

FROM 'PESSIMISM' TO GEOPOLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION:
REVISTING THE US POLICY TOWARDS DYING YUGOSLAVIA

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ABSTRACT

The article studies the US foreign policy towards Yugoslavia from Premier Ante Marković's visit to Washington, DC in October 1989 to the end of 1990. It addresses the superpower's approach towards the federal economic and political reform plan and its stance in relation to the country's unity after the end of the Cold War. Considering archival materials from the George Bush Presidential records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and sources available in US agencies' electronic reading rooms, the author dismisses the idea that the US administration did not consider Yugoslavia to be important from the geopolitical perspective.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, US Foreign Policy, Geopolitics, Cold War – End, New World Order

DAL 'PESSIMISMO' ALLA STRUMENTALIZZAZIONE GEOPOLITICA: UNA RILETTURA
DELLA POLITICA STATUNITENSE RISPETTO AL TRAMONTO DELLA JUGOSLAVIA

SINTESI

L'analisi della politica estera statunitense nei confronti della Jugoslavia, illustrata nel presente articolo, prende in considerazione l'arco di tempo compreso tra la visita ufficiale del premier jugoslavo Ante Marković a Washington DC nell'ottobre del 1989 e la fine del 1990. Nello specifico sono oggetto d'esame l'approccio della superpotenza statunitense rispetto al piano jugoslavo di riforma politica ed economica della federazione nonché la sua posizione riguardo all'integrità della Jugoslavia alla fine della guerra fredda. L'autore, sulla scorta di materiale d'archivio proveniente dai registri presidenziali di George Bush, visionati tramite il Freedom of Information Act [Legge per la libertà di informazione], e sulla base delle fonti disponibili presso le sale di lettura digitali degli enti governativi statunitensi, respinge la tesi che l'amministrazione statunitense dopo la fine della guerra fredda non considerasse la Jugoslavia geopoliticamente importante.

Parole chiave: Jugoslavia, politica estera statunitense, geopolitica, fine della guerra fredda, Nuovo ordine mondiale

INTRODUCTION

The accounts of the US policy towards Yugoslavia during its final crisis are, to an extent, the tales of justifications of policy-makers. Among these, the presence of a certain 'pessimism' towards the future of the country was allegedly the key reason why the administration decided not to support the plan for implementing market economy at the federal level, promoted by the Yugoslav federal government between 1989 and 1990. Influential figures like Brent Scowcroft (Bush's National Security Advisor and a former staff in the US embassy in Yugoslavia) and Lawrence Eagleburger (Deputy Secretary of State and former ambassador in Belgrade) were "pessimistic" in relation to the fate of the country at least since the end of 1989 (Hutchings, 2011). The ambassador in Belgrade during this period, Warren Zimmermann, summarizes and justifies this attitude in his memoirs:

The very difficulty of Marković's problems, which should have made assistance imperative [in 1990], caused people to shy away. Compared with other countries in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia didn't look like a good bet. Politicians would rather back a winner than a loser, and, despite Marković's heroic efforts, Yugoslavia looked like a loser (1996, 51).

Thus, in the case of the US gaze towards Yugoslavia, pessimism becomes a signifier that, intentionally or not, blurs the political decision of not supporting changes at the federal level and, at the same time, blames the Yugoslav government for it.

'Pessimism' was linked with the loss of geopolitical importance attributed to Yugoslavia as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. With the consent of Eagleburger, Zimmermann based his diplomatic activity on the idea that the US policy towards Yugoslavia was not anymore subject to its geopolitical position, but to general principles of promotion of democracy and human rights (Zimmermann, 1996, 7–8). However, Louis Sell, political counsellor in the US embassy in Belgrade during this period, tackled this problem in a less conclusive way. Looking back to the beginning of the crisis, he noted that

senior officials in the Bush administration decided early on that Yugoslavia did not touch vital US

interests and that there were no solutions to the conflict that could be effectively advanced by the United States. Whether the Bush administration was sincere or was simply sheltering behind them to avoid involvement in what was seen as a non-win issue remains a matter of debate (Sell, 2002, 205).

