware of the fact that "Soviet troops in Hungary and Rumania have been reinforced and continue to be reinforced" but "not yet on a scale that represent a direct military threat". Therefore, they considered the denunciation of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance as the next step in the conflict.⁹ The Foreign Office accepted the evaluations of the

⁸ PRO FO 371/78693 R8534/1023/92G.

⁹ PRO FO 371/78695 R9588/1023/92G.

Russian Committee, which became the official view point, and on 11 October, Alexander Rumbold, First Secretary of the South Department, informed the State Department on its content.¹⁰

The British Chiefs of Staff dealt with the Yugoslav situation and its capability of resistance against a Soviet and/or satellite military attack in their detailed report in February 1950, which considered the military capabilities of Yugoslavia rather weak and unable to resist a foreign invasion without effective Western help. If they could, then, according to the chiefs of staff, the Yugoslav example might spread to other Communist states. This highly unfounded view was based on the expectation that some kind of national Communist tendencies existed in the Eastern European Communist countries and those were ready to establish an independent Communist rule, similar to the Yugoslav establishment. The chiefs of staff were highly interested in the size and the effects of an invasion. According to the Ministry of Defense, the Soviet Union could mobilize approximately 15-17 divisions in case of an isolated attack, which later could have been raised to 30 divisions. As such a large scale participation would have necessitated the redeployment of Soviet troops from the Western front, it would have definitely been in line with the British interests. The invasion, regardless if it had been isolated or part of a general attack against Europe, would have put additional pressure on Italy and Greece. Since Yugoslavia surely would have bound the attackers, enough time could have been won to redeploy Western troops from Trieste and Austria. Moreover, such an attack might even have had favorable impact on Greece, because Albania, fearing of a preventive Yugoslav attack, would have been unable to impose threat against its southern neighbor and even the pressure on the Bulgarian-Greek border might have been reduced. Moreover, the Western powers could have efficiently supplied Yugoslavia through the Adriatic Sea, which could have also hindered the Soviet advance. (The report considered a general war possible only with Soviet involvement.) At the same time, Western military aid had to serve two purposes: it needed to avoid the deterioration of the efficiency of Yugoslav armed forces, and it needed to adjust Yugoslav military plans to the general interests of the Western powers, namely, the defense of Western Europe, Italy and the Mediterranean. The report also reminded that no adequate information was available on the size and nature of the Yugoslav reserves, which would render the common planning more difficult. Moreover, the members of the chiefs of staffs had a negative attitude towards the Yugoslav air and naval forces. In the final part of their analysis, Yugoslav defense policy was investigated. As Britain and the United States were both unable to send troops at the beginning of an invasion, the chiefs of staff would have considered it more fortunate if the Yugoslavs had withdrawn to the mountains of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where successful guerrilla

¹⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1949. Washington, United States Government Publication Office, 1974. Vol. V. 970.

warfare could have been launched after the collapse of the Yugoslav defenses, although they highly debated whether Tito was to follow this recommendation.¹¹ As it can be indicated from later British reports, their doubts were fully established.

War of nerves and military pressure on Yugoslavia after the outbreak of the Korean War

From 25 June 1950, another factor influenced British evaluations of the Yugoslav situation. 25 June was the day the war in Korea broke out, which immediately raised the alarm of a similar unexpected Communist attack in Europe.¹² Besides the re-consideration of general Western defense plans, the role of Yugoslavia in Western military planning was also re-evaluated.

After the outbreak of the war, it was A. I. G. Ramsey, assistant military attaché to Yugoslavia who prepared the first analysis on 8 July. According to Ramsey, there had not been any significant change in the satellite armies since early 1950. Moreover, the Yugoslav army was still larger in number than that of the satellite states, which also lacked the necessary political steps needed for a successful invasion. However, the ongoing border incidents could act as factors of uncertainty. Among those, he considered the incidents on the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border the most serious, while he thought that the incidents on the Yugoslav-Hungarian border were more likely defensive than attacking in character. He acknowledged that the outbreak of the Korean War would raise the fears of the Yugoslav leaders, but he considered impossible the disguising of the attack against Yugoslavia as a civil war, similarly to the Korean War. The assistant military attaché also thought that the attack would be drawn from Bulgaria towards Niš and from Romania towards Vojvodina. The third course of attacks would be directed towards Zagreb. As Vojvodina virtually lacked Yugoslav defense, it seemed to him "likely that it has been written off militarily in advance and that the few troops there have a delaying role only." He expected Tito to withdraw his forces into the Bosnian and Montenegrin mountains and underlined that the weapons of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army were outdated but considered the morale of the soldiers good.¹³

British ambassador to Moscow David Kelly opposed the above interpretation but

¹¹ PRO DEFE 7/2096 JWPS (WP)(Arms)/P(50)11 Annex, 7 February 1950.

¹² For the background and the causes of the Korean War see: MASTNY, VOJTECH: *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*. New York – Oxford, 1996. 91-115.; GADDIS, JOHN LEWIS: *Most már tudjuk. A hidegháború történetének újraértékelése*. [We Now Know. Rethinking Cold War History.] Budapest, 2001. 135-161.; WEATHERSBY, KATHRYN: "Should We Fear This?" Stalin and the Danger of War with America. Washington, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper, 2002.; and ZUBOK, VALDISLAV – PLESHAKOV, CONSTANTINE: *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, 1996. 54-72. For Stalin's reasons: MASTNY, VOJTECH: NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956. Washington, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper, 2002. 18-36.

