

QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL: THE MACEDONIA QUESTION AS A
PROTAGONIST IN THE TITO-COMINFORM SPLIT, 1943-1949

by

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*Quest for the Holy Grail : The macedonia Question as a Protagonist
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ABSTRACT

On June 21, 1948, Communist Party delegates of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, France, and Italy, convened a meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in Bucharest, Rumania, to discuss the Yugoslav Communist Party. The Resolution passed by the delegates on June 28, expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform and marked the beginning of a period of near war with the Soviet Union. The Bucharest Resolution was designed to force the compliance of the Yugoslav Communist Party whose plans for the post-war Balkans threatened Stalin's system of Soviet dominated satellites in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

At the Moscow Conference in 1944, Stalin had agreed to predominate British influence in Greece in exchange for concessions in Poland and spheres of influence in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Since 1943, however, Tito had emerged as a major power and pursued his own irredentist ambitions in the Balkans that he hoped would ultimately lead to the creation of a greater Macedonia within a Yugoslav federation. This campaign prompted Yugoslav intervention in the Greek Civil War, threatened the northern frontier of Greece, and also led Tito to pursue closer relations with Bulgaria.

In January 1948, Bulgarian Communist Party leader, Georgi Dimitrov, announced the conclusion of negotiations with Tito for a Yugoslav-Bulgarian federation that he suggested would be extended to include Greece. The meeting between the two leaders also established the terms by which Bulgarian Macedonia would be prepared for autonomy and eventual unification with Yugoslav Macedonia. Stalin's reaction to Dimitrov's announcement was swift. In March 1947, the British had withdrawn their aid

to Greece and compelled a strong American presence in the region. The Truman Doctrine was established to provide aid to Greece and Turkey and aimed to contain the spread of communism in both countries. Stalin recognized that Tito's irredentist ambitions for a greater Macedonia would be interpreted by the Western powers as a veiled attempt at Soviet hegemony in Greece. Tito's campaign to establish a greater Macedonia within a Yugoslav Federation was thus a protagonist in the Bucharest Resolution reached by Cominform delegates on June 28, 1948.

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PREFACE

The Macedonia Question remains a sharp point of contention within the Balkans to the present day. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s led to declarations of independence by a number of former Yugoslav Republics, including Macedonia. The declaration of independence by the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in September 1991 threatened to destabilize the northern border of Greece and prompted the intervention of international monitors in the region. Greece refused to recognize an independent “Macedonia” on its northern border, recognizing the potential it created for irredentist claims to northern Greece. In this way, the Macedonia Question continues to attract the attention of international powers seeking to prevent the pervasive affects of a collapse in the stability of the region.

Recent events in the Balkans have prompted a renewed interest in the origins of tension in the region. It is in this context that the Macedonia Question has become the focus of both political and scholarly debate. Current interest in the subject, however, focuses less on the history of irredentist ambitions toward the region, favouring instead, a discourse aimed at identifying or denying the existence of a “Macedonian” people. The impact of the Macedonia Question on international relations has received the attention of a small, albeit authoritative, group of scholars. Three of the most comprehensive works on the Macedonia Question in the twentieth century remain *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia: Civil Conflict, Politics of Mutation, National Identity*, by Evangelos Kofos, *Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949*, by John S. Koliopoulos, and *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, by Anastasia N. Karakasidou.

Various edited works have compiled a range of articles that cover a variety of aspects of the Macedonia Question. These works include *The New Macedonian Question*, edited by James Pettifer, and *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics, and Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian Question*, both edited by Victor Roudometof. Also, *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and Its Legacy*, edited by John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, contains insightful articles concerning the impact of the Macedonia Question on the Greek Civil War.

The current study seeks to analyze one aspect of the Macedonia Question and its impact on major power politics. Mainly, this study considers the Macedonia Question as a protagonist in the Tito-Cominform split that occurred as a result of the Cominform Resolution concluded in Bucharest, Rumania, on June 28, 1948. It has been organized into four sections: *The History of the Macedonia Question, 1878-1941*; *Tito's Campaign for Bulgarian Macedonia*; *Tito's Campaign for Greek Macedonia*; and *The Macedonia Question in the Post-War Period*. It is not the intention this study to consider all factors that contributed to the Tito-Cominform split. Rather, in light of recent events in the region, it is the author's intention to use the Tito-Cominform split to demonstrate the reaching effects of the Macedonia Question and its impact on relations between Balkan leaders and among the major powers.

The author's interest in this topic, as is surely the case of many scholars that have recently become fascinated by the history of the Balkans, developed out of the study and observation of current events in the region. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the American sponsored NATO intervention opened the door to a diverse range of

contemporary Balkan topics. Without the patience and guidance of Professor André Gerolymatos, I could not have committed myself to one specific area long enough to see it through to completion. This study was completed around a number of competing commitments and I am grateful to have had Professor Gerolymatos' support and dedication. Without him, I would likely still be buried under a hill of books, trying to satisfy all of my many and various interests in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 21, 1948, Communist Party delegates of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, France, and Italy, convened a meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform)¹ in Bucharest, Rumania, to discuss the Yugoslav Communist Party. The nationalist aspirations of Josip Broz Tito, were at odds with Joseph Stalin's designs for an Eastern European satellite system and the objective of the meeting was aimed at destroying the Yugoslav leader. Thus, on June 28, in the absence of Yugoslav representation, the delegates adopted the "Resolution of the Information Bureau Concerning the Situation in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia," condemning the Party's leadership for pursuing policies considered "unfriendly" to the Soviet Union. The Resolution expelled the Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY) from the organization.

The Bucharest Resolution marked the culmination of a rift that had been developing between the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union since the success of the Partisan resistance struggle began during the Second World War. The tension that resulted in the 1948 Resolution was not detected by the Western powers and was largely underestimated by the Communist Parties of the remaining Cominform members. As a Soviet trained communist, Tito publicly professed a deep commitment to the communist leadership of the Soviet Union and was considered one of Joseph Stalin's closest allies. However, the success of the Partisan movement had elevated Tito to a

¹ Established in 1947 and was composed of members of the Communist parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Rumania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. The Cominform was designed to solidify the solidarity of the Communist parties of member nations under the influence of the Soviet Union. While it appears that the creation of the Cominform was a direct response to the Marshal Plan (1947) recent evidence suggests that discussion concerning an organization of this type may have taken place between Stalin and Tito in Moscow as early as 1946. The Cominform was dissolved in 1956 as a result of the reconciliation between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

powerful position in the Balkans and made him a force in his own right. His observance of Soviet hegemony became increasingly limited as his plans for post-war Yugoslavia and the Balkans met with resistance from the Soviet leader.

Among the most ambitious of his designs for the post-war Balkans, Tito's campaign to establish a greater Macedonia within the framework of a Yugoslav federation, proved to be a direct protagonist to the 1948 Bucharest Resolution. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the territory loosely defined as greater Macedonia, once comprised of three Ottoman vilayets, had endured half a century of territorial claims and conflict. Distributed among Yugoslavia, Greece, and Bulgaria, as a result of the First and Second Balkan Wars, these boundaries were maintained despite the occupation by the Central Powers during World War I, and were fiercely guarded thereafter to deter subsequent irredentist claims. On his travels throughout the Balkans, Otto von Bismarck emphasized the geographical importance of the region, remarking that "those who control the valley of the River Vardar are the masters of the Balkans..."² In addition to the strategic location of the region, the former Ottoman territory assumed a certain symbolic importance to the Balkan states. Based on these factors, Tito's attempt to create a Macedonian Republic within the Yugoslav Federation threatened the stability of the region and provoked intervention by the Western powers.

The conditions brought on by the Second World War presented an opportunity for Tito to proceed with his plans for a greater Macedonia. In the post-war Balkans, Yugoslavia had emerged as a major power in the region. Bulgaria was in a precarious diplomatic position as a result of her alliance with the Axis powers. The Greek Communist Party, seeking assistance from Yugoslavia to seize power in Greece, was

² Quoted in A. Michael Radin, *IMRO and the Macedonian Question*, Skopje, p. 19.

inclined to follow Tito's lead. Simultaneously, Britain and the United States were preoccupied with negotiations over the post-war environment in Europe, as well as Asia and the Middle East.

As Tito proceeded with his plans for the post-war Balkans, Stalin was negotiating spheres of influence in post-war Eastern Europe with Churchill and Roosevelt. In exchange for predominate influence in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Rumania, and concessions in Poland, Stalin agreed to accept almost exclusive British influence in Greece. Tito's irredentist ambitions in northern Greece threatened to interfere in the spheres of influence arrangements Stalin had made with Churchill. Tito's Macedonia campaign, given Tito's relative alliance with the Soviet Union, could easily be mistaken by the Western powers as an attempt by the Soviets to dominate the Balkans. Attempts by Stalin to subdue Tito met with resistance. Tito was increasingly disenchanted with Stalin's attempts to restrict Yugoslav autonomy and was determined to set a more independent course for the Yugoslav Communist Party. In addition to challenging Stalin's post-war objectives, Tito threatened to set a dangerous example to the other communist satellites by disregarding Soviet pressure. Stalin could tolerate neither.

The Bucharest Resolution passed by the Cominform on June 28, 1948, was an attempt by Stalin to isolate Tito into submission. Marking the beginning of a period of near war between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union that ended only upon Stalin's death in 1953, the Resolution had profound consequences on international relations within the Balkans and among the major powers. Events between the two countries leading up to, and proceeding the Resolution, reaffirm the volatility of the Macedonia Question.

Amidst the modern day instability in the region, the Macedonia Question continues to demonstrate its potential for conflict.

THE HISTORY OF THE MACEDONIA QUESTION, 1878-1941

Macedonia has long proven to be the “apple of discord” among rival Balkan nations. Although Tito formally established the existence of a “Macedonian” nation in 1944, when the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was created, he by no means invented the notion of a “Macedonian” people. It is not the intention of the current study to pursue the “archaeology” of the Macedonia Question. Recent events in the Balkans have compelled an extensive scholarship on the origin of a “Macedonian” people. Rather, it is sufficient to maintain that the Second Balkan War ended five hundred years of Ottoman rule over the region defined as Macedonia. Under Ottoman rule, the region consisted of three vilayets.³ As a result of the Balkan wars, the territory of Ottoman Macedonia was distributed among Yugoslavia, Greece, and Bulgaria. These boundaries have remained intact and, to date, Yugoslavia is the only country to have officially recognized Macedonia as a separate republic. Bulgaria has accepted the existence of a Macedonian state, but not a Macedonian people. The Greeks have argued that the name “Macedonia” refers to the Greek province of Macedonia and its residents.