Explanations based on the loss of geopolitical importance of Yugoslavia are valid from the perspective of the end of the Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and the beginning of the transitions in Poland and Hungary, which, under the gaze of the Bush administration, were essential pieces in terms of pressuring the Soviet Union.¹ In that scenario, in fact, Yugoslavia had ceased to be located in a geopolitical borderland, or, in Cold War terms, it was not anymore "*an obstacle to Soviet expansionism and hegemony in southern Europe.*"² However, despite the fact that the transition towards a new geopolitical order involved critical changes, certain continuities of the US geopolitical foundations and, consequently, of world politics, can be found, as "*political institutions created and shaped by the decades-long Cold War division of international politics would exert and extend themselves eastward over a unified world*" (Sarotte, 2014, 8). In particular, the end of bipolarity meant not only the shifting of geopolitical borders eastwards, but also structural continuities that shaped the exertion of power. In terms of Ó Tuathail (1998, 103), "*while the Soviet complex began to disintegrate, the Western complex of ideology, institutions and intellectuals remained coherent and in place.*" Among these continuities, the exclusion of Russia from the plans of the winning side of the Cold War had specific implications, including, as Sakwa points out (2008, 252–259), the rejection of a new collective security system in Europe under the CSCE and the subsequent NATO enlargement.

After the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was still holding a particular geopolitical significance. Whereas at the end of 1989 – at the beginning of its final crisis³ – the country was not located anymore at a geopolitical borderland, it was still holding a specific role in the US rationale due to its resemblance to the Soviet Union as a socialist multinational federation. The awareness of the potential effects of their similarities dates back to the beginning of the Second Cold War, during the Carter administration, a period that brought about a new discussion on the question of nationalities in socialist federations and

1 In terms of Robert Hutchings (1997, 38), director of European Affairs of the National Security Council, "*rather than seeking a strategic partnership with a reform-minded Soviet leadership, the United States, in effect, held its bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union, and East-West generally, hostage to the end of the Soviet domination of the countries of Eastern Europe.*"

2 FAS-PD, National Security Decision Directive 133, United States Policy Toward Yugoslavia, March 14, 1984.

3 The legal basis of subsequent political decisions in Serbia and Slovenia were set in 1989 (Silber and Little, 1996, 73–78). In March, Serbia reformed its republican constitution and took control of its two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, and their representation at the federal level. Between September and December, Slovenia declared its sovereignty and introduced specific legal obstacles to federal democratisation, including the blockade of eventual federal elections and halting the contribution to federal funds out of its own income. These changes, along with specific events – including the Cankarjev dom gathering of the Slovene leadership in February, the

the role of ethnic groups in the stability of countries with similar characteristics. At the end of the seventies, as Gates⁴ notes (1996, 93), the Department of State considered that countries like Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia could suffer the consequences of the eventual American support of Soviet nationalities, which could lead to the possibility of disintegration and violence in socialist multinational federations. This idea was based on the perceived fragility of the Yugoslav federation, which was shared by different agencies. Cord Meyer, a CIA officer in Europe, wrote in 1980 about the possibility of the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, a process in which Washington and Moscow would support different nationalities (1980, 294). The CIA held this line, particularly highlighting the indispensable role of Tito in the preservation of unity and peace in the country.⁵ From a different background, Zbigniew Brzezinski (2011) reminded that, as Carter's National Security Advisor (NSA), he considered that Yugoslavia could not survive eventual nationalistic tensions between Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes once Tito died.

These ideas – the artificiality attributed to the federation and the subordination of the policy to the approach towards the Soviet Union – were inherited by the Bush administration after the beginning of the Yugoslav political and institutional crisis by the end of 1989, a moment in which the federal government attempted to implement an ambitious reform agenda and, at the same time, republican elites were institutionalising their own political changes. In the first stage of this period – from October 1989 to the summer of 1990 –, the US supported the federal reform plan without providing any substantial assistance for its successful execution. The administration only started to discuss the geopolitical position of Yugoslavia in the second half of 1990, under the light of the increasingly delicate situation of the Soviet Union.

PESSIMISM AS AN EXCUSE: THE POLICY TOWARDS THE FEDERAL REFORM

The US policy towards Yugoslavia after the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe was initially framed, in Hutchings' terms, *"in the context of a general liberalization in the region,"* even though he acknowledged that the country *"was a blind spot from the beginning"* and that the administration *"saw the warning signs if impending disintegration but drew no lessons from them"* (1997, 40). The detachment of the US policy from de-

velopments in the field started with the way in which the administration addressed the project of federal reform carried out by the federal government of Yugoslavia.