¹³ PRO FO 371/88240 RY1023/28. Internal Disposition of Yugoslav Forces. Peake to Younger, 8 July 1950.

emphasized that his analysis was not a military but rather a political one and was based on the propaganda articles he had read in the Soviet press. According to him, the only possibility for the Soviet Union would be the military overthrow of Tito's regime but he excluded that it would take place in the near future because, at least in his opinion, Yugoslavia played a less important role in the defense of the Soviet orbit. He thought that the direct participation of Soviet troops would have proven the fiasco of Soviet foreign policy. However, he considered it too early to determine the real motivation of the border incidents and was certain that a Soviet or satellite attack would only take place as a counter step in the event of Yugoslav aggression. He also admitted that it was too early to predict the outcome of the Korean War, and in case of its protraction, the Soviets might take the attack against Yugoslavia as an alternative step. The same could happen if the Western armies had rapid success in Korea, but in this case the reason for the attack would be to save the prestige of the Soviet armies.¹⁴

It can be indicated from the above mentioned reports that even if the British leadership was thinking about the possibility of a Soviet invasion against Yugoslavia after the outbreak of the Korean War, after the initial shock had passed, it remained only a theory. The outbreak of the Korean War was a serious psychological shock in Western Europe and politicians were afraid of a similar unexpected Soviet maneuver. Their fear was not unfounded. In January 1951 Stalin summoned the military and party leaders of the Eastern European satellites and during their meeting of 9-12 January ordered them to raise their national armies to such a level that would make a military attack possible in two or three years' time. One reason behind the Soviet view point must have been the successful Chinese offensive on the Korean Peninsula. The other reason might have been the confidential information of the Soviet intelligence, not confirmed, that the United States would have been ready to use the atomic bomb against Eastern European targets if a war had took place on the continent, and intended to provoke a European conflict during the summer of 1951, for which it would have used Yugoslavia as a stepping-stone. The halting of the Chinese invasion and the arrest of Soviet spies once again modified the Soviet policy and Stalin abandoned his plan in May 1951.¹⁵ As Stalin was suspicious of a Western military attack against the Soviet Union, his plan might have been defensive in character. Moreover, the military build-up and the preparations for a successful invasion could not happen from one day to the other, so the above mentioned plan of the Soviet dictator does not mean that a Soviet Union would have launched a military invasion in 1951.

¹⁴ PRO FO 371/88240 RY1023/35. Kelly to Younger, 14 July 1950.

¹⁵ MASTNY: NATO op. cit. 29-31. The Hungarian leadership, lead by Mátyás Rákosi, participated in the Moscow meeting, too, and although they were shocked by the Soviet plans, they dutifully obeyed the Soviet instructions. BORHI, LÁSZLÓ: *Magyarország a hidegháborúban. A Szovjetunió és az Egyesült Államok között, 1945-1956.* [Hungary in the Cold War. Between the Soviet Union and the United States, 1945-1956.] Budapest, 2005. 239-240.

Still, I would like to note that those who lived in the early 1950s could not exclude the possibility of another war in Europe. Even if both the Americans and the British considered the military invasion against Yugoslavia only a theory, and certainly not the most probable one, they had to be cautious that in case such an invasion had taken place they would have needed to be ready to help, some way or other, Tito's regime, which with its independence, all things considered, strengthened Western defense plans. Therefore it was logical to supply arms and other military equipments to Yugoslavia and harmonize the defense plans. In the next chapter, I am analyzing the question of Western military assistance to Yugoslavia from a British view point, and in regard to the fall of military balance between Yugoslavia and the satellites, and the detailed reports on the possible directions of the invasion.

The question of Western military assistance and the formation of Western defense plans

The military assistance to Yugoslavia, in the form of supplying weapons and equipment, had appeared earlier in American analyses, but it was just during the autumn of 1950 when Britain started to deal with this question more seriously. So much time needed to elapse before the official British view point changed toward Tito in this respect. As it can be indicated from the letter of the Foreign Office to the Ministry of Defense on 13 November 1950, Yugoslavia officially asked for credit for the purchase of weapons from France. Although Talbot de Malahide, head of the Southern Department in the Foreign Office made it clear in that letter that Britain has "not very much to offer the Yugoslavs now", that did not divert their support from a joint tripartite (American, British and French) initiative. Moreover, Malahide regarded the French aid as the beginning of a joint Western approach towards Yugoslavia.¹⁶

By request of the Foreign Office, the Chiefs of Staff again dealt with the question of an invasion against Yugoslavia and, in connection to that, the Western aids during its meeting on 17 November 1950. The meeting analyzed the report of the Tripartite Working Commission, which held its sessions in Washington. The working commission reached an agreement in principle that "subject to political and strategic considerations" Yugoslavia can be supplied with arms and military equipment. Similarly to the previous British and American analyzes, the report distinguished four forms of Soviet attack against Yugoslavia: increasing of the current political, economic and psychological pressure; guerrilla warfare; launching of a military invasion by Yugoslavia's neighbors; and Soviet military attack against Yugoslavia, which was only considered possible in the

¹⁶ PRO DEFE 7/215 COS 1536/17/11/50 Annex, FO to DEFE, 13 November 1950.

early summer. As the members of the commission were fully aware that the protraction of a limited conflict could extend to general war, they suggested that Western powers should help to secure the internal cohesion within Yugoslavia and strengthen the regime's ability to resist a future Soviet and/or satellite military pressure or guerrilla warfare in order to deter the Soviet Union and its satellites from aggressive steps against Yugoslavia.