To date, the Greeks continue to deny the existence of a distinct “Macedonian” ethnicity and have amassed an expansive scholarship to support their claims. Alternatively, those in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia provide extensive arguments for the existence of a “Macedonian” identity predating the Common Era. One

³ Selanik (Thessaloniki), Manastir (Monastir or Bitola), and Kosovo, including Skopje.

common theme surfaces through the maze of literature presented by both sides – a century of territorial conquest and forced migration in the region has made anthropological and linguistic analysis that much more complex. Similarly, the ensuing debate contributes to the resurrection of heroes and symbols that exaggerate the collective memories of those who identify themselves as “Macedonian.”

The history of “greater Macedonia,” as it involves the current study, begins in 1878 with the Congress of Berlin. The Treaty of San Stefano, concluded at the end of the Serbo-Turkish War (1876), established an autonomous Bulgarian state and extended the territory of Bulgaria proper to include Ottoman Macedonia, Thrace, and Moesia. The enlargement of Bulgarian territory served to strengthen Russian influence in the Balkans.⁴ This outcome threatened the European balance of power in the region and the Congress of Berlin (1878) was convened shortly thereafter to return Bulgaria to her pre-San Stefano borders.⁵ In addition to curbing the territorial expansion of Bulgaria, the Congress of Berlin failed to satisfy the aims of Serbia and Greece. While the Congress recognized the independence of Serbia, she was granted only a small portion of Ottoman territory. Similarly, the territorial aspirations of Greece were neglected. The Congress of Berlin created a bitter Bulgaria and denied the expansionist aims of the three countries at the expense of Ottoman Macedonia, making the region an ongoing objective of the irredentist ambitions of all three.⁶

⁴ Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 12, 1877, and shortly thereafter, Bulgaria initiated a war of independence to free herself from Ottoman rule. Russian support for the Bulgarian campaign further strengthened their relations.

⁵ Macedonia and Thrace were returned to Ottoman control as a result of the Congress. San Stefano Bulgaria was reduced from 176,000 square kms to 96,000 kms. See Misha Glenny *The Balkans: Nationalism War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, London, p. 147.

⁶ In 1885, Bulgaria annexed Eastern Rumelia in the Serbo-Bulgarian war, in which Bulgaria succeeded in defending her gain. Austria-Hungary intervened to prevent the invasion of Serbia by Bulgaria. In the same year, the Greeks attempted to annex Crete and were defeated by the Ottomans.

Despite the results of the Congress of Berlin, Russia continued to maintain a predominate influence in Bulgaria. Soon after the conclusion of the Congress, Russia conceived a plan for Bulgarian expansion in Ottoman Macedonia, which involved the expansion of the influence of the Bulgarian Exarchate in the region. Until the 1890's, the Greek Patriarchate enjoyed supremacy over the entire Orthodox community in the Ottoman Empire. Through the assistance of Russian diplomacy, the Ottoman Sultan granted the Bulgarians permission to establish an independent Bulgarian church in Macedonia. The Bulgarian Exarchate was thus established in the Ottoman Empire in 1870. Shortly thereafter, the Bulgarian Exarchate was declared schismatic, thus commencing a period of rivalry in Macedonia between the two Churches. The Bulgarian Exarchate undertook a campaign to secure the religious support of the Slavs in Ottoman Macedonia and, in time, superseded the influence of the Patriarchate.

The competition for the religious loyalty of the Slavs in Ottoman Macedonia also marked the beginning of the Bulgarian campaign of territorial expansion in the region. The Bulgarian Church established and administered schools in Ottoman Macedonia, as did the religious institutions of Serbia and Greece. Education and religion were used in Ottoman Macedonia by all three countries as a means of imparting a national consciousness conducive to their respective irredentist goals. Later, the graduates of these schools became some of the most active agitators for Macedonian independence.

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a new era in the formation of political movements in Macedonia. The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was established in 1893 to achieve, by means of revolution, complete autonomy for the region of Macedonia. The Central Committee of IMRO was

composed of Bulgarians from Bulgaria, as well as Bulgarians from Macedonia. The IMRO undertook a program of terrorism against Ottoman rule in Macedonia and in 1903 attempted a major coup that came to be known as the Ilinden Uprising, commenced on the evening of the Feast of St. Elijah or Ilinden.⁷ Although crushed by the Ottoman Army in just three weeks, the uprising marked a violent era of underground terrorism aimed at Ottoman rule in Macedonia.

The retributions carried out by the Ottoman Army against the Macedonian Slavs were sweeping. The atrocities that followed Ilinden only served to strengthen the resolve of the IMRO. The retributions were so severe that the great powers concluded the Murzteg Agreement, which called for an international force to control the violence.⁸ Not surprisingly, the leaders of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, saw the intervention of the great powers as a symbol of the weakening of Ottoman control. Events were to convince them that cooperation was more effective than rivalry in succeeding in overthrowing Ottoman rule in Macedonia.

The Young Turk Revolution (1908) further weakened the Ottoman Empire. Decades of increasingly centralized rule under a despot, combined with the prospect of impending penetration by the great powers⁹ led to an uprising of Turkish officers aimed at overthrowing the Sultan. This event, combined with the Italian occupation of Ottoman

⁷ The Ilinden Uprising of 1903, is commonly used by proponents of Macedonian nationalism to illustrate the early identification of Slavs in the region of Ottoman Macedonia as "Macedonian." It is a foremost example of the symbolism that forms part of the collective memory of those who identify themselves as "Macedonian."

⁸ This intervention was the first attempt of its kind at international intervention. It was not successful and did not achieve its mandate.

⁹ The defeat in Japan in 1904, forced Russia to set her sights on securing an influential position in the Balkans. At the same time, Austria-Hungary turned her attention to the region. In 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, significantly increasing her presence in the region. In order to curb the encroachment of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, Russia and Great Britain resolved to weaken the Ottoman Empire.

Tripoli and the Albanian rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, presented an opportunity for a cooperative offensive involving those Balkan states standing to gain from the Empire's defeat.

The concept of a Balkan alliance was realized as early as 1861 when the Greek premier, Kharilaos Trikoupis, had proposed a Bulgar-Greek-Serbian alliance.¹⁰ While the respective countries were not disposed towards an alliance at the time, conditions at the beginning of the twentieth century would lend credence to the idea. As a result of internal revolution and external attack, the Ottoman Empire was distracted and growing increasingly weaker. The annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1908, expanded the influence of the Austro-German alliance in the Balkans. Austro-Hungarian and German interest in the Balkans challenged the balance of power between the major powers and convinced Britain and Russia of the need to check the strength of the Ottomans. The Balkan countries were also quickly realizing the difficulties that any one Balkan state faced in rising against the Ottomans, but Macedonia remained the main obstacle preventing a Balkan alliance.

The defeat by the Japanese in 1905, and the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1908, led Russia to encourage the formation of a Balkan alliance that could be directed against Austria-Hungary. The Serbs saw Austria-Hungary as the major obstacle to achieving a greater Serbia, while Bulgaria saw a Balkan alliance as a means of recognizing her claims in Thrace and Macedonia. Thus, supported by the Russians, a bi-lateral agreement was achieved between Bulgaria and Serbia in March 1912. In May, a treaty was concluded between Greece and Bulgaria, and soon after

¹⁰ Hall, Richard C. *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 4.

followed agreements between Greece, and Serbia and Montenegro. Thus, by the end of the summer of 1912, a Balkan alliance had been established. After concluding a series of military conventions, Montenegro opened the First Balkan War on October 8, 1912, by attacking Ottoman installations.

By the end of November 1912, the armies of the Balkan countries succeeded in defeating the Ottoman forces and an armistice was signed in Chataldzha on December 3. On December 16, the London Peace Conference was convened to negotiate a peace settlement. However, the month of negotiations that followed the opening of the London Conference could not fulfill the objectives of all the Balkan states. This was especially true of the overlapping claims to the region of Macedonia. Bulgaria blocked Greek claims to Salonika and Serbian claims to Macedonia. Ultimately, the Greeks were the only delegates who departed the Conference with any satisfaction, while the Bulgarians felt cheated by the terms of the treaty.

The armistice signed in December 1912, was the first phase of the Second Balkan War. Tensions within the Balkan alliance over Macedonia divided Bulgaria from Greece and Serbia. On May 5, 1913, Greece and Serbia concluded a formal agreement that effectively provided for the division of Macedonia between them. After Russia failed to arbitrate the dispute among the three Balkan regions, Bulgaria attacked Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece in June 1913, commencing the Second Balkan War, which ended a month later in her defeat.

The Treaty of Bucharest, which opened on July 30, 1913, ended the Second Balkan War and satisfied, to some degree, the territorial gains of Serbia and Greece, particularly in Macedonia. Dividing Macedonia into three parts, the Treaty of Bucharest

established the borders of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, until the end of the First World War. As a result of the Conference, Greece secured the Aegean regions of Macedonia, including the strategic port of Salonika, Serbia gained the largest amount of territory, which included the Vardar watershed, but Bulgaria's interest in Macedonia was reduced to a small corner known as Pirin. The Balkan Wars¹¹ demonstrated the volatility of the Macedonia question for both the Balkan countries and the major powers.

The Balkans once again took center stage when the world erupted into war in 1914. The First World War presented an opportunity for Bulgaria to reverse her misfortunes in Macedonia. In exchange for concluding an alliance with the Central Powers, Bulgaria was able to occupy Serbian Macedonia and some parts of Greek Macedonia. Though brief, the occupation of Serbian and Greek Macedonia by the Bulgarian Army was especially brutal. The occupation forces exacted violent reprisals against the populations of both regions. When Bulgaria was forced to return the occupied regions of Greek and Serbian Macedonia under the terms of the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919, both the landscapes and the populations had been terrorized. To prevent future Bulgarian territorial claims to the regions, the Treaty of Neuilly called for the exchange of minorities between Greece and Bulgaria, thus reducing the percentage of Bulgarian Slavs in Greek Macedonia.¹²

The interwar period was free of active competition for the former Ottoman territories of Macedonia. Greece and Serbia were satisfied by the territorial gains

¹¹ For a more detailed analysis of the Balkan Wars see Andre Gerolymatos *The Balkan Wars: Myth, Reality, and the Eternal Conflict* Toronto: Stoddart, 2001.

¹² In 1928, the distribution of Greek minorities within a population of 6,204,684 was as follows: 270,000 Turks, 200,000 Macedonians, 200,000 Vlachs, 120,000 Albanians, 100,000 Jews, 33,634 Armenians, 4,000 Roma, and 3,000 Russians. For a more detailed discussion of minorities in Greece see Vladimir Ortakovski *Minorities in the Balkans*. New York: Transnational Publishers, 2000, pgs 90-99.

assigned them by the Treaty of Neuilly. Bulgaria, in a precarious diplomatic position as a result of her association with the Central Powers, reduced her territorial interests in Macedonia to championing the rights of minorities in the area, recognizing that any hopes for regaining lost territory lay in the autonomy of Greek and Serbian Macedonia. Interestingly, for a brief period, Bulgaria succeeded in persuading the USSR to consider granting independence to Yugoslav¹³ and Greek Macedonia.

