

THE YUGOSLAV CONCEPT OF "ALL-NATIONAL DEFENSE"
A Deterrence to Great Powers¹

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Under the bright blue skies of a Balkan October the sounds of war echoed again last month from the green hills of northwestern Bosnia and the adjacent regions of Croatia and Slovenia. The Titoist regime was commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of Tito's call to revolt and revolution in 1941 with the first large-scale and widely publicized display of a new Yugoslav defense strategy designed to deter any potential aggressor, even and especially a Great Power, or to deny victory if the warning is ignored.

Observed by accredited foreign military attachés and documented by the domestic (but not the foreign) press corps with cameras, the maneuvers called "Freedom 71" were the largest war games to be held in Yugoslavia since 1953. Also on hand were Marshal Tito and most of the country's present-day political leadership. All of them were in uniform, the older ones looking nostalgic and the younger slightly self-conscious in long, unfamiliar, military costumes extracted from mothballs to symbolize the involvement of the whole population in the new concept of defense.

The scenario they were there to observe called for "aggressor" or "blue" forces, represented by the most modern armor and technology the Yugoslavs possess, to attempt a *blitzkrieg* "invasion" using traditional offensive strategies designed to exploit superior numbers, equipment, and take command of the air. They were met, harassed, and ultimately thrown back by the coordinated operations of what some might consider a motley collection of "red" defenders: units of the regular armed forces (the Yugoslav People's army), territorial militia, partisan units, volunteer "subversive detachments" of youth trained for urban-rural

guerrilla warfare, and an armed citizenry assigned to sabotage the enemy and provide logistical support to their own troops. Meanwhile, government departments, Party committees, newspapers, and radio stations from temporarily "occupied" regions were transferred to already prepared facilities hidden in the forests, where they continued to function, publish, and broadcast.

The Yugoslavs called the exercise a "confrontation between two contrasting military doctrines." Victory fell, as programmed, to their own, to the strategic doctrine known as *opštenarodna odbrana* (literally "all-national defense," perhaps better translated as "popular defense"), a particular and synchronized combination of regular and partisan warfare, civil disobedience and sabotage, and urban guerrilla activities.

The spectacle of a "nation in arms" defending itself against invasion through such a combination is not new in history, but the Yugoslavs claim that this is the first time the concept has been incorporated into the official defense strategy of a country at peace, complete with coordinated contingency plans and assignments, active training of irregular and regular forces, and caches of arms in factories and communes ready for instant dispersal under local control.

The concept has its roots in the experience of Tito's partisans during the Second World War, but it has evolved in an expanded and modernized form since August 1968. It was then, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia was taken as a reminder that military interventions by Great Powers could also happen in Europe as in Southeast Asia or Latin America, that the Yugoslav



Marshal Tito (center) and Colonel-General Viktor Bujanj (on Tito's right), the Chief of the General Staff, on an inspection tour of the "battle zone."

regime concluded that a small state without military alliances and awkwardly placed between rival Great Powers or their spheres of influence must have a defense strategy of sufficient credibility to give even a Great Power pause for thought. Otherwise, the argument ran, there is a high risk that both leaders and populace will lose their nerve and ultimately their independence in the face of military pressures, with or without an actual invasion, while awareness of this weakness may even encourage a foreign power to apply such pressures.

In the subsequent debate about existing defense doctrine, allegedly rendered urgent by glaring deficiencies revealed when contingency plans were examined and some reserves were mobilized in August 1968, two alternative courses seem to have been examined and rejected before the new concept was adopted. The arguments apparently employed are as telling of the tenor of Yugoslav thinking in this field as the new doctrine itself.

With the traditional pride, prejudice, and acquisitiveness of their profession, a number of

senior regular officers must have opposed the creation of territorial and other irregular formations and to have urged instead the expansion and urgent modernization of the regular armed forces, whose heavy equipment is nearly obsolete. It was concluded, however, that if the purpose is really deterrence by means of a credible threat to defend oneself with determination and effectiveness, then reliance on the regular armed forces alone would not only be inadequate but actually dysfunctional. Clearly both one's own people and foreign governments would see that such forces, however well equipped, could not hope to stand up to the overwhelming numerical and technical preponderance of a Great Power's army. Such reliance would only invite defeatism and surrender at home and encourage rather than deter military pressures by a potential aggressor.