The program of Ante Marković – federal prime minister since March 1989 – was initially oriented towards the implementation of economic changes. Sasso (2015, 215) points out three explanations for his *"economy-first stance,"* including the premier's personal and career background, the limited prerogatives of the Federal Executive Council, and the precedent of Mikulić's government, which had fallen in March 1989 after a failed constitutional reform and the worsening of the macroeconomic situation of the country. By the end of 1989, Yugoslavia was suffering a 2,700% inflation rate (OECD, 1990, 60) and a chronic stagnation, which raised unemployment to 15% (OECD, 1990, 34). For the planning of his economic program, Marković decided to follow the recipes of the shock therapy, against the advice of some of his advisors, like Aleksander Bajt, who defended a gradual approach to market reform (Meier, 1999, 105).⁶ This decision was related to Marković's aim of framing his action in the broader regional context of political and economic changes. The premier had gained the respect of the staff of the US Embassy in Belgrade from the beginning, and Warren Zimmermann professed great sympathy for him and for what he represented: *"a leader who could deal with the growing economic crisis and at the same time appeal to Yugoslavs to stay together and build a democratic society"* (Zimmermann, 1996, 42–43). Moreover, Marković relied on the macroeconomic stabilisation plan outlined by Harvard professor Jeffrey Sachs, which was being implemented in Poland (Sachs, 2005, 127).⁷ The initiative of implicating Sachs in the Yugoslav reform endeavour fitted into the regional scheme of the United States. Despite not being an official envoy of the administration, he was considered an *"informal ally"* for supporting Eastern European governments to carry out the same policies that the United States was promoting (Hutchings, 2011). In particular, his plan involved the rejection of *"third ways,"* forms of public ownership, and workers' self-management initiatives. Its completion in Poland and Yugoslavia comprised two phases for the implementation of a *"Western-style market economy"* (Sachs, 1990). The first was endogenous, and consisted in the application of measures, including deregulation of imports, price liberalisations, wage controls, tax cuts, and limitations in money supply. The most important action for controlling inflation was the introduction of a

Serbian boycott of Slovene products in November, and the Slovene banning of the 'rally of truth' in December –, entailed the breakup between the two republics (Palacios, 2000, 295).

4 Robert Gates performed as Bush's Deputy National Security Advisor until November 1991, when his nomination for the position of Director of Central Intelligence (signed by the president in May) was confirmed by the Senate.

5 CIA-FOIAC, "Prospects for Post-Tito Yugoslavia," 1, National Intelligence Estimate, 15-79, February 1, 1979.

6 The strategy for a gradual market reform was firstly advocated by Gorbachev, and was briefly attempted in Poland after the 1989 elections (Klein, 2010, 237).

7 Sachs visited Yugoslavia for the first time in November 1989, after an invitation of the President of the Presidency (Drnovšek, 1996, 135).

fixed exchange rate of the dinar over the German mark.⁸ The second stage of the program was external, and intended to “finance a safety net for the region” through Western financial support, part of which was intended to come in the form of grants and the cancellation of accumulated debt, which, in the Yugoslav case, had become a chronic problem.⁹

In this period, ‘pessimism’ became the justification of the American policy towards Yugoslavia. This attitude had specific implications, and Marković experienced them during his visit to Washington in October 1989, in which he met with policymakers, bankers, and businessmen.¹⁰ The results of the meetings were disappointing in terms of finding actual financial assistance. In the case of the meeting with the president, “no financial or other support was forthcoming, and without US government action, others – such as the banks, international financial institutions, and Europeans – would not act” (Woodward, 2000, 144). The encounter was intended to demonstrate verbal support of the administration to Marković’s reformist agenda.¹¹ However, information provided in advance by the State Department to the president alerted him that, even though Marković had managed to place himself at the “forefront of change in Eastern Europe,” Yugoslavia was facing its most serious political and economic crisis since its inception after the Second World War.¹² The US diplomatic bureaucracy admitted that, in order to succeed, the premier “will need funds to soften the blow of structural adjustment,” but that the US “cannot provide them.” Instead, it suggested that, besides the political support for the unity of Yugoslavia,

one concrete form of help we could provide would be an infusion of U.S. expertise in management, finance, and economics to help build a genuine market economy. By drawing heavily on voluntary organisations

*and the Peace Corps, and sharing some costs with the Yugoslavs, we could do this with little or no additional financial burden on the U.S. Government.*¹³