At the Fifth Comintern Congress, which was held from May to June 1924, the Bulgarian Communist Party representatives succeeded in persuading the Comintern¹⁴ to pass a resolution calling for the establishment of an independent Macedonia. The Greek delegates to the Congress voted for the proposal, as did the Yugoslav representatives. The proposal was widely contested within the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and led to the resignation of key members. The Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY) reacted similarly. Both Communist Parties later criticized themselves for supporting the proposal and were able to modify the decision in 1935, when the Comintern reversed some of its more revolutionary doctrines in accordance with the rise of Fascism in Germany. Thus, Bulgaria was unsuccessful in her attempts to open up the Yugoslav and Greek territories of Macedonia for her own territorial aspirations.

By the end of the 1930s, calls for independence were rising in Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia. Publications in a number of Balkan Communist Party organs by those identifying themselves as “Macedonian,” demonstrate that the Slavs in the regions of Yugoslav, Greek, and to a lesser extent Bulgarian Macedonia, were growing increasingly

¹³ The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, was created in 1918, and was committed to the concept of Yugoslavism.

¹⁴ Founded by Russia in 1919, at the end of the First World War, the Communist International (Comintern) was established to control the leadership of the international socialist movement.

active against policies of assimilation and oppression aimed at denying the existence of a separate Macedonian nationality.¹⁵ The arrival of the Second World War presented such groups with the opportunity to rally their cause. Bringing another round of Bulgarian occupation to Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia, the resistance movements that developed in the Balkans throughout the 1940s offered those in the regions recognition in exchange for participation.

The Yugoslav Partisan resistance movement, under the leadership of Tito, adopted the concept of “brotherhood and unity” and encouraged the participation of all elements of the Yugoslav population. This concept would prove instrumental to the success of the Partisan resistance movement in Yugoslavia. The success of the Partisans afforded Tito the opportunity to exploit nationalist aspirations for the post-war and establish a network through which the CPY could spread propaganda to neighboring Balkan countries. As many Balkan leaders before him, Tito set his sights on territorial expansion in Greek and Bulgarian Macedonia in an effort to establish a greater Macedonia under Yugoslav administration. Securing a greater Macedonia was not only an exercise in territorial expansion rather, the symbolic importance of the region was also important to Tito’s aspirations.

TITO’S CAMPAIGN FOR BULGARIAN MACEDONIA

The Partisan resistance movement was slower to develop in Macedonia than elsewhere in occupied Yugoslavia. While the Treaty of Neuilly had enabled the exchange of populations between Bulgaria and Greece in order to reduce the number of Bulgarian

¹⁵ See Sfetas Spyridon. “Autonomous Movements of the Slavophones in 1944: The Attitude of the Communist Party of Greece and the Protection of the Greek-Yugoslav Border.” *Balkan Studies*. 36(2) (1995): 297-317.

Slavs in Greek Macedonia,¹⁶ it did not affect the Bulgarian Slav population in Yugoslav Macedonia. Rather, at the onset of the Second World War, Yugoslav Macedonia was comprised of a substantial percentage of Bulgarian Slavs who remained sympathetic to Bulgaria proper. When the occupation forces of the Bulgarian Army arrived in Yugoslav Macedonia in April 1941, on the heels of the Germans,¹⁷ there were mixed sentiments among the population. The Bulgarian communists in the region hesitated to take up arms against the Bulgarian Army during the occupation. Some saw the Bulgarian Army as a force of liberation and believed the occupation could lead to the unification of Yugoslav Macedonia with Bulgaria. The Yugoslav Communists appealed to the Soviet Union for support and the Comintern assigned control of Yugoslav Macedonia to the CPY. Despite this measure, however, the CPY was unable to foment a resistance movement in the area, and the Bulgarian communists largely dominated the Macedonian Communist Party until the summer of 1943.

In the spring of 1943, the situation showed signs of change. Tito sent a special emissary, Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo, to the region to develop resistance. His mandate, as he describes, was as follows:

To implement, together with Macedonian communists, the CPY line in the conditions of war and the occupation of the country. This was in fact, the line of armed uprising against the invader, but it also represented the right of every nation to decide its future for itself, following the expulsion of the invader; we called this line the national liberation struggle line.¹⁸

¹⁶ Under the terms of the Treaty of Neuilly, approximately 30,000 Greeks in Bulgaria were exchanged for approximately 53,000 Bulgarians in Greece. In addition, 16,000 Greeks and 39,000 Bulgarians fled to their homelands during the war. See Evangelos Kofos *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia: Civil Conflict, Politics of Mutation, National Identity*. New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993 p. 42-44.

¹⁷ Germany attacked Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941.

¹⁸ Tempo, Svetozar Vukmanovic. *Struggle for the Balkans*. Trans. Charles Bartlett. London: Merlin Press, 1990, p. 188.

Thus, as early as 1943, Tito had outlined his objective of achieving an autonomous Macedonia within a Yugoslavia Federation. To the extent that it was necessary to establish the resistance movement, Tito instructed Tempo to purge the Macedonian Communist Party of “vacillating and opportunist elements who for various reasons did not accept the line of armed struggle.”¹⁹ Shortly after arriving in Yugoslav Macedonia, Tempo was able to organize an effective resistance movement.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia was founded on August 2, 1943, and immediately thereafter, declared “the Macedonian people met all the requirements necessary to win their freedom and independence, to gain on the basis of self-determination, true equality, and to build their own state in brotherly unity with the Yugoslav peoples.”²⁰ It further stated, “within the framework of this unity, the Macedonian people had all the conditions for realizing their age-long dream of unification.”²¹ The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) for its nationalist undertones immediately criticized this declaration, and, therefore, the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY CC) denied participating in its creation.

Instead, the Second Session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia²² offered a more censored version of the declaration issued by the Communist Party of Macedonia. The Jajce Resolution outlined:

On the basis of the right of all nations to self-determination, including the union with or secession from other nations... the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia passes the following decision: ... Yugoslavia is being

¹⁹ Tempo, p. 199.

²⁰ Kofos, Evangelos. *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia: Civil Conflict, Politics of Mutation, National Identity*. New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993, p. 117.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Established in November 1942, by the Yugoslav Communist Party during the Second World War to coordinate the Partisan resistance movement. Tito appointed himself the Supreme Commander.

built up on a federal principal, which will ensure full equality for the nations of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina.²³

The Jajce Resolution was expanded in January 1944, and more explicitly defined the Council's campaign to establish a greater Macedonia within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

As for the question of the unification of the Macedonian nation... we believe that this centuries-old ideal of our people will be more quickly achieved in a Yugoslavia of Tito's making than with some other political structure... We too, like yourselves, are very keen to see the unification of the Macedonian people and we will do our utmost to achieve this unification... Tito's Yugoslavia is today a reality, a recognized international force, with whose help we will be able to achieve the unification of our people... We can now tell you that we are convinced that with the assistance of our great leader, Tito, we shall be successful in achieving the centuries-old dream of our people.²⁴

By the beginning of 1944, the success of Tito's Partisan resistance movement in Yugoslavia gained international attention. The Special Operations Executive (SOE)²⁵ began reporting the success of Tito's Partisan resistance movement to the British Foreign Office as early as 1942. In 1943, the British Foreign Office was better understanding the relative success of the Partisan movement. The resistance movement under the Royalist Colonel Draza Mihailović, who the British had been supporting since early in 1942, was making little progress against the forces of occupation compared to Tito's Partisans. In 1944, after failing to respond to operational instructions from the British mission and after receiving reports of Mihailović's collaboration with the occupation forces, the British officially began providing support to the Partisans. Mihailović was increasingly

²³ Kofos, p. 117.

²⁴ Tempo, p. 245.

²⁵ Created in July 1940, to carry out clandestine operations in enemy or enemy-occupied territory and in neutral countries.

distracted by the civil war and became possessed by his determination to defeat Tito's communists. Tito, in contrast, directed his efforts at defeating the occupation forces.

The Soviet Union also realized the growing success of Tito and his Partisans. Stalin observed the expansion of Tito's power with caution. Tito had always demonstrated his loyalty to the Soviet leader, however he was now positioning himself to assume the leadership of Yugoslavia at the close of the war. At the same time, he was making plans for post-war Yugoslavia without consulting Stalin. By 1944, Tito had recognized that his territorial aspirations would not be popular with the Soviet leadership. According to Milovan Djilas, Tito's closest ally and confidant, during the preparation for the Jajce Resolution in meetings of the CPY CC, "the stand was taken that Moscow should not be informed until after it was all over."²⁶ Djilas outlined the reasons for this decision, stating that:

We knew from previous experience with Moscow and from its line of propaganda that it would not be capable of understanding... And indeed, Moscow's reactions to these resolutions were negative... Only when it became obvious that the West had reacted to the resolutions at Jajce with understanding did Moscow alter its stand to conform with realities.²⁷

Thus, by the beginning of 1944, the Communist leadership of Yugoslavia had outlined their plans for the creation of an autonomous Macedonia despite the potential for discord with Stalin.

Once Tempo began to realize the effectiveness of the resistance movement he had established in Yugoslav Macedonia, he began to work towards the autonomy and eventual unification of the Bulgarian and Greek territories of Macedonia. In September

²⁶ Djilas, Milovan. *Conversations with Stalin*. Trans. Michael B. Petrovich. Ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1962, p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid.

1944, Tempo and Lazar Kulishevski, member of the Regional Committee of the CPY of Macedonia, met with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bulgaria (CPB CC) in Sofia to discuss the possibility of establishing independence for Bulgarian Macedonia (Pirin). This meeting coincided with the termination of Bulgaria's alliance with the Axis powers, which had left Bulgaria in a precarious diplomatic position. According to Tempo's account of the meeting, the Bulgarians supported Yugoslav suggestions concerning autonomy for Bulgarian Macedonia. This opened the door to the establishment of a Yugoslav controlled greater Macedonian Republic.

Negotiations between the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria continued throughout November and December of 1944. These negotiations were also extended to include the participation of the Soviet Union, which expressed positive interest in a Balkan alliance between the two countries. Such an alliance would afford Stalin an opportunity to control the leadership of Yugoslavia through a much more subservient Bulgaria, whose leadership was more inclined to accept Soviet influence.

The Bulgarian Communist Party proposed, "a union of the South Slavs, by means of creating a joint state, organized on a federal basis, called the 'South-Slav Federation.'"²⁸ The Yugoslav proposal differed substantially, calling for a federation of seven units – Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina. The main objective of the Yugoslav Communist Party was to secure the unification of Yugoslav and Bulgarian Macedonia through a federation under which Yugoslavia would remain the central administrative power. By the end of 1944, the two countries were deadlocked and the only concession achieved at the meeting in Sofia remained the Bulgarian commitment to recognize the autonomy of the population of

²⁸ Kofos, p. 141.