Concern with these aspects of morale and politics was of central importance in the evolution of the new doctrine and was implicitly admitted by the Chief of the Yugoslav General Staff, Colonel-General Viktor Bujanj, in a series of articles published in the army's weekly newspaper last

summer.² Among the fundamental principles of the new military doctrine he listed "an answer to defeatism" and "also an ideological move to settle accounts with all defective concepts of the so-called military supremacy of the superpowers."

Noting that no small country could stop a Great Power *blitzkrieg* with its conventional army, Bujan argued:

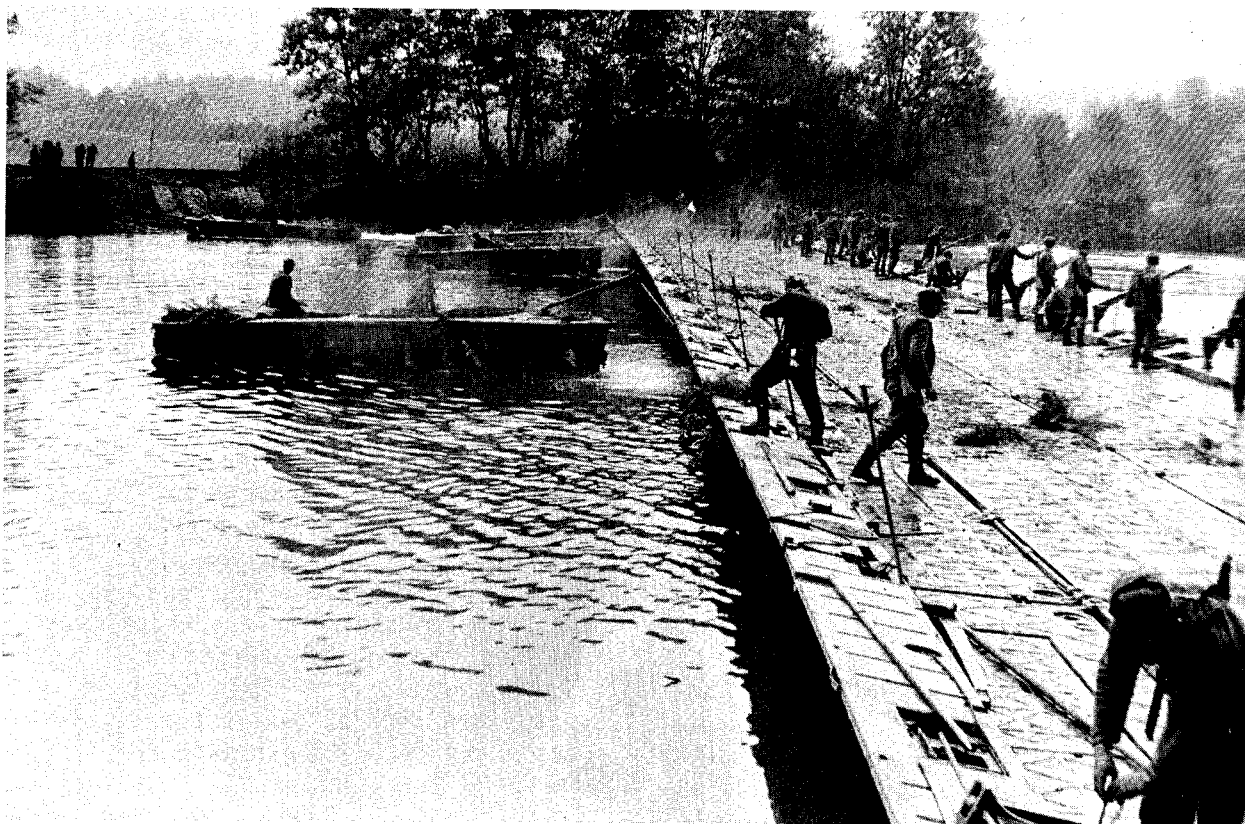
We can claim with full certainty that we not only can achieve a successful defense of the country but also can avoid war, if we consistently apply and realize our [new] concept. . . .