At the same time, the NSC specifically alerted Bush that Marković would attempt to match Yugoslavia’s position with that of Poland and Hungary. In that case, the president was advised to consider that Yugoslavia deserved “sympathy and understanding,” and recommended him to “note that Yugoslavia already enjoys the trade benefits we have made available to Poland and Hungary.”¹⁴ Finally, as Hutchings recalls, Marković’s visit passed “almost unnoticed [...] He got a polite hearing and words of encouragement, but no tangible economic or political support” (1997, 304).¹⁵

The aforementioned distinction between Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and Poland and Hungary, on the other, had a specific rationale. At that time, Washington’s regional policy was outlined in terms of self-determination of Eastern European countries with regard to the Soviet Union (Hutchings, 1997, 37). This approach presented a certain continuity in relation to Reagan’s years, characterised by the differentiation of cases according to the level of political liberalisation of individual countries and their distancing from the USSR. In that context, political developments in Poland and Hungary were significantly more important to the US, and, since 1988, their incipient transitions deserved all the possible support. Later, at the end of 1989, a specific law, the Support of East European Democracy Act, was set up in order to encourage political and economic liberalisation in both countries through a conditional aid package,¹⁶ and, at the same time, “to test the reality of new Soviet thinking and whether Soviet behaviour matches rhetoric in key areas around the world.”¹⁷ In this vein, Hutchings synthesizes: “Rather than seeking a strategic partnership with a reform-minded Soviet

8 A leading Western advisor said that ethnic tensions would be automatically solved if that exchange rate was maintained over time (Almond, 1994, 17).

9 Marković requested the postponement, not forgiveness, of Yugoslavia’s debts (Sachs, 2005, 127). In 1989, the Yugoslav debt with international financial institutions consisted of six International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs – one of them included a surveillance procedure – and one carried out by the World Bank (WB). Together, they added up to 16,2 billion dollars. The Yugoslav debt had reached its peak in 1987, with 20 billion (OECD, 1990, 33–34).

10 During his trip, he obtained the verbal support of leading figures of the administration – including the state secretary, James Baker, the defence secretary, Dick Cheney, and the treasury secretary, Nicholas Brady – and of the presidents of the EXIMBANK, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the WB, and the IMF (Woodward, 2000, 144).

11 “Markovic is not the answer to all of Yugoslavia’s problems, but his agenda is the right one. We believe a meeting with the President would be an important signal of US support for the Markovic government and the reform course on which it has embarked” (BPR-NSC PAF, ID# 8906064, Memorandum, Robert L. Hutchings to Brent Scowcroft, August 15, 1989).

12 BPR-NSC PAF, ID# 8908086, Memorandum, J. Stapleton Roy to Brent Scowcroft, October 6, 1989.

13 BPR-NSC PAF, ID# 8908086, Memorandum, J. Stapleton Roy to Brent Scowcroft, October 6, 1989.

14 BPR-NSC PAF, ID# 8908086, “Meeting with Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic,” Brent Scowcroft to the President, October 12, 1989.

15 Similarly, when the President of the Yugoslav Presidency, Janez Drnovšek, met with Bush in New York only a few weeks before, the possibility of applying the Brady plan for debt reduction (that had been applied in Latin America) in Yugoslavia was surreptitiously dismissed by the American president (BPR-Memcons and Telcons, meeting with President Janez Drnovsek of Yugoslavia, September 25, 1989).

16 The law included different support methods, including plans for the waiver of debt and a specific assistance package for Poland. The plan followed Sachs’ proposals (BPR-JTF, ID# 04334, Memorandums, Susan Collins to John Taylor, “Suggestions To Help Ease The Adjustment in Poland” and “The Timing of An Economic Reform Package For Poland: Talking Points,” October 26, 1989).

17 FAS-PD, National Security Directive 23, US Relations with the Soviet Union, September 22, 1989.

leadership, the United States, in effect, held its bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union, and East-West relations generally, hostage to the end of Soviet domination of the countries of Eastern Europe" (Hutchings, 1997, 38). In that context, the National Security Council and the Council of Economic Advisers worked hand in hand from the second half of 1989 in order to carry out a comprehensive assistance package to Poland.¹⁸ As a follow up, the Treasury Department announced the establishment of a multilateral stabilisation fund for Poland that would include partners from Western Europe and Japan in January 1990.¹⁹

The approach towards Yugoslavia remained without changes at the diplomatic level throughout most of 1990. In October, one year after Marković's visit to the United States, Bush expressed its support to "the government's political and economic reform" to the then federal president, Borisav Jović.²⁰ This contact confirmed that the US policy towards Yugoslavia still lacked specific support measures and that it was disconnected from developments in the field, like the fact that Jović himself was a fierce opponent of the federal reform program. That conversation between chiefs of state demonstrated America's lack of interest, which was confirmed by the cancellation of a visit from the secretary of defense.