Bulgarian Macedonia. The CPB sought to avoid committing itself to any additional concessions until the end of the war, in the hope that post-war treaties would award them some of the territory of Yugoslav Macedonia that they had occupied.

Towards the end of 1944, the CPY CC received information suggesting that the Bulgarians were not respecting the terms of the agreement concerning the autonomy of Bulgarian Macedonia. During this period, General Blagoje Ivanov-Kosta, Assistant Minister of the Bulgarian Army, requested a written pledge from the Vranje CPY District Committee that Yugoslav Partisans would not occupy the districts of Bosilegrad, Caribrod, and Trn – which, until the end of the war, had been districts of Yugoslav Macedonia.²⁹ Koca Popovic, Commander-in-Chief of the Yugoslav Headquarters responded as follows:

Ask the most senior Partisan Bulgarian command in our country, firmly, but not too provocatively, to order all its units to cease forthwith the formation of any form of government in our liberated and sovereign territory. Explain to this command that the Bulgarian units are guests in our country and that their sole task is to fight the Germans under the orders of our competent HQ... We are unpleasantly surprised by your completely incorrect and unacceptable standpoint on the question of the districts of Bosilegrad, Caribrod, and Trn, which, before the war, belonged to Yugoslavia. Please take note of the fact that these districts are now a constituent part of the sovereign territory of the free Democratic Federative Yugoslavia and issue the appropriate orders to all your units and administrative bodies. We regret that you have forced us to explain to you things which are not negotiable.³⁰

According to *Tempo*, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party raised the issue with Georgi Dimitrov in Moscow:

Tito informs us of his immediate intention to place the administration of the Caribrod and Bosilegrad region under Yugoslav control. He is also trying to restore the borders of 1941. Our comrades in these areas believe that such action would lead to the flight of the local population en masse. The situation is

²⁹ *Tempo*, p. 274.

³⁰ *Tempo*, p. 274.

hampering the main task in hand – the struggle against the Germans. What is the point of bringing up this issue so unexpectedly at the present time?³¹

Despite some delay in the implementation of the Sofia agreement involving the preparation of Bulgarian Macedonia for autonomy and eventual unification, the BCP appeared to be working towards applying the terms of the agreement. In a letter to Tito dated November 2, 1944, the Central Committee of the BCP emphasized:

... We shall endeavor to popularize [the new Macedonian state] amongst Bulgarians as a whole, and in particular, amongst the population of Bulgarian Macedonia; we shall help to awaken the Macedonian national consciousness amongst these people... we are changing our Gorna Dzhumaya Party organization into a Macedonian one with the status of Obkom [BCP Regional Committee]... which, amongst other things, will clear the way for the most painless realization of the Macedonian dream for freedom and a united Macedonia within the framework of the new Yugoslavia.³²

At the same time, Yugoslav Communist Party delegates and delegates of the Fatherland Front³³ met in Craiova and reached an agreement of friendship, brotherhood, cooperation and joint conduct in the war against Germany, that, according to Tito, was a “first step forward... to a happy future, assured of the realization of [an] age old dream.”³⁴

By 1945, the Western powers realized the likelihood that Bulgaria would cede Macedonia to Yugoslavia. In a telegram to the Secretary of State, dated November 30, 1945, a United States Representative in Bulgaria reported: “There is no doubt in my mind about [the] willingness [of the] present Bulgarian Govt to cede territory to Yugo

³¹ Tempo, p. 274.

³² Tempo, p. 286.

³³ Established in 1942, as a united front against the Bulgarian government, which had committed the country to Nazi Germany. It was controlled by the Communist Party of Bulgaria. At the end of the Second World War, in 1946, the Fatherland Front was elected and Georgi Dimitrov became Prime Minister.

³⁴ Tito, Josip B. “Report to the Third Session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia.” August 8, 1945. *Selected Speeches and Articles, 1941-1946*. Ed. Tihomir Stanojevic. Trans. Dorian Cooke, Dr. Djura Nincic, and Zvonimir Petnicki. Zagreb: Naprijed, 1963, p. 65.

federal state of Macedonia in connection [with] plan for South Slav Union...”³⁵

However, when responding to inquiries from the Western powers about the potential South Slav Union with Bulgaria, Tito downplayed the concept. In a conversation to Fitzroy MacLean, Commander of the Allied Military Mission to the Partisans in Yugoslavia, Tito explained that he was not immediately in favor of a federation with Bulgaria, explaining:

While relations with the Bulgars had improved enormously in recent months, nevertheless it would take some time before the Yugoslav population could forget the horrible behaviour of the Bulgarians during the past 3 years. He stated that he intended to do anything he could to [promote] closer relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia but that he positively would not press for such a federation now.³⁶

It is unlikely that Tito was interested in a post-war federation with Bulgaria.

Substantially weakened both diplomatically and economically as a result of the war, the greatest incentive for such a federation lay in the opportunity it could present Yugoslavia to unify Bulgarian and Yugoslav Macedonia. Beyond this, a federation between the two countries would not benefit Yugoslavia enough for the Yugoslav Communist Party to accept the increase in Soviet interference that such a federation may pose.

Despite the failure of the two countries to reach an agreement regarding federation, it appears that the Bulgarian leadership was willing to proceed with the terms of the Sofia agreement and prepare Pirin Macedonia for autonomy and eventual unification with Yugoslav Macedonia. In a speech to the Bulgarian Assembly in 1946, Dimitrov pronounced: “... What is more natural than that the free Macedonian state

³⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*. Volume IV: Europe, p. 401 (Hereinafter FRUS). Name of US representative in Bulgaria not provided.

³⁶ *FRUS*. Volume V: Europe, p. 1305.

should find its place within a federative and democratic Yugoslavia...”³⁷ Similarly, in a letter to Tito, dated August 17, 1946, Dimitrov, in accordance with the Sofia agreement, wrote:

... The BCP considers it necessary, in the period until the unification of the Pirin region with the National Republic of Macedonia, that it should work systematically for the cultural rapprochement of the Macedonian population of the region with the National Republic of Macedonia... that it should work for widespread mutual contact between the Macedonian population on either side and undertake a whole string of measures to promote the cultural autonomy which would facilitate the development of a national consciousness on the part of the Macedonian population and smooth the way towards the unification with the main part of the Macedonian nation in the National Republic of Macedonia...³⁸

While not free of complication, the period between 1944 and 1946, ushered Yugoslavia closer to achieving her plans for the unification of Bulgarian Macedonia within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On August 2, 1947, Tito and Dimitrov signed a series of protocols in Bled that strengthened the terms of the agreement reached in Sofia in 1944. Beginning in September 1947, Bulgaria imported teachers from Yugoslav Macedonia, introduced new, de-Bulgarized textbooks in Macedonian schools, started to promote Macedonian language and culture, and encouraged contacts among the Macedonians on both sides of the frontier.³⁹ Upon a return visit to Bulgaria in November 1947, after signing a treaty of cooperation and mutual assistance with the Bulgarian leadership, Tito proclaimed from the balcony of the Presidential Palace in Sofia: “Many people will be saying during this visit of ours that we have come to establish a federation; we are indeed, cooperating so closely and

³⁷ Tempo, p. 287.

³⁸ Tempo, p. 289.

³⁹ Banac, Ivo. *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*. London: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 37.

comprehensively that the question of a federation is only a formality.”⁴⁰ Despite the optimistic tone of this speech, the reality of establishing a federation between the two countries, was, as events would prove, much more difficult than Tito or Dimitrov could have predicted.

The optimism that surrounded the negotiations between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian Communist leaders, prompted Dimitrov to declare, in a press conference on January 31, 1948, that “the question of a people’s federation or confederation, encompassing Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, *and even Greece*, was bound to come into existence.”⁴¹ On February 10, immediately following this public announcement, the Bulgarian and Yugoslav leaders were summoned to Moscow. Stalin was incensed that the two leaders had initiated a series of agreements without consulting him and was especially outraged that Dimitrov had suggested the inclusion of Greece in a Balkan federation. Tito was already aiding the communist insurgents in another round of the Greek Civil War in an effort to further his nationalist goals in Greek Macedonia. Tito’s campaign was threatening to pose complications for Soviet foreign policy in Eastern Europe.

TITO’S CAMPAIGN FOR GREEK MACEDONIA

The first official meeting between delegates of the Yugoslav and Greek Communist Parties regarding Greek Macedonia took place in the summer of 1943. Similar to conditions in Yugoslav Macedonia, the resistance movement against occupied forces was slow to develop among the Slavs in Greek Macedonia. Organized resistance

⁴⁰ *Tempo*, p. 297.

⁴¹ Kofos, p. 164. The emphasis on Greece is my own.

to the Axis occupation in Greece had begun in September 1941, with the formation of the National Liberation Front (EAM).⁴² However, in Greek Macedonia, the EAM found it difficult to recruit from among a population of Slavs who, traditionally oppressed and isolated from the rest of the country, did not see the resistance movement as a means of improving their political, social, or economic conditions. The dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas from 1936 to 1941, had initiated a policy of aggressive assimilation in Greek Macedonia that alienated the remaining Bulgarian Slav population. When Bulgarian occupation came to Greek Macedonia in 1941, organizers of the resistance movement faced the additional challenge of preventing Bulgarian Slavs in the region from joining the ranks of the Bulgarian Army. The Bulgarian Slavs in Greek Macedonia, in the more exceptional cases, saw the Bulgarian Army as a liberating force rather than an occupying force. In addition, the population of Greek Macedonia associated the resistance movement with the British who supported the repressive Royalist Greek government in exile. In fact, SOE policy in Greece was aimed at suppressing the left wing resistance movement of EAM. To this end, the KKE looked to Yugoslavia for assistance in strengthening the communist resistance movement in Greece.