There is again evidence of so-called military-technical concepts, the essence of which is that it would be much better to devote all our energies to the creation of a large modern army which would, with conventional principles, and by itself, solve the question of defense. If these concepts are analyzed more deeply, then it will be seen that they are based on the idea that a local war against us is impossible, and that if a general war were to take place other factors would come into play. That theory is propagated by the Great Powers, who are trying to impose the idea that a small country should not make any special preparations for defense and that the policy of independence and nonalignment is unrealistic. By imposing on small countries—especially those that are not members of any bloc—the idea that local aggression is something that it would be senseless to undertake in Europe or anywhere around Europe, they are trying to disarm these countries ideologically and morally, to create among them a psychological state of mind which would make it possible to turn them into obedient satellites without much difficulty and without the use of force, or, if necessary, to force them into discipline by military intervention.

On the other side of the debate, another group of former partisans in senior posts in the military and political establishments, recognizing the strength of the argument against complete reliance

on conventional armed forces, seems to have urged that the partisan sauce that effectively poisoned this land for German goosesteppers in the last war ought by itself to be sufficiently effective (and inexpensive) as a deterrent sauce for potentially aggressive ganders 30 years later. These people have in turn been accused by General Bujan in his 1971 articles, and thus presumably in the earlier debate, of "romanticizing" the partisan experience of 1941-1945 by imagining that a war under contemporary conditions would be similar. A future war would not repeat the history of the last one, they were told, since the country to be defended is not the Yugoslavia of 1941, almost totally agricultural, underdeveloped, and inhabited largely by barefoot peasants with nothing to lose but their lives. Today it would be politically and psychologically inappropriate as well as militarily unnecessary to abandon the cities and industrial centers of the plains and valleys to an aggressor without a fight, as these "romantic" advocates of pure partisan mountain warfare have urged by implication. So a modern version of popular defense by a nation in arms must and can include the use of a modern (and expensive) regular army.

Whether or not this line of thought was also influenced by a need to make some concessions both to the local "military-industrial complex" and to economic pressure groups demanding lower taxes, the strategists of Yugoslavia's defense, like the good Marxists they claim to be, were in fact producing a synthesis; elements of both were combined from the thesis of an expensively modernized but still unconvincing army and the antithesis of a "romantic" untenable 1940 style partisan war. The result is a concept designed to ensure, in Bujan's words, "that any aggressor, whoever he might be and whatever political, ideological, or other motives he might have, must from the very frontier reckon on all possible forms of armed resistance and a full involvement of all our forces." It is, in other words, a threat to turn Yugoslavia into a European Vietnam for anyone foolish enough to attempt a military intervention here. Conscious that Europe, even in its Balkan manifestation, is not Indochina, the authors of the Yugoslav concept have attempted to endow the threat with added credibility by constructing a modern version of a "nation in arms" adapted to the 1970s and to local conditions, with particular attention to social structures, history, and level of economic development.



The forcing of the Kupa River by "aggressor" forces: an engineering battalion erects a portable bridge with impressive speed while an amphibious tank crosses on its own.

How the Yugoslav Concept Differs

As a result there are several important distinctions between the new Yugoslav concept and the conceptions of "popular war" developed by others, including Mao, Che Guevara, and even Tito's own partisans of 30 years ago, with their acknowledged debt to Mao. Each of these distinctions is reflected in specific aspects of Yugoslav organization, strategic planning, and in domestic and foreign political purposes that the wide and carefully orchestrated publicity given to the doctrine and to the "Freedom 71" maneuvers was designed to serve.

(1) In the first place, other conceptions have usually been designed to fulfill two functions simultaneously: "national liberation" and social revolution. The struggle to repel a foreign occupier or invader is to be combined with a seizure of power and the destruction of the pre-existing domestic system. The Yugoslav partisan struggle of 1941-1945 is itself one successful example of this

dual form of conflict and mobilization. In Yugoslavia today, however, the purpose is the defense and preservation of the existing system, a difference that brings an important reordering of priorities and means.