In connection with the Western strategic aims, the commission also dealt with the size and the quality of the Soviet-satellite and Yugoslav armed forces. The strategists expected that the Soviet Union would have participated with approximately 25-30 divisions during an invasion, from which 6-6 divisions would have been stationed in Hungary, in Austria and in Rumania. As supply and reinforcement could pose a serious problem for the invaders in mountainous territories, the commission expected the active attack of 20-25 divisions, helped by an air force of 1200-1500 planes and the Soviet fleet on the Baltic Sea. Yugoslavia's four satellite neighbors had 30 divisions at their disposal on their own, although their efficiency varied. Among the satellite armies and contrary to previous British estimates, the Bulgarian army was considered the most efficient because it had 400 Soviet T-34 tanks at its disposal. At the beginning of a military attack, so the estimate, the satellites could mobilize 650 thousand soldiers, but that number could be raised to 845 thousand, in 40-50 divisions, within 30 days. Against such an invading force stood Yugoslavia with its 33 divisions and 400 tanks, from which about 250-300 were T-34, mostly used in the Second World War. The commission estimated that about 400 thousand soldiers could be mobilized at the beginning of the invasion, which could be raised to 400 thousand in 45 divisions within a month, although these new divisions could not be well equipped. As the numbers indicate, Yugoslavia lagged behind the satellites by early 1951 in the number of its soldiers, which could not be counterbalanced by its 300 airplanes, mostly models from the Second World War, even if that represented a much better air force than its Communist neighbors'.

Because of the poorly equipped Yugoslav troops, the commission considered the Yugoslav defeat inevitable, "unless military assistance is provided". If not only Yugoslavia's neighbors but other Eastern European Soviet satellites participated in the invasion, the prospects for Tito and the Yugoslav leadership would be even worse: "Should additional satellite resources thrown into the war, such as the Polish Air Force, the process of wearing down Tito's forces would be accelerated. Substantial support from these sources is considered unlikely, however." In case the Soviet Union participated, "Yugoslavia would have no hope of holding the plains, and her only chance of prolonged resistance would lie establishing a defensive line in the mountains to the southwest." The success of which "require major and prompt material assistance from the outside."

Regarding the military aid during war, the working commission considered its shipment,

within the shortest time possible, the most crucial aspect. Therefore, they suggested its stocking in the area. The tripartite working commission presumed that France could deliver German weapons, mostly used during and confiscated after World War II, while Britain could help the fleet and air forces, as it was going to have enough Mosquito bombers at its disposal in 1951-1952, from which it could deliver to Yugoslavia, together with the necessary training. Surprisingly, the report did not state the undertaking of the American obligation. As the American participant explained during the discussions, because of the Korean War, the United States had no free available stock at that moment. The efficient military assistance raised a further problem: how to deliver the shipments to Yugoslavia. In peace time it could have been easily arranged, and shipping on the Adriatic Sea was still possible in a limited war of the satellites, as they did not have significant fleet or air forces, but the Soviet control of the airspace during an open Soviet participation would have made it rather difficult.¹⁷

After its meeting on 17 November, the British Chiefs of Staff again discussed the proposal of the working commission during its session on 24 November 1950 and invited the Foreign Office to tally the details of the shipments. Obviously, the Foreign Office did that, but, as it can be deferred from its letter to the Chiefs of Staff on 6 January 1951, the opinion of the State Department had changed. The Americans feared that Tito would not allow the Tripartite Fact Finding Commission to inquire in Yugoslavia, therefore, the "State Department do not like our [e.g. the British] proposal to offer Tito arms now".¹⁸

The next time the Ministry of Defense discussed the military assistance to Yugoslavia was on 23 January 1951. Talbot de Malahide, who participated in the meeting, elucidated the view point of the Foreign Office, according to which, and contrary to the opinion of the other ministries, Yugoslavia needed to be supplied with military equipments as soon as possible. Therefore, the Foreign Office did not object the French proposal to "supply Yugoslavia with certain ex-German military supplies which they have available", but, the Americans alike, opposed the journey of the Tripartite Fact Finding Commission to Yugoslavia as Tito "would probably turn it down."¹⁹

The rather reserved British stand point soon underwent a complete revision because Milovan Djilas "made a direct request that His Majesty's Government should supply Yugoslavia with arms" during his official visit in London at the end of January 1951. According to the Prime Minister's note of 29 January about their working luncheon, Djilas inquired on the possibility of purchasing British military equipment but asked that it took place discretely and not at the plenum of the

¹⁷ PRO DEFE 7/215 COS 1536/17/11/50 Appendix, 17 November 1950.

¹⁸ PRO DEFE 7/215 COS 25/6/1/51 FO to COS, 6 January 1951.

¹⁹ PRO FO 371/95539 RY1192/33G.

NATO. As the note of Deputy Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Ernest Davies (1950-1951) of 29 January amplified the Prime Minister's note, Djilas also hinted that the Yugoslavs had already asked for military assistance from the United States through informal channels. Consequently, the Foreign Office indicated in its recommendation of 31 January that the Yugoslav request should be dealt in a sympathetic way but no definite commitment be given: Britain could help "in the light of availabilities and of our other commitments." Considering the course of the Western assistance, the Foreign Office suggested a rapid consultation with the Americans and the French, which was to be followed by the invitation of Yugoslav experts to London to work out the details.²⁰

Before the Yugoslav experts arrived in London, the discussions on military assistance had developed in three directions: summary of the available arms and ammunition for Yugoslavia; a joint Western statement considering the Yugoslav situation; and the theoretical use of nuclear weapons.