Tito, interested in securing the loyalty of the Slavs in Greek Macedonia, extended Tempo's mandate to include direct contact with the KKE in order to determine the extent to which a cooperative resistance in Greek Macedonia was possible. During his initial meeting with the KKE in 1943, Tempo found the Greek communists willing to cooperate with the Yugoslav Communist Party and discussed methods of strengthening the

⁴² The EAM charter, signed in September 1941, identified as its two goals the liberation of Greece from the occupation and the formation of a provisional government following expulsion of the occupying forces to proclaim elections for a National Assembly so that the Greek people could determine the form of their post-war government.

resistance movement in Greek Macedonia. Tempo realized that the resistance movement in Greek Macedonia was weakest in areas where nationally disenfranchised Macedonians constituted a majority, and advised KKE representatives to offer the Slav Macedonians concessions in exchange for their contribution to the resistance. The KKE was reluctant to implement this type of policy because although they believed it would prove effective in mobilizing the resistance movement in Greek Macedonia, they suspected that the Greek population would negatively receive it. However, the first meeting resulted in a commitment from the KKE delegation to offer equal rights to the Slavs of Greek Macedonia and an expression of their willingness to consider further concessions.⁴³

The CPY recognized that their involvement in Greek Macedonia would assist their long-term goal of realizing a greater Macedonia within the framework of Yugoslavia. With this goal in mind, Tempo directed negotiations with the KKE towards the establishment of independent Slav resistance units in Greek Macedonia. Tempo recognized that the formation of Slav resistance units that functioned independently of EAM-ELAS⁴⁴ would enable greater Yugoslav influence in the region. The KKE partially accepted Tempo's proposal and allowed the creation of an independent political organization of Slavo-Macedonians known as the Slav-Macedonian National Liberation Front (SNOF).⁴⁵ This organization was put under the command of EAM and was intended to operate alongside ELAS. The KKE also agreed to the formation of joint

⁴³ This is the first example of the KKE's ambiguous policy with respect to Greek Macedonia. The leadership of the KKE recognized the volatility of the Macedonia question in Greece and feared that granting concessions would alienate the rest of the population. The KKE would proceed with an ambiguous policy on Greek Macedonia into the post-war period. The KKE policy that recognized Greek Macedonia as an inseparable part of Greece, was often contradicted by the policies of EAM, which were adjusted to accommodate the needs of the resistance movement in the region.

⁴⁴ ELAS was the armed section of EAM.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the formation of SNOF coincided with the Second Meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council in Jajce where the Yugoslav campaign for the creation of a greater Macedonia was revealed. It does not appear that Tempo discussed the campaign with KKE delegates in 1943.

Greek-Yugoslav Partisan units that would function on both sides of the border in order to attract the Slav-Macedonians of Greece and the Greeks of Yugoslavia.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the CPY and KKE agreed that Partisan units of each country would be free to cross the border. Immediately following the conclusion of these arrangements, agents from Yugoslav Macedonia crossed the border into Greek Macedonia to spread propaganda aimed at encouraging Slav Macedonians to fight for self-determination and unification.⁴⁷

The more radical Slavs in Greek Macedonia saw the formation of SNOF and its armed branch the Slav-Macedonian National Liberation Army (SNOV) as the beginning of a movement towards national liberation. As early as the beginning of 1944, members of SNOF began challenging KKE policies and demanding greater concessions. In a letter published on January 24, in *Slavjanomakedonski Glas*, an organ of the Kastoria SNOF, members of the unit demanded that the KKE grant Slav Macedonians the right to self-determination, stating:

The KKE promises the Slavo-Macedonians full equality in the framework of a People's Republic. However, the prime objective of its struggle is the liberation of the Dodacanese and Cyprus, whose people will be free to take their place in people-governed Greece. The Slavo-Macedonians justifiably ask, Why do they not leave us free to build our own culture and our national ideals, for we too are something separate, we are not Greeks, we are a Slavo-Macedonian race with different ideals, but they want us to remain within the Greek framework, giving us only equality. How does this square with the declared principles of self-determination of peoples?⁴⁸

Similarly, an unidentified leading radical in Greek Macedonia emphasized the deficiencies of KKE policy towards Slav Macedonians in Greek Macedonia:

⁴⁶ Kofos, Evangelos. "The Impact of the Macedonian Question on Civil Conflict in Greece, 1943-1949. In *Greece at the Crossroads: The Civil War and Its Legacy*. Ed. John O. Iatrides and Linda Wrigley. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p. 283.

⁴⁷ Sfetas, Spyridon. "Autonomous Movements of the Slavophones in 1944: The Attitude of the Communist Party of Greece and the Protection of the Greek-Yugoslav Border." *Balkan Studies*. 36(2) (1995): 297-317.

⁴⁸ Sfetas.

Do they [the Macedonians] or don't they have the right... in accordance with the eight points of the Atlantic Charter on self-determination of nations, to demand, together with the other two parts under Serbia and Bulgaria, to establish their own Slavmacedonian people's republic?!

The Slavmacedonians justly ask: Why do they not permit us to develop fully our national culture and to realize our national ideals... We are not Greeks, but a Slavmacedonian nation, with different ideals. How could we remain in Greece, content solely with equality? How could this be reconciled with the basic principles on the self-determination of nations?⁴⁹

Essentially, the KKE wanted to use SNOF-SNOV as a "token" organization to assist in the recruitment of Slav-Macedonians for EAM-ELAS.⁵⁰ Their concessions did not extend as far as accepting the development of a national independence movement within its ranks. After recognizing the momentum that was developing within the organization under the influence of the Yugoslav Communist Party, SNOF-SNOV was disbanded in April 1944, after operating for only six months.

After being disbanded, members of the former units of SNOF-SNOV crossed the border into Yugoslav Macedonia where they joined the Macedonian Liberation Army that was organized to free Yugoslav Macedonia from occupation. They regularly crossed the border into Greek Macedonia to spread propaganda for an independent and united Macedonia. In the early summer of 1944, the CPY was able to negotiate terms under which members of the disbanded SNOF-SNOV units would return to Greek Macedonia. Their service with the Macedonian Liberation Army had only served to strengthen their resolve to foster a strong independence movement in Greek Macedonia.

Since the creation of SNOF-SNOV in 1943, the organization's members, with the support of the CPY, continued to negotiate for the formation of armed partisan units that

⁴⁹ Rossos, Andrew. "Incompatible Allies: Greek Communism and Macedonian Nationalism in the Civil War in Greece, 1943-1949." *The Journal of Modern History*. 69(1) (March 1997): 42-76.

⁵⁰ Rossos.

would function independently of EAM-ELAS. In the summer of 1944, at the instigation of Markos Vafiadis,⁵¹ the leadership of EAM agreed to the creation of two separate Slav-Macedonian battalions in the Edesa and Kastoria-Florina districts of Greek Macedonia.⁵² However, following its establishment under the leadership of Ilias “Goce” Dimakis, the Kastoria-Florina battalion was soon incorporated into an ELAS detachment, in an effort to cease the systematic recruitment of Slav-Macedonians by Goce. Shortly thereafter, the KKE issued an order aimed at prohibiting the recruitment of Slav-Macedonians entirely. Despite this order, the Goce Battalion received direction from General Headquarters in Yugoslav Macedonia to continue recruiting. Furthermore, GHQ advised that “the battalion should demand that the KKE set up a special Macedonian army and staff and if the KKE refused Goce was to go ahead and recruit as many Slavo-Macedonians as possible and bring his battalion to Yugoslav Macedonia.”⁵³

Based on these factors, relations between these units and ELAS quickly collapsed and the men from these units fled across the border into Yugoslav Macedonia to avoid being purged. By November 1944, the two battalions were united to form the First Aegean Macedonian Brigade, which was comprised of four to five thousand men.⁵⁴ Tito prohibited this brigade from crossing back into Greek Macedonia and set out to restore relations with the leadership of the KKE. When the brigade was formally disbanded on April 2, 1945, most of its members returned to Greece to participate in the civil war.

⁵¹ Markos Vafiadis was commander of ELAS forces in Macedonia and became commander of the Communist Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) established on October 28, 1946. DAG was the successor of ELAS.

⁵² This concession was granted in an effort to establish closer military cooperation between Tito and ELAS. See Sfetas. Vafiadis was commonly known as a “Titoist” because of his support for Yugoslav partisan resistance tactics. He was a strong supporter of Tito.

⁵³ Sfetas.

⁵⁴ Sfetas.

The Varkiza Peace Agreement, concluded in February 1945, after a month of fighting between ELAS and the security forces of the Papandreou government in the Battle of Athens,⁵⁵ caused reprisals against the left, particularly against the Slav-Macedonians in Northern Greece, who had renounced the Greek state. These reprisals forced the migration of an estimated 8,000 Slav-Macedonians across the border into Yugoslav Macedonia.⁵⁶ In the period that followed, the National Liberation Front (NOF) for Greek Macedonia was established under the direction of the Communist Party of Yugoslav Macedonia (CPM). The goal of NOF was to continue the objective of its predecessor SNOF to agitate for the independence of Greek Macedonia. In June 1945, a leading ideologist of NOF, L. Damovski, emphasized:

The desire of Aegean Macedonia is *Unification with Free Macedonia* in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic Charter and the declarations of Stalin-Roosevelt-Churchill... The common struggle of the Macedonians and the Greeks will help open the way for the unification of the Macedonian with free Macedonia...⁵⁷

NOF had to operate clandestinely in Greek Macedonia to avoid detection by anti-left government forces. They formed the Secret Macedonian Liberation Organization (TOMO) in the Edessa district. While their activities were successful in continuing the momentum of the independence movement in Greek Macedonia, achieving their objective was dependent on the victory of the left in Greece.

⁵⁵ The Battle of Athens resulted when George Papandreou ordered the disbandment of ELAS after a breakdown in relations within the government of "national unity," which included the Greek Communist Party. In the summer of 1944, the KKE agreed to become a minor partner in the government and placed control of ELAS under the direct British military authority. With the assistance of British enforcements, the Papandreou government suppressed ELAS forces in the Battle of Athens.

⁵⁶ Koliopoulos, John S. *Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949*. London: Hurst and Company, 1999, p. 221.

⁵⁷ Rossos.

The discord that had developed between SNOF and the KKE towards the end of the war continued after the establishment of NOF. Following the conclusion of the Varkiza Agreement, this discord intensified. NOF refused to abide by the terms of the Varkiza Agreement and continued to conduct clandestine agitation for an independent Greek Macedonia. By the end of 1945, the KKE condemned NOF's activities and distanced themselves from the organization. However, in December 1945, when Nikos Zachariadis,⁵⁸ General Secretary of the KKE, distinguished between the "autonomists" and NOF, an improvement in relations seemed possible.

Between 1945 and 1946, the number of Slav-Macedonians that crossed the border into Yugoslav Macedonia from Northern Greece rose to between 15,000-20,000.⁵⁹ The increase in migration was due, in part, to reprisals undertaken against the Slav population of Greek Macedonia by the Papandreou government in an effort to suppress NOF activities in the region. In response to these reprisals, the CPY attempted to discredit Greece internationally for its reprisals against the Slavs in Greek Macedonia. On July 22, 1945, in a note to the Greek Foreign Minister, Yugoslavia protested against the "persecution committed against the Macedonians" whom he referred to as Yugoslavia's "co-nationals."⁶⁰ Similarly, in a speech in Skopje, Tempo proclaimed to his audience:

Comrades, you know very well that there is a part of the Macedonian people, which is still enslaved. We must openly state this case. We are not the only ones to do this; there are tens of thousands of Macedonian men and women who suffer and mourn today under the yoke of the Greek monarcho-fascist bands.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Zachariadis was interned at Dachau during the war and returned to Greece in 1945.