One vital consequence is that the Yugoslavs can count on the use of the regular armed forces and other instruments of an existing state from the beginning of a conflict and can, therefore, give these forces the integral place in their strategic planning described above. They no longer have to think, as they did in 1941-1945, in terms of a guerrilla war initially almost entirely dependent on partisan and other irregular units, which only later may evolve into something resembling and operating like a regular army. It thus becomes possible, in the terminology of the new doctrine, to plan for that "mixed kind of armed struggle," combining elements of both "classic" and "pure partisan" strategies, which is the essence of the Yugoslav concept.

Along with these advantages for military planning, the fact that "popular defense" in Yugoslavia is designed to defend the existing system also imposes psychological and political imperatives that a revolutionary liberation movement does not face. One must, in short, build and exploit satisfaction and confidence in the existing system, not the opposite. One consequence, as perceived by the authors of the doctrine, is that all of the established instruments of the existing state, and especially the military one, must be seen to be fully and effectively engaged—both in preparations and if necessary in action— if the rest of the population is to be expected to have the morale and confidence they need to play their assigned roles.

General Bubanj reflected this line of thinking, too, in the course of his polemic with the "romantics" of "pure partisan warfare." Admitting that in a protracted struggle with a resolute and powerful enemy the defenders might ultimately be forced into an almost exclusive dependence on irregular guerrilla warfare, he maintained: "that kind of

resistance and armed struggle will be possible only if the operative army has previously done everything possible, if our people see that we fought bravely and with full strength and did everything to avoid such a situation." The contrast, by implication, was with the situation the partisans faced during the Second World War, when the early collapse of the Royal Yugoslav army and the precipitate flight from the country of king and government were largely irrelevant or even a positive factor in the morale and fighting spirit of a Communist-led resistance that was as interested in the overthrow of the old system as in the expulsion of the Axis invaders.³

(2) Most other concepts of "popular war" have been designed for use in underdeveloped countries and in situations in which urban centers are part of the enemy bastion. Yugoslavia is now a semideveloped country with extensive islands of modern industry and social infrastructure to protect. Its cities are to be defended rather than conquered.

Regulars and Territorials in action south of Karlovac.



The doctrinal consequences of these distinctions parallel and reinforce those flowing from the "pro-establishment" function of the Yugoslav concept. Again primarily for the sake of morale, the authors of the doctrine argue, the new strategy must envisage a determined defense of what has been built in the past 25 years, and this could not be achieved by a partisan struggle in the hills, abandoning the cities and industries of the plains to the occupier. On the other hand, the very existence of these greatly enlarged modern sectors, populated by people who now have something to lose and some reason to prefer the existing regime to the alternative that a hypothetical aggressor would presumably impose, makes the initial defense of these areas and effective subsequent resistance to occupation there a more realistic possibility than it was 30 years ago.

The new doctrine, therefore, does not recognize the surrender of any territory, but as Bubanj suggested: "only the temporary presence on some territories of an enemy against whom an armed struggle is waged permanently, throughout the territory, by resorting to all means and methods and in all possible ways." This would include urban guerrilla warfare, virtually nonexistent during the 1941-1945 War of National Liberation but now, that has resulted from large-scale changes in the social structure and the increase in size of Yugoslav cities since the war, potentially effective enough to deny to the aggressor permanent or easy occupation of at least many urban centers.

In such a war, as Yugoslav planners see it, the concepts of "front" and "rear" assume secondary importance, if they exist at all. After initial engagements on the frontier and inevitable initial withdrawals, the regular armed forces are to be present "everywhere in the country." Their primary task will be to attract, engage, and neutralize as far as possible the armored spearheads of the enemy *blitzkrieg*, while the more lightly armed territorial and irregular forces—deployed during that initial holding action on the borders—attack the enemy's flanks and communications to prevent the consolidation of his hold on occupied territories. All of the defending forces are to make maximum use of the extensive "interspaces" of liberated or unoccupied territory that such a war is expected to create.