The theoretical discussion on the use of the nuclear weapons in case of war reappeared on 27 February 1951 when the report of the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) was discussed. The Chiefs of Staff insisted vigorously on making such a statement that "open up to the Russians the possibility that we might use the atomic bomb, without actually committing us to the use of this weapon." By all certainty, the CoS was fully aware of the consequences of a rash obligation as it would render immediate and direct Soviet steps, which could easily have led to direct nuclear conflict. Presumably for these reasons, a more general wording was suggested: "all facilities at our disposal".²¹ The question was reconsidered at the meeting of the Tripartite Joint Working Committee Meeting in Washington on 20 March. Although the report of the meeting states that the use of a nuclear bomb "would be inadvisable," its later use was not fully excluded.²² In its meeting the next day, the British Chiefs of Staff accepted the recommendations of the Working Committee, but amplified it with the following sentence: "consultation before the use of the atomic bomb would be necessary not only with the United Kingdom but also with the other United Nations concerned."²³ The aim of the Chiefs of Staff with this phrase was probably to hinder any independent actions of the United States.

The question of a joint Western statement on the Yugoslav situation was partly connected to

²⁰ PRO FO 371/95539 RY1192/34G. According to another note in the Foreign Office Papers, that refers to the result of the negotiations, the United States, similarly to Britain, will decide based on its reserve, priorities and certain other factors. In case of a Yugoslav urging for decision, the Americans would have been ready to provide the Yugoslavs with the necessary information without further hesitation, but for concrete military assistance, they expected more from the Yugoslav leadership than a detailed list about those items the Yugoslav wished for. PRO FO 371/95539 RY1192/41G.

²¹ PRO DEFE 7/215 COS Annex, 27 February 1951.

²² PRO FO 371/95473 RY1023/57G.

²³ PRO DEFE 7/216 COS (51) 21. March 1951.

the use of nuclear weapons. It was first suggested in the memorandum of the US Policy Planning Staff on 31 January 1951 recommending such a statement that would refer first to a similar situation in the Korean War and second to Yugoslav membership in the United Nations.²⁴ Although the usefulness of a joint statement was soon rejected, separate British and American declarations were indeed published in February 1951. The British statement was published by Minister of Workfare Aneurin Bevan (1947-1951) in the House of Common emphasizing that the Charter of the United Nations provided the same protection for each and every nations. The American statement was published by US Secretary of State Dean Gooderham Acheson (1949-1953) at his news conference on 14 February in reply to a question inquiring about US foreign policy objectives towards Yugoslavia and were as follows: "[...] those who have it in their power to unleash or withhold actions of aggression should know that new acts of aggression committed in the world would strain the fabric of peace to a dangerous extent. That is the broad policy of the United States. Our attitude towards aggression is indicated very clearly in our attitude in regard to Korea and in the United Nations and in support of the United Nations."²⁵

As it was mentioned earlier, Britain had difficulties in shipping military equipment to Yugoslavia even in a limited scale. As the representative of the Admiralty set it forth during the meeting of the Arms Working Party Commission on 20 March 1951, the British government could supply Yugoslavia with 30 thousand .303 pistols, 18 thousand Lanchester rifles, 21 thousand Smith and Welson pistols, 750 thousand Vickers .303 guns, and ammunition but tank and airplane engines could be provided only in 6-18 months' time, and the anti-tank mines, requested by the Yugoslavs, could not be shipped in the near future. Because of their own needs, they were not able to provide any tanks to Yugoslavia at all. The same can be said in connection with airplanes and their equipments, although the Admiralty did not exclude the possibility of the shipment of some choppers in half a year's time, but those still needed to be withdrawn from other areas. Therefore, the committee suggested supplying Yugoslavia with the necessary licenses for the manufacturing of those arms and equipments. However, this was only a recommendation and the committee invited the other relevant departments to discuss the question.²⁶

It was the Foreign Office that insisted on providing Yugoslavia with efficient military aid, while the War Office was in general against such assistance to Tito's regime as any shipment for Yugoslavia, at least according to its position, "could only be issued to the detriment of the

²⁴ FRUS 1951. Vol. IV. 1717-1718.

²⁵ For Bevin's statement see: Hansard. House of Commons Official Report. London, 1951. Volume 484. 728. For Acheson's see: PRO FO 371/95470 RY1023/24.

²⁶ PRO DEFE 7/216 Arms Working Party Minutes, 20 March 1951.

requirements of the British Army."²⁷ In trying to surmount these two extreme view points, the Ministry of Defense endorsed in theory the suggestion of the Foreign Office that instead of Britain, Canada may provide Yugoslavia with the necessary military equipment but feared that in such case Canada would insist in participating in the working commission, even if it was familiar with the unfavorable position of the War Office as "the remainder of the surplus Canadian equipment should be earmarked as reserve to those European countries which use British type military equipment".²⁸

Finally, in its letter of 11 May 1951, the Ministry of Defense informed the Foreign Office that although it appreciates "the political significance of our making a reasonably large contribution" but "we could hardly hope to compete with the Americans in this respect." Therefore, only 70 Spitfire air planes, not in their best shape, 18 other planes from the British units in the Middle East and 90 Mosquito night planes could be provided. Still, the ministry managed to persuade the War Office to reconsider the possibility of the shipment of Canadian equipments on reserve.²⁹