⁵⁹ See Kofos in *Greece at the Crossroads*, p. 297. It should be noted that this reversal in policy towards NOF appears to be related to the KKE's decision to prepare for civil war. To this end, the KKE recognized the importance of cooperating with armed units in Northern Greece and sought the commitment of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

⁶⁰ Kofos, *Nationalism and Communism*, p. 151.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 152.

In the period between the Varkiza Agreement and the onset of the Greek Civil War in 1946, the Yugoslav Communist Party remained actively involved in the politics of Greek Macedonia. Meetings between the KKE and NOF took place beginning in December 1945, in Thessaloniki. As a result of these meetings, the KKE reversed its policy toward NOF, referring to the organization as “democratic,” and “anti-fascist.”⁶² In the spring of 1946, Greek Communist bands began to cooperate with NOF, while the leadership of the two groups discussed their common interest. From May to November 1946, negotiations were undertaken between the KKE, and NOF, the CPM, and the CPY.⁶³ In the final agreement reached between the KKE and NOF in November, NOF agreed to sever its organizational ties with the Communist Party of Macedonia, dissolve its political organization and armed bands, and unite with the KKE and the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).⁶⁴ It is likely that under the terms of this agreement, NOF agreed to cease agitation for independence in Greek Macedonia.⁶⁵ The KKE required NOF to postpone the talk of independence in order to focus its energy against the Greek government.

In negotiations leading up to the onset of civil war in Greece, it appears that the KKE was willing to grant some concessions to Greek Macedonians in exchange for the commitment of Yugoslav support. However, at least in the early years of the civil war, Zachariadis did not mislead the CPY to believe that he considered granting independence to the Greek Macedonians. Rather, on August 24, 1945, Zachariadis declared that:

⁶² Kofos in *Greece at the Crossroads*, p. 299.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

“Macedonia is and will remain Greek!”⁶⁶ Similarly, on October 25, 1945, he denied that the KKE had ever supported an independent Macedonia.⁶⁷ Despite this publicly stated position of Zachariadis concerning the question of Greek Macedonia, the CPY agreed to provide material support to the Greek Communists in their war against the Greek Government.

While it is difficult to determine the extent to which the CPY encouraged the KKE to instigate a new round of civil war, it is clear that the CPY recognized that conditions brought on by war in Greece were necessary to the success of their objectives in Greek Macedonia. Similarly, it is likely that Tito believed he could count on the support of Markos Vafiadis, whose communist principles were more national than international, and, therefore, made him more likely to accept the notion of autonomy for Greek Macedonia in exchange for Tito’s support against the Greek government. Shortly after declaring the formation of the First Provisional Democratic Government for Free Greece in December 1947, George C. McGhee, Coordinator for Aid to Greece and Turkey, wrote to the American Under Secretary of State, suggesting that Vafiadis was sympathetic to Tito’s objectives in Greek Macedonia. He explained: “It is believed that the Greeks have by now become convinced that the Markos movement is controlled by Greece’s enemies, who seek to dominate their government and separate Greek Macedonia and Western Thrace.”⁶⁸

By the end of 1947, Tito’s campaign for an independent and united Greek Macedonia had made considerable progress. Due to the success of the Yugoslav

⁶⁶ Woodhouse, C.M. *The Struggle for Greece, 1941-1949*. London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976, p. 153.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ McGhee, Coordinator for Aid to Greece and Turkey to Lovett, Under Secretary of State, August 11, 1948. *FRUS*. Volume IV: Eastern Europe-Soviet Union, p. 124-129.

resistance movement during the Second World War, Tito enjoyed a position of considerable power among his Balkan neighbors. Diplomatic negotiations with Dimitrov in Bulgaria had all but formalized the establishment of an independent Bulgarian Macedonia within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Similarly, the CPY continued negotiations with the KKE throughout the civil war and remained optimistic that its success would open the door for the independence and unification of Macedonia. Tito pursued his designs for a greater Macedonia despite the pressure of global politics and the potential for discord with the Soviet Union. Tito attended to his post-war plans for Yugoslavia and hoped to present them to Stalin *fait accompli*. Summoned to Moscow after news of the Bled Protocols with Dimitrov reached the Soviet leadership, Tito sent a delegation in his place, as an affront to Stalin. While prepared to defend his policies, Tito likely did not expect the events that were to transpire over the course of the five years that were to follow.

THE MACEDONIA QUESTION IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The 1947 protocols concluded between Tito and Dimitrov in Bled, committed Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to increased cooperation and formalized prior agreements between the two leaders concerning the independence of Bulgarian Macedonia. The Bled Protocols brought the leadership of the CPY that much closer to realizing a united Macedonia within the framework of Yugoslavia. For the leadership of the BCP, the Protocols were a means of strengthening their economic position in the Balkans through closer relations with a much stronger Yugoslavia. For the two parties involved, therefore, the meeting at Bled proved successful. However, the news of the Protocols was received with much less enthusiasm in the Soviet Union. Stalin had been left out of the

negotiations between the two leaders and had his own plans for the post-war Balkans that did not coincide with the Protocols concluded at Bled. In response to the news, the Soviet leader summoned delegates of the CPY and BCP to Moscow.

Delegations from both Bulgaria and Yugoslavia arrived in Moscow on February 8, 1948. The Yugoslav delegation, comprised of Edvard Kardelj, Milovan Djilas, and Vladimir Bakarić, did not include Tito, who sent Kardelj in his place. Molotov convened the meeting by explaining that “serious differences had appeared between the Soviet Government, on the one hand, and the Yugoslav and Bulgarian Governments on the other hand, which [were] ‘impermissible’ from both the Party and the political point of view.”⁶⁹ Referring to the Protocols concluded at Bled, Molotov criticized the leaders of the CPY and BCP for reaching an agreement “not only without the knowledge of, but contrary to, the views of the Soviet Government...”⁷⁰ Stalin followed Molotov’s introduction by addressing each of the “differences” that were challenging relations between the Soviet Union and the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. While Stalin had invited both delegations to Moscow, his reproach was mainly directed at the Yugoslav leadership, over which he had lost control.

While the immediate issue for discussion in Moscow surrounded the Bled Protocols and Dimitrov’s public projection concerning a Balkan federation that included, among other controversial countries, Greece, Stalin also sought to address the outstanding issue of Yugoslav activities in Albania. The subject of Yugoslav influence in Albania had been addressed in a meeting between Djilas and Stalin one month prior to the February meeting in Moscow. The focus of the January meeting surrounded the steps

⁶⁹ Djilas, p. 173.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

taken by the Yugoslav leadership toward unification with Albania, which included the imposition on Albania of a Yugoslav-controlled joint coordinating commission that was to oversee the economic integration of the two countries.⁷¹ At the meeting in January, Stalin had expressed his desire to see Yugoslavia “swallow” Albania. He similarly expressed this same preference at the Moscow meeting the following month. According to Ivo Banac, it is likely that Stalin’s instructions were aimed at “overturning the Yugoslav Balkan policy by enticing it into overdrive.” It is interesting that the Albanian leadership executed following Tito’s expulsion from the Cominform, the Albanian Communist Party member instrumental in negotiating the unification of Albania and Yugoslavia, Koci Xoxe.

Similarly, at the Moscow meeting in February, Stalin urged the Communist Party leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgarian to conclude negotiations and establish a federation between them immediately. His urgency was motivated by his belief that a federation between the two countries would enable him to exert a greater degree of control on Yugoslavia through a much more servile Bulgaria. His underlying motivations for the federation did not escape the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

The most decisive objectives of the Moscow meeting were aimed at addressing Dimitrov’s forecast of a larger Balkan federation that included Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and Greece. While the countries of Eastern Europe remained within the Soviet sphere of influence, Greece posed a much greater concern to the Soviet leader.

⁷¹ Banac, Ivo. “The Tito Stalin Split and the Greek Civil War.” In *Greece at the Crossroads*, p. 258-273. Also, according to Banac, a similar organization was proposed for the integration of the armies of Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria, as a first step toward a united Balkan armed forces.

In October 1944, Stalin and Churchill had convened a meeting in Moscow⁷² to discuss the division of the Balkans into Soviet and British spheres of influence. Both leaders had arrived in Moscow with preconceived agendas that suited their own designs for the post-war Balkans. The agreements concluded at the Moscow Conference largely satisfied the interests of both.

Churchill attended the conference in Moscow aiming to limit Soviet interference in Greece. Greece was arguably the most strategic point in the Balkans and the British had expended considerable resources to defend the country at the beginning of the war. At the same time, Stalin recognized that Greece was of vital strategic importance to the British and was aware that the country was historically vulnerable to naval power. Thus, the Soviet leader was willing to concede British influence in Greece and bargain for spheres that were important to Soviet interests. The resulting “percentages agreement” reached at the conference in Moscow suited both Stalin and Churchill. In exchange for conceding predominate British influence in Greece, Stalin secured predominate influence in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The leaders agreed to divide interest in Yugoslavia equally.⁷³

During the Moscow Conference, a Polish delegation arrived to discuss the terms of post-war Soviet interest in Poland. Soviet designs for post-war Poland were among the most important of Stalin’s objectives at the Moscow Conference. In fact, Churchill confided to Roosevelt in a letter dated October 3, 1944, that he expected “the bulk of

⁷² The Moscow Conference was codenamed TOLSTOY by the British. While Roosevelt did not attend the Conference, he sent a delegate to regularly report to him on the details.

⁷³ Specifically, percentages were allocated as follows: BULGARIA and HUNGARY – Soviet Union 75%, Britain 25%; YUGOSLAVIA – Soviet Union 50%, Britain 50%; RUMANIA – Soviet Union 90%, Britain 10%, GREECE – Britain 90%, Soviet Union 10%. Note that original negotiations concluded that the Soviet Union and Britain would maintain equal influence in Hungary. However, in discussions following the Moscow Conference, Eden agreed to predominate Soviet influence in the region (75%).

[their] business [would] be about the Poles.”⁷⁴ The Soviet Union had established a presence in Poland in 1939 and 1945 and refused to relinquish territory that the Soviet Army had occupied.⁷⁵ The issue of post-war Poland divided the Allies, however in an effort to appease the Soviets, the issue was largely avoided until the end of the war.⁷⁶ At the Moscow Conference, an agreement was reached that favoured Soviet territorial interests in Poland. In exchange for the Polish government’s acceptance of Soviet territorial acquisitions along the Curzon line,⁷⁷ Stalin agreed to support the establishment of a sovereign, independent Poland.⁷⁸

The Moscow Conference revealed Stalin’s plan to establish a system of communist satellites in Eastern Europe that would serve as a buffer to the encroaching presence of the Western powers in the Balkans. The negotiations of the Soviet leadership at all post-war conferences demonstrated Stalin’s attempt to secure spheres of influence in Eastern Europe before relations broke down with the Western powers, which, while he did not see as an inevitability until 1947, he did determine to be more than just a

⁷⁴ Churchill to Roosevelt. October 3, 1944. *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*. Ed. Francis Loewenheim, Harold Langley, Manfred Jonas. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975, p. 581.