Another example of these contradictions had taken place on July 4 1990, when the secretary of state expressed his support to Marković's program and, at the same time, welcomed the results of the republican elections that had taken place in Croatia and Slovenia in spring.²¹ That approach ignored the nature of republican elections in Yugoslavia, which, as Woodward points out (2000, 117–118), were more means for consolidation of local elites than a step towards democratisation and liberalisation. In particular, the institutional reform that had allowed political pluralism in Slovenia in September 1989 was concurrent with the new Act on Parliamentary Elections, which, in practice, blocked the possibility of holding federal elections.²² Later, in October, the State Department expressed its interest in the compliance of elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia²³ with the new criteria approved by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) for the validation of democratic, free, and fair elections.²⁴ The administration kept on avoiding the

political implications of voting at the republican level even after the conclusion of the Slovenian independence referendum, in December 1990. At that moment, it welcomed the fact that all republics had already held elections, and hoped that the country's future would be shaped by the result of a dialogue that should take into account the interests of all peoples of Yugoslavia.²⁵ In this vein, the administration was assuming that the democratic legitimacy paradigm could only be applied at the republican level, accepting as a *fait accompli* that Yugoslavia was not able to complete its own transition process and would eventually cease to exist as a federal state.

By then, Marković had already postponed his own plans for political reform, "so that the process of constitution of the various multiparty parliaments are consolidated," as he noted as early as in March.²⁶ This delay forced the extension of the mandate of republican representatives in the Federal Assembly (elected back in 1986), which involved a decline of the legitimacy of federal institutions in front of the multiparty elections that were taking place at the republican level. Later, the creation of his new political party – the Alliance of Reformist Forces – only led to the electoral failure of the federal approach in the republics that held elections in fall.²⁷ As one of Marković's top advisor remarks, the background of this development consisted in the initial prioritisation of the economic question, when, in fact, the Yugoslav problem was an essentially political one (Vejnović, 2013).

ASSUMING FAIT ACCOMPLI: GEOPOLITICAL ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTS OF VIOLENCE

During the first half of 1990, the federal institutions received feedbacks from the IMF and the WB, which assessed positively the results of the economic reform plan. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also stressed the role of the federal government in the partial economic success, pointed out that the measures were only a first step, and highlighted that systemic weaknesses (including the restructuring of the entrepreneurial and banking sectors, the labour-market reform, and the effects of new fiscal provisions) would be resolved only "with patience and

18 The drafting of the Support for East European Democracy Act, the Council of Economic Advisors justified the assistance to Poland on Sachs' plan. During September 1989, the communications from this office incorporated press articles with information of the achievements and ideas by the young professor (BPR-MBF, ID# 01113, Letter, John B. Taylor to James C. Murr, September 25, 1989).

19 BPR-TDF, ID# 00972, US Treasury Remote Unit, "Status Report on Polish Stabilization Fund," January 4, 1990.

20 BPR-Memcon and Telcons, meeting with President Jovic of Yugoslavia, October 1, 1990.

21 ERC – US Department of State, Dispatch, vol. 1, no 1, September 3, 1990.

22 In this vein, the new Act on Political Associations created the conditions for the constitution of republican political parties.

23 Which were held in November and December.

24 BPR-RHF, ID# 01412, "Statement by Margaret Tutwiler/Spokesman," October 31, 1990.

25 BPR-RHF, ID# 01412, "EUP daily press guidances. Yugoslavia: Slovene independence referendum," December 24, 1990.

26 El País, 3. 3. 1990: Ante Marković: 'Necesito cinco años para realizar la reforma económica' (El País, 2017).

27 The organisation was established after the elections in Slovenia and Croatia, and only presented candidates in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

perseverance" (OECD, 1990, 75).²⁸ Praises also came from the US bureaucracies. In June, six months after the implementation of the program, the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) made a positive assessment of new inflation figures, the effects of liberalisation of imports, and the creation of new companies.²⁹ It also pointed out that the decision not to include Yugoslavia in the program of the Paris Club for that year was weakening the administration's discourse of support of Yugoslavia.³⁰ During this period, economic institutions put aside political developments in their analysis, taking for granted that the partial improvement of macroeconomic figures would automatically resolve political contradictions.