This reconsideration was highly necessary as the US leadership was more and more ready to supply Yugoslavia with arms and equipment in a significant amount. The Americans informed the British and French delegates in the Tripartite Working Commission on 9 April 1951 that the United States was "now ready to supply a considerable amount of equipment in the near future, provided that they can obtain Congressional approval [...] and the further information which they require from the Yugoslavs", including the shipment of 25 thousand Howitzer machine guns and 200 middle-sized tanks.³⁰ The Americans were also reviewing the means of financing the military assistance. On 3 May, during the session of the working commission, they suggested the signing of bilateral agreements with Yugoslavia on the details of shipment and financing instead of a common approach.³¹

So the planned tripartite-Yugoslav meeting in London finally did not take place. Instead, the delegation of the Yugoslav Chief of Staff Koča Popović (1946-1953) and General Todorović had separate discussions in the three capitals. In London, it was Deputy Imperial Chief of Staff Harold Parker who first met the delegation on 16 May 1951. According to Parker's own notes and his report to the Ministry of Defense, the Yugoslavs, at least officially, claimed Western arms and equipments because the Soviet Union had armed the neighboring satellites. Therefore the Yugoslav delegation thought, in accordance with the earlier British stand, that the stronger their army was the weaker the

²⁷ PRO FO 371/95540 RY1192/80G.

²⁸ PRO FO 371/95540 RY1192/85.

²⁹ PRO DEFE 7/217 Ministry of Defence to Morrison, 11 May 1951.

³⁰ PRO FO 371/95541 RY1192/95G.

³¹ PRO FO 371/95541 RY1192/110G.

possibility was for a Soviet and/or satellite military aggression. Although the delegation emphasized that Yugoslavia only asked for military equipment, not divisions, it urged, for effective use, the arrival of such shipments as soon as possible. The delegation asked mostly anti-tank and anti-aircraft defense equipments and weapons against the infantry from the British in the form of short and middle term assistance. As the Yugoslavs were fully aware of Britain's difficulties, they were ready to reduce their demands and, in certain cases, were content with German World War II models.³² In my opinion, this Yugoslav attitude clearly shows that Yugoslavia, in any case, wanted to get hold of Western arms and military equipments and there is no reason to question that in 1951 Tito and the Yugoslav leadership sincerely feared a military attack.

In his reply to Todorović, Harold Parker assured the Yugoslav delegation that "we were considering the request [...] with every sympathy and desire to help", but repeatedly emphasized their difficulties. Therefore, he suggested that the Yugoslavs rather asked direct assistance from the United States: "it would be very useful if after his talks in London he were to proceed to Washington" where "actual negotiations as to supplies should take place [...] with the Tripartite Committee."³³

On 31 May, the Chiefs of Staff also consulted with Todorović but no move forward took place. The Chiefs of Staff sounded their view that technical discussions should take place the earliest time possible to handle the current Yugoslav problem and emphasized that in "two or three years time we might well have some supplies available, but at the present moment we wanted all and more than we could make for ourselves."³⁴

The visit of Koča Popović to the United States, already underway, was more successful. The American notes indicate that the Americans had a more positive attitude in handling the Yugoslav request: they were ready to send military equipment and provide the necessary training of Yugoslav officials in form of a bilateral treaty but only after an official Yugoslav appeal for help. They also suggested that joint detailed technical discussions took place and expected from the Yugoslavs to allow the inquiry of American experts on the spot.³⁵

On his way home from London and Washington, Popović stopped in Paris. During his meeting with the French representatives, he used the same argument for military assistance as he set forth in his discussions with British and American delegates and repeatedly emphasized the merits of the Yugoslav army. The French were again ready to supply Yugoslavia with German World War

³² PRO FO 371/95542 RY1192/133G and 134G.

³³ PRO FO 371/95542 RY1192/134G.

³⁴ PRO DEFE 7/218 COS (31 May 1951.) to William Elliott 1 June 1951.

³⁵ CEH: op, cit. 287-289. The official Yugoslav ask for help arrived on 28 June. From then on, the Yugoslavs even gave their consent to the inquiry of a 14-member American mission.

II weapons in large scale but found the shipment rather problematic.³⁶

Despite the failure of the London discussions, Yugoslavia did send a technical mission to the British capital. In my opinion, it again indicates that Tito and the Yugoslav leadership tried to grasp every opportunity to provide their poorly equipped army with modern arms and equipments, and the repeated and emphatic assertion of a possible Soviet military attack provided a convenient pretext for that.

The Ministry of Defense had multiple discussions with the Yugoslav mission between 7-14 August 1951. During the meetings, the Yugoslavs repeated their previous requests and added new demands concerning the training of their officials. While the Treasury, probably on pressure from the Foreign Office, was ready to accept that Britain provide the costs for the 38 Mosquito air planes and their shipment, the Yugoslavs, whose stand became more and more demanding, raised their claim to 60 such planes. Moreover, they had more objections to the British offer and, according to the minutes of the meetings, the Yugoslav delegation took offense at the fact that the air planes would not be fully equipped (probably with the latest technology). Therefore, their night time use was excluded and because of their slow speed, the planes were unsuitable for daytime flights, too. As the air plane factory had no extra capacity, the Ministry suggested the selling of a fully equipped air plane to Yugoslavia so that the Yugoslavs could manufacture the extra equipments for their own planes based on that model. The British were also ready to provide Yugoslavia with the necessary licenses but repeatedly made it clear that they are unable to ship more air planes or equipment.³⁷

During and after the discussions on British shipments, both the Ministry of Defense and the Foreign Office found it important to prepare new analyzes on the possibility of a military attack against Yugoslavia and review the necessary British steps if that happened. Although none of these reports dealt seriously with such a scenario, Colonel Bird, British Military Attaché to Belgrade, provided a detailed analysis in his report on 15 March 1952 on the conditions in the Yugoslav army and on the Yugoslav options if such an attack did take place. Needless to say, Bird painted a gloomy picture on the equipment of the Yugoslav National Army and objected that the "Yugoslav army is still to a large extent depended on horse transport" and the army lacked adequately trained technical experts. Moreover, he saw two basic problems in case of a foreign invasion: the impossibility to defend the borders and the settlement of real Yugoslav plans. In connection with the first problem, Colonel Bird ascertained that, because of moral reasons, the mass evacuation of the population was impossible, therefore, he was certain that the Yugoslavs would held on to defending their borders, at

³⁶ PRO FO 371/95545 RY1192/198G.