(3) Finally, other concepts of "popular war" have invariably been designed for the primary purpose of fighting a war. The Yugoslav concept, as already noted, is primarily designed to deter a potential aggressor and thus preserve peace and independence.

If the concept is to fulfill this primary function, both the people who are to be armed and any potential aggressor must be convinced that the doctrine makes a long-term defense of a small country against a Great Power a credible possibility and that both leaders and populace are willing to take the risk, united in their determination to defend the country at any cost.

A simple syllogism is implicit in this line of reasoning and in the Yugoslav regime's recent activities in this field, including "Freedom 71:"

- (a) The best deterrent is a credible defensive strategy that everyone believes you are willing to use whatever the odds.
- (b) The only credible defense for a small country awkwardly situated between Great Power spheres of interest and without military alliances is their kind of "all-national defense."
- (c) The only credible deterrent they can have, therefore, is to plan and train on a large-scale and detailed kind of defense—which means involving, arming, and training the whole people—and to be observed doing so.

To achieve such credibility is thus the purpose of the organization and training of the past 18 months, the massive demonstration provided by the "Freedom 71" maneuvers, and the wide publicity given to the concept, to the training of and willingness to distribute weapons to members of all ethnic groups in this otherwise troubled multinational community, and to the maneuvers themselves.

As a senior Yugoslav diplomat recently told me: "The only security a small country like this has in the contemporary world is to possess a detonator with unpredictable reverberations. Our unique and sufficient detonator was demonstrated in the 'Freedom 71' maneuvers."

Arms and the Man in the Balkans

How convincing a demonstration was it? The foreign military attachés invited to observe the maneuvers presumably could give (and have given their superiors) a professional evaluation. This lay observer, following the action through the mass media and talking with Yugoslav journalist friends who were there, was particularly impressed but not surprised by some incidents that were not written into the scenario.

Peasants in the "battle zone," for example, took the war games so seriously that official warnings had to be issued in the press begging them "not to carry out crude actions such as slashing tires, cutting cables, etc.," but to "pretend these actions by marking with white paint" the equipment of the "aggressors," and to remember that the men of the "enemy forces" were really part of their own army.

"It is again emphasized," the announcement said anxiously, "that it is not their fault that they are playing the role of aggressors."

The plight of these "aggressors" was frequently quite genuinely pathetic. Peasants who trekked for miles with supplies on ponyback for their own "red" forces refused food and even water to thirsty "blue" footsoldiers. When one of the latter found a spring or well, a peasant would appear to tell him it was poisoned, and the soldier could never be quite sure it was not really so. "Blue" soldiers and even an occasional noncombatant journalist captured by irregular units were sometimes treated with genuine brutality by their captors, despite their protests and those of official umpires.

It is perhaps worth noting that the region in which the maneuvers took place was once part of the famous military frontier of the Hapsburg monarchy against the Ottoman Empire and that the inhabitants, descendants of South Slav peasant-warriors who settled there as privileged Hapsburg minutemen on perennial alert, have a famous fighting tradition they still eagerly maintain.

(An old partisan friend in Belgrade told me a wartime anecdote from the same district, as we discussed incidents from the maneuvers. He was at

one time in charge of smuggling a theatrical troupe out of German-occupied Zagreb to perform for partisan forces in the mountains. One young actor was always condemned, because of his blond hair and Aryan features, to play the part of a German officer in these productions. Peasants in the area would bring the partisans and the troupe what little food they had for a party after the show, but consistently refused to give the "German officer" even an apple. My friend would point out that he was really a good Croat and partisan and as near starvation as everyone else, to which the locals would reply: "We know that, but we still won't give him anything!")