⁷⁵ The Soviet army had occupied Polish territory based on the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact concluded on September 28, 1939.

⁷⁶ Throughout the war, the Polish government appealed to Britain and the United States for a resolution of the occupation of Polish territory by the Soviet Union. In the territory under Soviet occupation, the Red Army undertook a campaign of imprisonment and deportation. However, British and American leaders sought to avoid confrontation with the Soviets on the issue. A clear example of this is the response of the Western powers to the discovery of the bodies of 8,500 Polish officers in the Katyn forest in 1943. Despite considerable evidence pointing to Soviet culpability in the massacre, the Poles were urged to drop the issue. In a telegram to Roosevelt, dated April 28, 1943, Churchill referred to discussions about Katyn with the Poles, noting “you will see that we have persuaded them to shift the argument from the dead to the living and from the past to the future.” See *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, p. 328.

⁷⁷ Lord Curzon proposed the dividing line at the time of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. From 1921 to 1939, the Russo-Polish boundary was considerably to the East of this line. The frontier arranged under the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 was further west of the Curzon line.

⁷⁸ As a result of this agreement, the Polish Prime Minister, Mikolajczyk, resigned. In the period proceeding the agreement, the Soviets aimed to install a Polish government that was sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Their tactics to this end involved substantial brutality.

possibility. In order to protect his spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, Stalin observed the terms set out at the Moscow Conference and limited Soviet involvement in Greece.

In the period that followed the Moscow Conference, Stalin attempted to demonstrate his agreement to British influence in Greece. He contributed to the preparation of a joint statement with the British insisting that the Bulgarian Army evacuate Greek Macedonia and Western Thrace, areas occupied as a result of Bulgaria's alliance with the Axis powers, which ended earlier in 1944. Similarly, after the KKE's unsuccessful uprising in the Battle of Athens in December 1944, Stalin encouraged the KKE to pursue its objectives in the political arena rather than through military initiatives. He called the Greek leftist rebellion "foolishness" and emphasized that the Western powers would never tolerate a communist Greece that would threaten their communications to the Middle East.⁷⁹

Furthermore, after the December 1944 uprising, Stalin instructed Dimitrov not to grant exile to the defeated Greek guerillas.⁸⁰ Similarly, when Dimitrios Partsalides, a leading member of the KKE, visited Moscow in January 1946, he was informed of the Soviet intention to recognize the results of the Greek elections scheduled for March 1946 under the terms of the Varkiza Agreement.⁸¹ Later, Stalin also limited his support for the KKE in the Greek Civil War that commenced in the fall of 1946. Only after successive pleas from the KKE and promises that the origin of the support would be protected, did Stalin concede.⁸²

⁷⁹ Pleshakov, Constantine and Vladislav Zubok. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*.

Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 56-57.

⁸⁰ Pleshakov, p. 126.

⁸¹ Kousoulas, D. George. "The Truman Doctrine and the Stalin-Tito Rift: A Reappraisal." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. 72(3) (Summer 1973): 427-439.

⁸² See Plushakov, p. 127-128.

Stalin's observance of the terms of the Moscow Conference was important to Churchill, whose government was under constant attack from the opposition concerning its policies in Greece, especially after the Battle of Athens in December 1944. While the leaders were at Yalta in 1945, Churchill commented on Stalin's respect for the terms established at the Moscow Conference:

The Russian attitude [at Yalta] could not have been more satisfactory. There was no suggestion on Premier Stalin's part of criticism of our policy. He had been friendly and even jocular in discussions of it... Premier Stalin has most scrupulously respected his acceptance of our position in Greece.⁸³

For the most part, Churchill extended the same observance to his agreement with Stalin, noting during discussions with his cabinet about Rumania that "his hands were tied because of his 'bargain' with Stalin."⁸⁴ Churchill also tried to remain objective as reports of Soviet ruthlessness in Poland made their way to Britain.⁸⁵

Throughout the early post-war period, consequently, Stalin's primary objective was to protect his gains in Eastern Europe. When Dimitrov and Tito concluded their negotiations regarding a Balkan federation and the unification of Macedonia at Bled in 1947, Stalin had two reasons to be concerned. First, the announcement of a Balkan federation was bound to generate a sharp response from the Western powers who naturally understood such an alliance to be a veiled attempt at Soviet hegemony in the region. Second, the suggested inclusion of Greece in the Balkan federation publicized by Dimitrov, appeared to be a reversal of the agreement concluded at the Moscow

⁸³ Churchill to Cabinet, February 19, 1945. As quoted in Gardner, Lloyd C. *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, From Munich to Yalta*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993, 244.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 244.

⁸⁵ Neither Churchill nor Roosevelt was prepared to go to war with the Soviet Union over Poland in the early post-war period. Concerning concessions made to the Soviet Union over Poland at the Yalta Conference, Churchill's government received considerable criticism.

Conference in 1944, and indicated a potential for increased Soviet presence in the country. At the same time, the landscape of international diplomacy had changed considerably since the succession of Harry Truman following Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, and the defeat of Churchill in July of the same year.

Similarly, in the period leading up to Bled, Stalin had grown increasingly suspicious of Tito's Balkan agenda and determined that his power, if unchecked, posed a direct threat to Soviet hegemony over the satellite countries. Tito had outwardly expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of Soviet support concerning Yugoslav claims in Trieste⁸⁶ and Macedonia,⁸⁷ and undertook his campaign in the Balkans without consulting the Soviet leadership. Overall, Tito made no secret of his disappointment in Stalin's lack of support for regional communist movements. This contributed to Stalin's increasing paranoia about Tito's steady rise to power in the Balkans. He determined that "Titoization had become an alternative to Sovietization for Eastern European regions trying to assert their regimes."⁸⁸ Thus, as far as Stalin was concerned, the Bled Protocols, which were concluded without his knowledge or consultation, were the last straw in the growing discord with the Yugoslav leadership.

Yugoslav representatives to the fateful Moscow meeting in February 1948, were instructed, along with the Bulgarian delegation, that "the uprising in Greece has to fold up."⁸⁹ Stalin declared:

... They have no prospect of success at all. What do you think, that Great Britain and the United States – the United States, the most powerful state in the world – will permit you to break their line of communication in the Mediterranean Sea!

⁸⁶ Actually, the Soviet leadership had, in the end, supported Tito's claims to Trieste.

⁸⁷ Plushakov, p. 126.

⁸⁸ Plushakov, p. 100.

⁸⁹ Djilas, p. 173.

Nonsense. And we have no navy. The uprising in Greece must be stopped, and as quickly as possible.⁹⁰

Stalin had correctly predicted the swift response of the Western powers to Dimitrov's announcement. On January 16, 1948, Iverchapel, the British Ambassador, telegraphed the American Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, with his concerns regarding Soviet policy in Greece:

If, however, Soviet policy was now based on the assumption that Greek frontiers were not inviolable, and if the Soviet Union and its satellites continued to foment civil war in Greece, then it was necessary to warn them publicly that they were playing with fire. In particular, such a warning should be addressed to Tito and Dimitrov, who should be reminded that, just as we had fought Hitler in defence of human liberties, so we would take a firm stand now against any new attempt to dominate free and independent countries.⁹¹

Similarly, in a dispatch from Belgrade on August 7, 1948, Ambassador Cannon summarized his analysis of the Bled meetings, stating:

The Embassy feels that the primary purpose in convening the Bled Conference at this particular time was not to lay the foundations for a Balkan Federation, but, rather, to promote the war of nerves against Greece, and to attempt, by means of beating the drums of Slav unity, brotherhood, and economic collaboration, to convince the public in this part of the world that the countries under the protective wing of the Soviet Union have something better to offer...⁹²

The Western leaders were informed of Tito's support for the communist insurgents in Greece and Dimitrov's public statement at the close of 1947 only served to reaffirm the threat that the Yugoslavs posed. The Bled Protocols coincided with the establishment of the First Provisional Democratic Government for Free Greece under the leadership of Markos Vafiadis who was considered a supporter of Tito. The Western

⁹⁰ Djilas, p. 181-182.

⁹¹ British Ambassador (Iverchapel) to the Secretary of State, January 16, 1948. *FRUS*. Volume IV: Eastern Europe – Soviet Union, p. 30.

⁹² *FRUS*. Volume IV: Eastern Europe – Soviet Union, 848n (footnote). Not printed in full in *FRUS*.

powers determined that the formation of this Provisional Government advanced the agenda of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to form a Balkan federation. George Marshall, in a communication with the Greek Ambassador, on January 19, 1948, revealed the position of the United States towards any recognition of the Markos government, stating:

The views of this Government that any such recognition not only would be contrary to the principles of the United Nations Charter but would also have serious international implications have already been publicly stated. In addition, American representatives have transmitted these views to the foreign offices of Yugoslavia, Bulgarian, and Rumania, as well as informally to the appropriate officials in other countries.⁹³

This position was firmly stated in a report to the National Security Council, dated January 6, 1948, by the Council's Executive Secretary. Emphasizing the vital strategic importance of Macedonia, the report clearly directed that:

Recognition of the 'First Provisional Democratic Government of Free Greece' by Albania, Yugoslavia, or Bulgaria, would constitute an open disregard of the resolution of October 21, 1947, of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Such recognition, combined with the UN Balkan Commission's Report charging assistance to the Greek guerillas by these three nations, might be regarded as evidence of armed attack against a member of the United Nations, justifying action under the terms of Article 51 of the UN Charter. Military aid to the illegal 'free' government would be more convincing evidence of armed attack against the legal Greek government.⁹⁴

Stalin was able to correctly predict the swift response of the Western powers to Dimitrov's announcement concerning a Balkan federation because he was aware that both American and British policies were against such a federation. The leaders of both countries had been expressing their disapproval of a Balkan alliance since early 1945. In a telegram to Edward Stettinius Jr., American Secretary of State, dated January 26, 1945,

⁹³ *FRUS*. Volume IV: Eastern Europe – Soviet Union, p. 32.