Meanwhile, the CIA was drawing a gloomy prospect of the implementation of the economic plan. Months before the CEA presented its opinion, the Agency's highlighted the vicissitudes of the program, including the growth of money supply (higher than expected) and misapplication of the wage freeze.³¹ Nevertheless, the Agency's analysis were primarily marked by portraying political obstacles in front of the federal government. In October, it submitted a comprehensive report that sentenced Marković's economic program in front of the administration. In that occasion, the CIA pointed at the economic failure of the program and insisted in the precarious political situation of Marković:

*Given deepening political cleavages in Yugoslavia, Markovic almost certainly lacks the support to recover momentum for his reform program [...] Markovic recently told reporters that he faces heavy criticism from Slovenia, and Croatia, where the new non-communist governments want to accelerate the pace of privatization but are resisting those reforms that would increase federal government control over the economy.*³²

In this vain, "[the Agency] judge[s] that over the next several months Yugoslavia will face both renewed inflation and economic stagnation or decline," and that

"Markovic – assuming he is still in power – will have to choose between a relatively loose monetary policy that would minimize the effects of recession at the cost of higher inflation, or tight monetary policies that would curb price growth but worse the economic slide." Furthermore, the report concluded that the fate of Yugoslavia itself was linked to Marković's future.

The CIA had been submitting reports from this approach throughout 1990. In April, it warned of the possibility of the outbreak of violence if the nationalist right-wing won the elections in Croatia that month.³³ In September, a special analysis pointed out that the *"disintegration of Yugoslavia appears irreversible,"* and that only a few factors (mainly financial) could slow down the process for a few years, warning, once again, of the risk of civil war.³⁴ In any case, the analysis said, *"the republics have taken control of the dissolution process,"* and, in relation with Slovenia and Croatia, *"both appear to view a confederation as only a transitory arrangement on the road to full independence."*³⁵ Later that month, the Agency added a relevant implication of possible dissolution process: *"Yugoslavia's breakup could produce a new clash of international territorial claims and counterclaims in the Balkans and to the creation of an area of major instability in the borderlands of Europe,"* which, at least, *"would hamper US and Western efforts to build a stable post-Cold War order in Europe."*³⁶ In that scenario, the *"US interlocutors at the federal level, such as Markovic, will have little or no influence over events in the strife torn republics."*

Even though the CIA had early assumed that Yugoslavia remained strategically important to the US after the end of the Cold War, this idea was incorporated by the administration only by autumn 1990. Policy planning from this approach had started in July 1990, when the Department of State submitted a report to the National Security Council that served as the basis for the elaboration of the policy towards Yugoslavia until the beginning of wars. The document took into account a general trend in the case of socialist and multinational federa-

28 Non-government actors also praised Marković's efforts. George Soros pointed out that, at that point, *"Yugoslavia was economically much better situated than Poland [...] Yugoslavia had the advantage of experts trained by the international financial institutions in Washington, and the program was much more advanced than in Poland. Prices were actually falling in April"* 1990, when Markovic launched his party (Soros, 2007, 311–312).

29 BPR-JTF, ID# 00504, Memorandum, Naomi Smith, Susan Collins and Lael Brainard to Michael Boskin and John Taylor, "Cables on East Bloc Economic Developments (June 11–15)," June 15, 1990.

30 BPR-JTF, ID# 04330, Memorandum, Susan Collins to Michael Boskin and John Taylor, "Paris Club Rescheduling for Yugoslavia," June 11, 1990. The document described Yugoslavia as a country in default. On the other hand, it referred to the precedents of Brazil and Chile in 1987, in which the US had a different reaction in a similar economic context.

31 CIA-FOIAC, "Yugoslavia – Key Points," February 1990.

32 BPR-RHF, ID# 00684, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency: "Yugoslavia: Economic Reform Running Aground", October 5, 1990.