All of this, however amusing and even impressive, begs a vital but delicate question that official Yugoslavs do not like to have asked outside their own ranks: even if their modernized version of "popular war" does make a long-term defense of Yugoslavia viable in theory, is the second condition necessary to make it a credible deterrent really fulfilled? That is, are foreign governments and the Yugoslavs themselves fully convinced that all the peoples of this quarrelsome multinational state would be willing to fight as they did in 1941-1945 in defense of the present state and its system? To take one specific example, which is not so far-fetched that it has not been included in some hypothetical scenarios contemplated by worried Yugoslavs and their worried friends abroad: Would the Croats (and perhaps the Slovenes) participate as fully and enthusiastically as *opštenarodna odbrana* requires in a war in which the invader had cleverly hinted or said that he would stop on the borders of Croatia, satisfied with the occupation of the south and east and an independent, "Finlandized" Croatia or Croatia-Slovenia? Or vice versa?

No one can answer these questions with certainty. Pessimists among those who believe that the existing Yugoslavia is the best of all realistically possible Yugoslavias or alternatives to Yugoslavia point to such straws-in-the-wind as recent demands in some Croatian circles for a separate Croatian army (in addition to the territorials and other more irregular formations of "popular defense," already legally under local control) and even a separate Croatian membership in the United Nations as a logical fulfillment of the "state sovereignty" of Croatia and the other five Yugoslav republics

written into the 1971 amendments to the Federal Constitution. The military themselves are concerned about the national problem, if one can judge from recent articles in military journals or the results of a poll of officers in which 54 per cent of senior (major and above), 40 per cent of junior, and 47 per cent of noncommissioned officers thought that "nationalism and chauvinism" were the greatest danger facing the Yugoslav socialist community. (Only 13.5 per cent of senior, 10 per cent of junior, and 11.7 per cent of noncommissioned officers answered that possible foreign aggression was the greatest danger.)⁴

Optimists among Yugophiles at home and abroad reply, in defiance of some historical experiences (e.g., April 1941) that Yugoslavs have always quarreled among themselves but always unite in the face of an external threat. In an article casting scorn on reports in an Italian newspaper that the Yugoslav army was planning a coup d'état, one Belgrade journalist—noting also that no army with such intentions would have drafted directives for "popular defense" creating territorial and other units not under its control, thus "ceasing to be the only military force in the country"—quoted an anecdote which he thought more characteristic of the real situation:

A Yugoslav functionary paid an official visit to a top functionary of a friendly country. He explained to his host that Yugoslavia was a monolithic country despite all its conflicts, differences, and underdevelopment. The Yugoslav added: If anybody attacks us, we shall be united as one! The foreign functionary asked: But what will happen if nobody attacks you? The lesson from this exchange: Yugoslavia's problem is not that somebody may attack us, but the opposite.⁵

In this context, and whether or not the foreign attachés were suitably impressed with the military aspects of the "Freedom 71" demonstration, the maneuvers were also designed with a second propaganda function in mind.

Frequently photographed among the observers of the exercise were Marshal Tito and most of the country's regional as well as federal political leaders, all in uniform as noted earlier, putting on a

display of unity and militant determination. In his public pronouncements and in televised conversations with local functionaries during the maneuvers Tito seemed far more preoccupied with the theme of "brotherhood and unity" among the Yugoslav nationalities, forged during the partisan war 30 years ago but seriously shaken in recent months, than with strictly military matters. The troop review in Karlovac with which the war games ended on October 9 began with the massed flags of the six federal republics followed by "representative" units of the participant territorial militia—one detachment from each republic in alphabetical order, a brave display of young Yugoslavs of both sexes prepared to defend their common homeland.

The theme of unity had a dual function. It was designed to demonstrate to foreign observers, especially those who have been speculating upon the possibility that Yugoslavia might break up, that unity exists and the population supports the present system. It was also planned to create or regenerate that unity with a demonstration and reminder of things that hold Yugoslavs of all nationalities together, including the need to unite in the face of foreign threats, real or imaginary, and emphasize their independence and freedom to build their own peculiar form of socialism.

The maneuvers and the whole organization of "popular defense," with its territorials, partisans, sabotage detachments, and arms caches in factories and town halls, seemed to say that here is a regime that is not afraid to arm the mass of its people and train them for irregular warfare. Here, they said, is our demonstration of confidence that an armed and trained multinational populace will not turn its weapons against each other or against the system. Is the confidence misplaced, the gamble unwise? The Yugoslavs themselves, in earlier efforts to point out that their "national question" should not be dramatized because it is neither unique nor unanswerable, were wont to find parallels in Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, India, and the United States. Not all of these are setting the happiest of precedents today.