⁹⁴ *FRUS*. Volume IV: Eastern Europe – Soviet Union, p. 4.

the United States Representative in Bulgaria quoted revealing instructions presented to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

His Majesty's Government could not approve an exclusive union or federation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria... Likewise, His Majesty's Government would be strongly opposed to the creation of a greater Macedonian state involving claim upon Greek territory although they are prepared to agree to the creation of a Macedonian state in a future federal Yugoslavia. The activities of Macedonian propagandists in Bulgaria which the Bulgarian Government appear to condone, are therefore looked upon with disfavor by His Majesty's Government. Also, the transfer of any part of Bulgarian territory to the Yugoslav federal state of Macedonia without consent of the United Nations would be an act which His Majesty's Government does not consider the Bulgarian Government would have the right to perform.⁹⁵

These views were similarly expressed directly to the Soviet leadership in July 1945, by James Byrnes, Acting Secretary of State, who requested that the Soviet Ambassador inform the Soviet Government that they were "quite willing to hold discussions immediately at Moscow with a view to enabling the three principal Allies to arrive at a common position with respect to the question of the proposed Yugoslav-Bulgarian pact."⁹⁶ This telegram reaffirmed the position of the American Government, stating that:

3. ... We cannot subscribe to the Soviet view that the proposed pact would contribute to the future maintenance of peace and security in Europe, and the Balkans in particular. On the contrary, we feel that the proposed treaty, particularly at this stage, would introduce a disquieting element into the European political situation...
4. We believe that our motives urging that the proposed pact be discounted have been made clear...⁹⁷

Thus, the position of the Western powers with respect to both the proposed Balkan federation and intervention in the Greek Civil War had been clearly outlined well in advance of the Bled Protocols at the end of 1947.

⁹⁵ *FRUS*. Volume V: Europe, p. 1306.

⁹⁶ *FRUS*. Volume V: Europe, p. 1310.

⁹⁷ *FRUS*. Volume V: Europe, p. 1311.

When word of the Bled Protocols reached the Soviet leadership, Stalin responded immediately with a cable to Belgrade and Sofia “denouncing the meeting as a mistake that might be used by ‘reactionary British-American elements’ in order ‘to expand military intervention in Greek and Turkish affairs against Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.’”⁹⁸ Dimitrov’s announcement of the conclusion of the Bled Protocols, which were interpreted in the West as veiled Soviet hegemony over all the Balkans, preceded Stalin’s move to gain greater control over the Turkish straits.⁹⁹ The British Embassy had informed the U.S. State Department in February 1947, that Britain could no longer provide financial support to the governments of Greece and Turkey. The Truman Doctrine provided \$400 million in assistance to Greece and Turkey, which had resulted in a massive increase in American intervention in the Balkans. With the mounting tension between the Western powers and the Soviet Union, Stalin recognized the impact of Dimitrov’s announcement of the proposed Balkan federation involving Greece.

Stalin’s furious castigation of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian delegations in Moscow in February 1948, was thus the combination of a number of factors. Tito’s Macedonia campaign, which contributed to his motivation for supporting the KKE in the Greek Civil War, conflicted with Stalin’s plans for the post-war Balkans and Eastern Europe. Stalin had reached an agreement with Churchill at the Moscow Conference in October 1944, under which he agreed to recognize predominate British influence in Greece. He had undertaken measures to this end throughout the post-war period. The Western powers

⁹⁸ Plushakov, p. 129.

⁹⁹ On May 8, 1945, the leadership of Turkey cabled the Soviet Union seeking to conclude a treaty of friendship. Stalin saw this as an opportunity to revisit the Montreux Convention and did so at both the Moscow Conference (1944) and Yalta (1945). Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that the revision was necessary but before having a chance to discuss such a revision, Stalin presented an ultimatum to Turkey demanding the lease of a base in the straits and two territories. This aggressive tactic led Truman to consider the possibility of a Soviet invasion of Turkey. See Plushakov, p. 92.

had clearly expressed their position on a proposed Balkan federation and on assistance from Balkan countries to aid the Greek communists.

Leading up to the Bled Protocols, the international atmosphere had changed substantially with the succession of Truman and Atlee, in place of Roosevelt and Churchill. Stalin was already at odds with the Western powers over the Turkish straits and the Soviet presence in Poland. With the increased presence of the United States in Greece beginning in 1947, Stalin had directed his efforts at protecting his interests in Eastern Europe from the encroachment of the West. The Bled Protocols concluded between Tito and Dimitrov at the end of 1947, succeeded in calling attention to Stalin, who was already suspected by the British and Americans of using Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to mask Soviet hegemony.

Following Stalin's meeting with delegates of the CPY and BCP in Moscow in February 1948, relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union continued to decline. Tito's continued support for the Greek communists was interpreted as a direct challenge to Stalin's authority. Tito placed his hope in a communist victory that would see Markos Vafiadis ascend to power in Greece, which he believed was the only means of achieving his plans for a greater Macedonia. The CPY demonstrated a loyal and unified front behind their leader, alongside whom many had fought to liberate their country.

In the period directly preceding the Moscow meeting, Tito prepared for a direct attack on his leadership. He correctly assumed that Stalin would attempt to remove him from power by fomenting a revolution in Yugoslavia. In two meetings of the CPY Central Committee in March and April 1948, Tito received sweeping votes of confidence. He simultaneously rejected demands that he attend a meeting of the Cominform to

arbitrate the dispute. The Cominform met in Bucharest in June 1948, in the absence of Yugoslav representation, and expelled Yugoslavia from the organization.

What ensued was a war of nerves that brought Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union to the brink of armed conflict and resulted in the intervention of the Western powers. Stalin quickly converted Tito's closest Balkan allies into enemies and Tito received letters of denunciation from the Communist Parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania. Stalin attempted to isolate the CPY into submission through the imposition of economic sanctions by the Soviet Union and her satellites. Similarly, the Soviet intelligence network, with the assistance of intelligence networks of countries bordering Yugoslavia, undertook a propaganda campaign focused on inciting a revolution that would start in Yugoslav Macedonia and spread throughout the rest of the country. Furthermore, Stalin ordered the mobilization of forces in Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary, and frontier incidents between Yugoslavia and her neighbors increased.

While Britain and the United States waited patiently for Tito to turn to them for support, not wanting to risk discrediting him by their association, analysts compiled reports that assessed all potential outcomes of the Tito-Cominform rift. The leaders of Britain and the United States discussed scenarios with policy makers to determine their position should an attack on Yugoslavia by the Soviet Union become imminent. Although neither power wanted to engage in war with the Soviet Union over Yugoslavia, both realized the benefit of having an ally among the Soviet dominated communist countries in the Balkans. This level of intervention, however, did not prove necessary. After five years the tension ended with the death of Stalin in 1953.

CONCLUSION

In the end, Stalin's attempt to remove Tito from power backfired and resulted in an increased Western presence in the Balkans. Much to the satisfaction of Britain and the United States, however, the Bucharest Resolution did succeed in accelerating the collapse of the Greek Civil War by forcing the end of Yugoslav aid to the Greek Communists. In the two years leading up to the Cominform Resolution, the Yugoslavs provided substantial assistance to the Greek insurrection in the form of military aid and training bases. This aid continued in the early period following the Resolution, however, the decision by Zachariadis to support Stalin in the dispute, led to the termination of aid from Yugoslavia and the closure of the Greek-Yugoslav border. Tito's decision to end his assistance to the Democratic Army of Greece contributed to the ultimate failure of the Greek Civil War and resulted in major divisions within the Greek Communist Party.

On January 31, 1949, the KKE's Fifth Plenum Resolution revised the official party line on the question of Greek Macedonia and called for the establishment of an independent state by the Slavo-Macedonians in Greek Macedonia within a Balkan federation upon the successful conclusion of the civil war. This controversial decision alarmed the Western powers and forced a re-evaluation of the KKE by the Greek people and communist politicians alike. The Resolution was perceived by the Western powers as part of the Soviet plan to undermine Tito. Immediately following the Cominform Resolution an anti-Tito campaign was undertaken in Greek Macedonia and the Bulgarians, who had severed their alliances with Yugoslavia, renewed their own irredentist ambitions in the region. While the KKE retracted the Resolution and denied the immediacy of a decision on the question of Greek Macedonia, the cat had been let out

of the bag. The Resolution of the Fifth Plenum deepened Tito's resentment toward the KKE.

As a result of the Cominform Resolution, Tito's campaign for a greater Macedonia amounted to nothing more than another attempt in a long line of efforts to control the strategic region since the collapse of Ottoman rule at the turn of the twentieth century. The year 2003 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Stalin's death. The half-century that has elapsed since the conclusion of the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute has not resolved the Macedonia question. The disintegration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, once again served to heighten tension in the region. In September 1991, the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared its independence and threatened to destabilize the Northern border of Greece. The international community responded by sending monitors to the region.

With the exception of minor flare-ups, the Macedonia question was relatively dormant until the end of the 1980s. In October 1989, however, public demonstrations were held in various cities of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia calling for the 'reunification' of Macedonia. A nationalist party, the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity) was founded in January 1990 and tabled the Macedonia question in the political arena. Cause for alarm was delayed in Greece until it became obvious that the collapse of the Yugoslav Republic was imminent and decline of Serbian hegemony in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was the inevitable result.

When ethnic nationalism swept through the republics of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, common themes in the history of Balkan relations presented themselves. Bulgaria had

never relinquished her territorial aspirations in the Macedonias of her neighbors. The declaration of independence by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia created a new opportunity for Bulgarian irredentism in the region. To this end, the leadership of Bulgaria was not indifferent to the collapse of Serbian control in the region and demonstrated that they were willing to sacrifice relations with Greece to play their cards in Macedonia. The Greek government responded to the changing climate in the North by calling for the support of the international community in guaranteeing the protection of existing borders in the Balkans. Furthermore, Greek politicians challenged the validity of the name selected by the independent Macedonian Republic, recognizing the potential threat that calls for unification could cause in Northern Greece.

Challenges from Greece based on claims regarding the Hellenic origins of the new state's name and symbols, delayed the international community's recognition of the independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In August 1992, the Soviet Union recognized the independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic in conjunction with the rest of the international community. In 1995, Greece finally lifted the blockade that had been imposed on the region as a demonstration of their refusal to recognize its independence. In 1996, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia began to receive funding from the EU and signed an Agreement for Stabilization and Association with the EU in 2001.

Despite the intervention of the EU and the international community, the potential for instability in the region remains an impediment to relations within the Balkans. In 2001, an agreement signed and ratified between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Former Yugoslavia that adjusted the borders between the new state

and Kosovo, remains a major point of contention with Albanian ethnic groups in Kosovo. Based on the turbulent history in the region, it is likely that the world has not seen the end of conflict in the Balkans over Macedonia. Major powers with strategic interests in the Balkans have been deterred from greater involvement because of the instability and tension in the region. Presently, the international community has provided a band-aid solution to the nationalist aspirations of the various ethnic groups in the Balkans that is unlikely to prevent the future collapse of the region into violent conflict.

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