33 CIA-FOIAC, "Yugoslavia: End of the Federal Experiment," Special Analysis, September 15, 1990.

34 CIA-FOIAC, "Yugoslavia: More Centrifugal Elections in Store," Special Analysis, April 18, 1990.

35 This analysis fits with Robert Hayden's (1999, 55–57) description of the confederal proposal presented by Croatia and Slovenia in October 1990, *"a putative confederacy [...] a nullity, a set of hortatory phrases and expressions of ideals, without any practical way of achieving them."* Most importantly, its member states could, *"at the request of any of them, consult among themselves concerning the revision of the agreement or the dissolution of the confederacy."*

36 CIA-FOIAC, "End of a Nation-building Experiment," September 21, 1990.



Image 1: A memorial on the exact location of the event from June 27, 1991, when a Yugoslav People's Army tank ran over a Croatian car, indicating the start of the hostilities, resulting in the Croatian war of independence (www.reddit.com/r/TankPorn/comments/41qsvh/a_red_zastava_750_fiat_600_triumphs_over_its/)

tions in relation to their position in the post-Cold War: *"The revival [of national movements] is most evident in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, where the demise of Marxist-Leninist ideologies and structures, failures in the economy, and absence of foreign threats have loosened the glue holding these fragmented multinational states together."*³⁷ In the particular case of Yugoslavia, the glue

was necessary, given that it was *"the most artificial and fragile of European countries,"* resulting of the sum of nationalities in specific historical circumstances.³⁸

The arguments of the State Department were in line with the administration's lack of support to the federal reform plan, insofar it disregarded the role of federal institutions at the stroke of a pen: *"Whether we like it*

37 BPR-RHF, ID# 00684, "Self-Determination and US Policy: The Yugoslav Case," attached to United States Department of State, memorandum for Brent Scowcroft, "Yugoslavia – Intelligence," July 16, 1990.

38 In fact, the beliefs in the alleged artificiality of Yugoslavia and in the inevitability of interethnic war was part of the US geopolitical reasoning during the Cold War, and served as a justification for the traditional policy of support of Yugoslavia's "independence, unity and territorial integrity" in front of the Soviet ambitions in Southeast Europe, as defined back in 1984 by the Reagan administration: FAS-PD, National Security Decision Directive 133, United States Policy Toward Yugoslavia, March 14, 1984.

or not, we have to face the prospect that no viable new system will emerge and that the independence of one or more republics in Yugoslavia may become a reality." Although not pretending to explicitly encourage secessionist republics, the report was assuming the doctrine of republican primacy over federal legality, deployed by Slovenia after the approval of its constitutional amendments in September 1989 (Hayden, 1999, 37–38).

The document stressed the importance of interrepublican consensus at the federal level, assuming republics as natural substances and constitutive entities. National unanimity became the supreme element for assessing the viability of the country, above the Yugoslav constitution, its institutions, and the rights and duties of citizens towards the state: *"Given the many requirements for inter-republic consensus already enshrined in the Yugoslav system, a good case may be made that, absent a complete consensus of all the parts, no Yugoslavia exists."*³⁹

The report also showed a relevant contradiction that emerged within the administration. In the following months, the acceptance of decentralisation as *fait accompli* – *"In the Yugoslav and Soviet cases political stability with democracy will require considerable decentralization, even at the price of inefficiency in central responsibilities"* – coexisted with the recommendation of supporting *"Markovic's program of political democratization and market reform,"* which contained traces of political recentralisation. Behind the literal meaning of that support – which in fact shows a detachment in relation to the actual developments in the ground – there was a warning in front of a threat to regional instability. The text identified the implications of the Yugoslav crisis and, at the same time, a *"movement toward fragmentation"* in the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, in which *"the Yugoslav crisis has the potential to aggravate the current problems and reactivate dormant ones."* For this reason, it established a legal interpretation that served as a guideline, at a time when secessionist agendas were under way: *"We should be clear that in any event, including secession or dissolution, Yugoslavia will be bound by the Helsinki Final Act insofar as its external frontiers are concerned."*⁴⁰