Balkan Wars and World Wars

One additional point of equal delicacy cannot be entirely evaded. President Tito and others

repeatedly emphasized that the "Freedom 71" maneuvers, like the strategy they were demonstrating, were not conceived with any specific potential aggressor in mind. Tito expressed annoyance while the war games were under way that some foreign press commentators had suggested the contrary, "in the hope," as Tito saw it, "of provoking unpleasantness, conflict, or suspicion between us and some countries that are near and friendly, as for example the East European countries." It was frequently pointed out that the site chosen for the maneuvers was quite deliberately far from any frontier, to avoid any misunderstanding, and that it was unfair and reaching too far to make a point for a foreign press agency like United Press International to note that the "aggressor's" line of attack was from northeast to southwest.

The official Yugoslav point here is certainly fair enough and should be respected. It is also true, however, that of the "Great Powers" or "superpowers" (and both terms are specifically used in Yugoslav writings to specify the kind of aggressor the new doctrine is designed to meet) China is rather remote geographically and militarily; the United States, with or without the rest of NATO, has in the recent past and the foreseeable future had an undeniably real and publicly expressed national interest in the unity, territorial integrity, independence, nonalignment, and further development of Titoist Yugoslavia. Only one Great Power, therefore, has any conceivable objective and important interest in a drastic change in Yugoslav policies or the regime, or, failing that, in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs know this and are not disinclined to say it—never, of course, officially—in their uncensored normally cautious foreign policy and fundamentally Party-controlled press.

The basic premise of *opštenarodna odbrana*, as we have seen, is that it makes credible the Yugoslav regime's implicit threat, first clearly enunciated in the autumn of 1968, to turn the country into a Vietnam in which any Great Power, tempted into a military adventure, would be bogged down indefinitely, and never able to conquer even if itself unconquerable. But when my diplomat friend speaks of a "detonator with unpredictable reverberations," he clearly has more in mind than that, and so does the regime he represents. The Yugoslav deterrent will be bigger and better if and because a potential aggressor must reckon that, if he fails to achieve a lightning occupation, a local war of indefinite duration will carry with it an unpredictable but growing risk of escalation into a world war. The scenario for such an escalation needs no elaboration here, but the Yugoslavs are hoping that their enemies are contemplating it with suitable horror and their friends willingly will play their assigned role to give those potential enemies additional pause for thought.

Discussing the sad plight of nonaligned small states in Europe and the continuing risk of local wars as the rationale of Yugoslavia's "all-national defense," General Bujanj noted that "they all, like countries on other continents, are included without their consent in the calculations of global strategy made by the superpowers, they play a role in the alignment and maintenance of the latter's spheres of interest, and if their strivings and policies are in contradiction to these interests then they may be subjected to pressures or force."⁶

Two kinds of states can play that game, and Great Powers, too, can be included without their consent in the calculations of global strategy made by small states, as it has happened before in the Balkans.

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NOTES

1. Parts of this Report have previously appeared, in condensed form, as "La conception yougoslave de la guerre populaire: Les manoeuvres 'Liberté 71' ont montré qu'un petit pays peut en principe assurer seul sa defense," in *Le Monde diplomatique* (Paris), November 1971.
2. In *Narodna Armija* (Belgrade), July and August 1971. It is from these articles and a long interview, also by General Bubanj, in the Belgrade weekly *NIN*, July 25, 1971, that the nature of the dispute within the military establishment, rumored at the time but never made public, can be inferentially reconstructed.
3. It is worth noting in this connection that a recent amendment to the Federal Constitution, adopted in July 1971, expressly forbids anyone "to sign or acknowledge the capitulation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or of any of its individual parts," making such acts punishable as high treason (Amendment XLI).
4. "What does the Army Think?" in *NIN*, (Belgrade), June 20, 1971.
5. *Nedeljne Novosti* (Belgrade), June 13, 1971.
6. *op. cit.* in *Narodna Armija*.