³⁷ PRO FO 371/95546 RY1192/215G and 219G, PRO DEFE 7/220 Minutes of 7 August 1951., DEFE 7/221, Minutes of 13, 23 and 24 August 1951.

least until mobilizing their reserves. If the above happened, Bird was sure that the Yugoslavs would be seriously defeated, that might even paralyze their later guerrilla warfare in the mountains. Therefore he regarded "to fight with strong withdrawal" the real aim and only useful tactics of the Yugoslav army. The colonel expected a complete defeat of the Yugoslavs if a direct clash had taken place in Vojvodina, and underlined it with multiple reasons. According to his knowledge, the Yugoslavs only had 300 decrepit T-34 tanks, dispersed in the country, while the Western tanks "cannot be ready to fight in armoured formations by the end of this year." Moreover, full supply was not well provided, bridges were full and in wrong shape, and even if air force supply was necessary for successful land warfare, the Yugoslav air force "has little or no experience of ground/air co-operation or the support of armour in battle." Of the 27 Yugoslav divisions, only two were stationed in Vojvodina and their supply during an invasion was rather difficult: the nearest military warehouse was at Smederevo but the only road it could be approached on was through the bridge at Pančevo. Based on all these, Colonel Bird considered the tactics of withdrawal to the mountains the only possibility.³⁸

Colonel Bird's anxiety was not unfounded. A few weeks earlier, on 20 February 1952, Yugoslav President Ivan Ribar and Colonel General Peko Dapčević arrived in London, on the occasion of the burial of King George VI, and held discussions with the British Chiefs of Staff. It was the first time that the Yugoslavs officially stated that "Yugoslavia is now ready to enter into defence discussions with the United Kingdom regarding the defence of her country." Regardless of this, they were prepared to defend their borders and underlined that withdrawing "would be politically and militarily quite unacceptable." The Yugoslavs again articulated their fear that "any arms we provided would for the most part be only those suitable for partisan warfare in the mountains."³⁹ There was some truth in the Yugoslavs' anxiety as the British strategists found it impossible to accomplish the defense of the borders while their real aim was to protect the roads leading to Italy and Greece and not in a protracted guerrilla war in the Bosnian mountains.

Probably the changed Yugoslav attitude was a factor to consider when the Cabinet Defense Committee again dealt with the question of military assistance to Yugoslavia during its meeting on 21 May 1952. At the time of the meeting, Yugoslavia was still on the same level with India and Pakistan on the list that determined the scale of the British assistance, which meant a significant disadvantage to NATO members or countries in the Middle East. Regardless of that, the committee only stated that "Yugoslavia's demands should be treated on their merits in the lights of her needs at the time and of the current political and military situation." The committee also acknowledged the

³⁸ PRO FO 371/102230 WY1194/1.

³⁹ PRO DEFE 7/222 COS Note by Colonel W. M. Street, 20 February 1952.

arguments of the Treasury on the payment for the shipments of further military assistance and underlined that the Cabinet had just granted another aid in value of 4.5 million pounds that Yugoslavia could call for in the financial year of 1952-1953.⁴⁰

At the same day, the Joint Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staffs also dealt with Yugoslavia, particularly with the harmonizing of the tripartite military plans. The minute of the meeting emphasized that, in case of a Soviet attack, the Yugoslav efforts would depend on the defense of Western Europe in general, and therefore, it was essential to reconcile their plans. Based on the discussions with Ivan Ribar and his delegation, the Chiefs of Staff took it for granted that "political reasons dictate that Yugoslavia should defend the Northern plains including Belgrade." So it was necessary to "persuade them that this defence should be a fighting withdrawal towards the mountains", first, because the mountains in Bosnia could provide shelter for the Yugoslav soldiers, second, because with their active withdrawal, the Yugoslav troops would defend the Valley of the River Vardar (where the road leads to Thessaloniki and the Aegean Sea) and the so called Ljubljana Gap, providing Italy with enough time for mobilization.⁴¹ However, the success of such a plan necessitated informing the Italian government at least about the details of the discussions concerning Yugoslavia, even if the British, according to the wording of the minute, were not happy of that prospect at all. Still, that could hardly have been avoided as the "major part of any air support to Yugoslavia will probably be conducted from bases in Italy." Similar methods of providing information were considered necessary in regard to Greece and Turkey, too.⁴²

The next significant, although not highly successful, step to the joint tripartite-Yugoslav military planning took place in November 1952 when a tripartite delegation, lead by General Thomas Troy Handy, deputy supreme commander-in-chief of the US troops in Europe, arrived in Belgrade to discuss the Western and Yugoslav defense plans.

Visit of the Tripartite Delegation: harmonizing the military plans

The discussions between the Yugoslav and the tripartite (American, British and French) delegations took place in Belgrade between 15-20 November 1952. The British delegation participating at the

⁴⁰ PRO FO 371/102228 WY1192/26G.

⁴¹ It was Imperial Chief of Staff John Harding who, at a joint British-Yugoslav military exercise on 18-25 September 1953, first realized that the Ljubljana Gap did not exist. The Slovenian capital stretches in a relatively flat valley, which opens to the direction of Austria and not Italy. PRO WO 216/847 157-160. Report by C. I. G. S. on Visit to Yugoslav Army Manoeuvres 18-25 September 1953.

⁴² PRO CAB 21/3277 J. P. (52)57(Final) 21 May 1952. Otherwise, British Ambassador to the United States, Franks assumed in his telegram to the Foreign Office on 13 November 1951 that the United States wanted to reduce the scope of military assistance to Slovenia. PRO FO 371/95476 RY1023/108G. The defense of Slovenia in other words meant the protection of Italy.

discussions was composed by Colonel Bird, Military Attaché at the British Embassy to Yugoslavia, Air Attaché Gayner, and Navy Attaché Wyburd. Although Tito had said beforehand that "it was the Yugoslav intention to present complete information on both the enemy and their own situations" to the Western delegates, the mood of the discussions was not the most cordial. Moreover, the Yugoslav delegation even warned the Western delegates of their "obligations" to assist Yugoslavia, and because of the geographical position of the country (it would fall into the first line of Western defense), they have "the "right" to be given more information and more military aid." The Yugoslavs also took the opportunity to express their discontent with the extent and size of the Western military assistance. Once, they even stated explicitly that "Russia was doing a much better and quicker job in equipping the satellites than we [the Western powers] were doing to Yugoslavia". Even Handy could not resist such a remark without comment. On the other hand, the American general made a grievance of the Yugoslavs' unwillingness to reveal their own plans and estimates. The Yugoslav delegation insisted that it could only provide such information after it had got the necessary guarantees that the Western powers would not transmit that information. Handy even supposed that that the Yugoslavs had bugged the meeting room: it happened once that Yugoslav Deputy Chief of Staff Peko Dapčević, leader of the Yugoslav delegation, after having returned to the meeting, started to voice opinions in diametrical opposition to his previous stand.

During the discussions, the Yugoslavs excluded the possibility of a limited invasion against Yugoslavia and argued that a satellite attack could only be successful if the Soviet Union would directly participate in it, which would mean nothing else but the outbreak of World War III. At the same time, the Yugoslavs were seriously afraid of the presupposition that, in case of a limited attack, the Western powers would not want to provide assistance at all. It was impossible to convince them of the opposite. According to Handy's summary, the Yugoslav delegation demanded more assistance all through the discussions, for which they provided the shift in Yugoslav-satellite military balance to the latter's favor as a reason, but, at the same time, were boasting of the merits of their army.⁴³ The Yugoslav army, although their delegation never mentioned exact figures during the meetings, was estimated by the Western intelligence for 275 thousand soldiers in 33 divisions in April 1951 and 325 thousand in 33 divisions in August 1952. Still, the Yugoslavs were ready to indicate the number of divisions that were to defend Yugoslavia at the particular borders at the beginning of an invasion. According to this, 14-16 divisions were ready at the Hungarian border, 18 divisions at the Romanian, 9 divisions at the Bulgarian, and 3 or 4 divisions at the Albanian border sections. The reserves could form another 6-8 divisions. These numbers are interesting for two

⁴³ PRO FO 371/107822 WY1022/1G.

reasons. First, they indicate that the Yugoslavs, similarly to the Western analyzes, expected the main course of the invasion through the Hungarian and Romanian borders, second, the total number of the divisions (50-55) was significantly higher than the 33 divisions previously estimated by the British.

The Yugoslavs provided the Western delegations with a more detailed account on the satellite armies. According to these estimates, the Hungarians had 20, the Romanian 24, the Bulgarian 14, and tiny Albania 3 divisions. Another 10 Soviet divisions could be added to this 61 divisions, 3 of them stationing in Austria, 3 in Hungary, and 4 in Romania. The Yugoslavs did not left out of account that after mobilization, Bulgaria could raise the number of its divisions to 26, and Hungary to 34. They did not provide data for Romania. Among the satellites, Dapčević regarded the Hungarians as the "best soldiers and that because of their hatred of the Serbs they would willingly fight against YUGOSLAVIA [capitals in the original document, V. P.]", moreover, they "have been promised the return of the VOJVODINA [capitals in the original document, V. P.] country". In terms of ideology, he considered the Bulgarian army the best as they are "opportunists and brother Slavs to the Russians." Therefore, the Yugoslavs estimated that the Bulgarians would closely follow the Soviet initiatives. On the other hand, they did not see any aggressive Romanian military aim and the Yugoslavs did not regard the Romanians as good soldiers. Considering the preparations for an invasion, the Yugoslavs were particularly worried because "all satellite borders facing YUGOSLAVIA [capitals in the original document, V. P.] were trenched and wired". The Yugoslavs regarded this as usual Soviet tactics before an invasion, which, according to them, could be launched any time under the pretext of a military training.⁴⁴ However, it can not be deduced from the minutes how seriously the Yugoslavs feared a Soviet attack or they simply wanted to provide their army more modern Western arms and equipment.⁴⁵

As opposed to the Yugoslav estimates and based on their own intelligence, the tripartite delegation estimated the number of the satellite armies to 675 thousand soldiers in 42 divisions; 14 in Bulgaria and in Romania, 10 in Hungary and 4 in Albania. The estimates counted 6 Soviet divisions in the area, equally shared between Austria, Hungary and Romania. At the launching of the invasion, the satellites would be unable to use all their divisions, as some of them would be needed for reasons of internal security and communication, and further 6-8 divisions would be needed to protect the Greek and Turkish borders. Apart from the shift in the proportions between the Yugoslav and the satellite armies, Western intelligence estimates considered the quality of the

⁴⁴ Such a large scale military exercise took place between 11-20 July 1952. OKVÁTH IMRE: A magyar hadsereg háborús haditervei, 1948–1962. [War Plans of the Hungarian Army, 1948-1962.] *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 2006/1. 37.

⁴⁵ PRO FO 371/102168 WY1022/94G.

Yugoslav army as another serious challenge. Although they accepted that their weapons were of good quality, most of them were Soviet and German models from World War II. They regarded the Yugoslav air force, with its 12 thousand pilots and 400 air planes, mostly a tactical force, the main aim of which was to assist the ground forces and the air defense but the achievement of these aims was seriously hindered by the lack of reserves and modern equipment. Similarly, the Yugoslav navy was poorly equipped, too, and its roles were solely to secure reinforcements through the Adriatic Sea, neutralize the Albanian coast, and lay mines in the River Danube.⁴⁶

As the discussions moved on, the Yugoslavs became more ready to protect the Trieste-Ljubljana Gap, with 12 divisions, and the road to Thessaloniki in order to provide direct connection to the Western powers, at least at the beginning of the invasion. But the Yugoslav delegation was aware of that in reality, such a plan would have protected Italy and not Yugoslavia, a fact Handy had to admit, too.

During the discussions, General Handy consistently emphasized the importance of controlling the lines of communication and requested useful information from the Yugoslavs for a successful tripartite planning. The American general also supposed that Yugoslav defense plans might be rather different from NATO plans and suggested that, in reality, the defense plan the Yugoslavs provided to the tripartite delegation aimed nothing more than the concealment of their plans for mobilization.

As for final conclusion, Handy stated that the Yugoslavs were still suspicious of the real aim of the tripartite discussions in general and of the Western aims of protecting Northern Italy in particular. He was certain that if an invasion took place, the Yugoslavs would have defended their borders and lines of communication as they would have been needed for the distribution of Western shipments from the ports at the Adriatic Sea, but could not find out whether the Yugoslavs wished the direct participation of Western ground forces in case of war or would only set a claim for military equipment, which, according to Handy, was highly needed in the Yugoslav army. For more successful discussions, he suggested the tripartite governments to provide Yugoslavia with such a statement, in which the Western powers guarantee the assistance of Yugoslavia if an aggressive act were committed against it. Precisely, that would cover military assistance to the Yugoslav fleet and air forces, the guarantee for Yugoslavia's border, and the shipment of military equipment. Handy also emphasized that for a successful Yugoslav resistance, more Western military aid was necessary and as soon as possible. He accentuated the importance of joint planning and the maintenance of direct contact, too, for which further discussions with a different and more suitable basis were

⁴⁶ PRO FO 371/107822 WY1022/1G.

essential. Therefore, he suggested joint political discussions first, which could later be extended to military operational discussions.⁴⁷

Although the Foreign Office acknowledged that the Handy mission was a failure, it opposed providing Yugoslavia with further guarantees. As for reasons, it cited the Yugoslavs' objection to formal pacts and did not regard the international situation different, either. The dilemma of the Foreign Office was articulated in the South Department by N. J. A. Cheetham, who admitted that "it would hardly help merely to repeat the statement of Bevan in 1951" but "in view of our relations with Italy and our commitments to N.A.T.O. we do not see how we could go further."⁴⁸

The consequences of the failure of the tripartite mission were dealt with at the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 23 February 1953 and the generals, in line with the Americans, recommended that later military discussions should concentrate only to the protection of the Ljubljana area. Other topics could be put on the table of the discussions, but only if the Yugoslavs asked for them. The Chiefs of Staff again excluded the possibility of Yugoslavia's membership in the NATO and no change happened in their attitude to British military assistance, either, which was only to be provided in accordance with their other obligations.⁴⁹

Regardless of the British backing and the more peaceful foreign policy of the new Soviet leadership after Stalin's death (5 March 1953), the military cooperation did not terminate completely between Yugoslavia and the three Western powers. New tripartite-Yugoslav military discussions took place on 24-28 August 1953, and a joint British-Yugoslav military exercise took place between 18-25 September 1953 as Tito did not wish to sacrifice his good working relations with the Western powers on the altar of Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation. Still, the normalization of Soviet-Yugoslav relationships provided Tito with a huge advantage: it increased the scope for action of Yugoslav foreign policy and resulted to the signing of the so called Balkan Military Pact between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey in Bled on 9 August 1954 and the peaceful settlement of the Trieste question through the signing of the London memorandum of understandings on 5 October 1954. This increased scope for action enabled Tito to send an elusive reply in March 1955 to the suggestion of US Admiral John Howard Cassady about joint Yugoslav-American military exercises. By that time, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles saw no reason to continue military discussions with Yugoslavia, even if he upheld his previous stand that Yugoslavia would continue to pursue a neutral policy between the two blocks.⁵⁰ The British view changed earlier: on 6 May 1954, London

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ PRO FO 371/102168 WY1022/100G.

⁴⁹ PRO FO 371/107823 WY1022/9G.

⁵⁰ MILOŠEVIĆ, NEMANJA: Yugoslavia, USA and NATO in the 1950s. In: *Western Balkan Security Observer – English Edition*, 2007/5. 76-78.

informed Washington that except the military aid of 3.25 million pounds in progress the British government would tackle no further military assistance to Yugoslavia.