Three months after the submission of that report, the National Security Council / Deputies Committee used it as the base for discussion in the meeting that took place on October 12.⁴¹ Three guidelines for the US policy can be concluded from the discussion paper.⁴² Firstly, it es-

tablished a differentiation between republics, identifying the Western republics of Slovenia and Croatia, with their democratically elected governments and free-market orientation, as opposed to Serbia, which was seen as an antagonistic force obstructing liberal and democratic tendencies. This approach was deepening the administration's disregard toward federal institutions. From this point of view, an agreement between republics and ethnic groups became the only plausible solution to the problem, considering that Marković was, according to the text, *"the weakest head of government in Europe, dependent on an increasingly fragile consensus of all Yugoslavia's constituent units,"* and that he *"so far has not been able to defuse effectively the tensions among national groups and republics."* Secondly, the discussion paper contained a protocol for action in case of break-up of the state, after which the US *"would have little choice but to live with it,"* and should *"act in accordance with the general principles governing the recognition of states [including considering the question of the control of territory] and, if appropriate, the establishment of diplomatic relations."* Finally, the document posed a provision for the internationalisation of *"rapid disintegration of federal authority and an escalating cycle of inter-ethnic violence."* This included consultations with allies and invoking the dispute settlement mechanisms at the UN and the CSCE.

These considerations had an explicitly geopolitical rationality. The encouragement of a confederal arrangement between Yugoslav republics was based on the fear of the spread of violence in the Yugoslav territory and the possibility of intervention of neighbouring states in an eventual conflict. Besides, there was a strategic foundation related to the necessity of avoiding the contagion of secessionist tendencies in other European multinational federations: *"The Soviet Union and some East European countries already are having difficulty in grappling with the desire of constituent units for a greater autonomy; dissolution of Yugoslavia would aggravate those tendencies."*⁴³

The conclusions of the meeting⁴⁴ involved a synthesis between the continuation of the verbal support of unity and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and the encouragement of a *"federal or confederal agreement"* and the application of the policy of *"democratic differentiation"* between republics, on the other. Considering developments in the field, this approach was, in practice, relying the future of Yugoslavia

39 BPR-RHF, ID# 00684, United States Department of State, Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft, "Yugoslavia – Intelligence," July 16, 1990.

40 BPR-RHF, ID# 00684, United States Department of State, Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft, "Yugoslavia – Intelligence," July 16, 1990.

41 During the Bush administration, the question of Yugoslavia was never officially discussed at the senior level of the NSC. At the deputies' level, Yugoslavia was discussed again on January 25 1991 and in several occasions after the outbreak of violence.

42 BPR-NSC DCF, ID# 902113, Memorandum and discussion paper, "Deputies Committee Meeting on Yugoslavia," October 9, 1990.

43 These fears can be linked to what Rok Zupančič (2016, 335) features as the "predominant thinking" in the State Department, which was based on the "rigidity of key figures," and "a realistic approach to international relations," which made them less likely to accept geopolitical changes in the Balkans.

44 BPR-NSC DCF, ID# 9021154, Memorandum and summary of conclusions, NSC to Robert Kimmitt, Paul Wolfowitz, Admiral David Jeremiah and Richard Kerr, October 16, 1990.

on the ability of all nationalities to work together, and, thus, diminishing the chances of the federal government to democratise the system. In relation to the capacity of Yugoslavia to keep its territorial integrity, the policy-makers concluded that *"states have the legitimate right to use force to preserve public order, but not to suppress democratic aspirations and processes."* In addition, the Yugoslav statehood should be a matter of consulting with the US allies, the Soviet Union, and the CSCE: *"As a crisis in Yugoslavia would be a matter for the Europeans to address in the context of regional stability, it was agreed that this should be treated as a test case settlement in the new Europe."*

The White House had an early opportunity to test the conclusions of the NSC/DC. Only one week later, the CIA issued its National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which contained clear conclusions about the future of the country: Yugoslavia would cease to function as a federal state within one year, the economic reforms would not stop the dynamic of disintegration (in fact, it considered that most of the achievements of the federal government were "illusionary"), and there was an actual danger of a civil war between ethnic groups. The document also made clear that the United States could do virtually nothing to prevent that outcome and that the Europeans, especially Germans, *"will pay lipservice to the idea of Yugoslav integrity, while quietly accepting the dissolution of the federal state."*⁴⁵ Almost immediately, following the NSC/DC provisions, cables were sent to the European capitals with the purpose of yielding the diplomatic initiative to the American allies in Europe and international organisations (including NATO, the European Community and the CSCE) in the policy towards Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

The NIE provoked a certain annoyance in part of the administration. Thus, Hutchings (1997, 306) believed that the analysis, although correct, left no room to the president for manoeuvre, and added that the document was presented with a "conceited purpose" related to corporate interests of the Agency (1997, 412).⁴⁷ The reaction was extremely negative in the Department of State, to the extent that the document was leaked to the press

in order to foster public debate on the issue. However, the problem for these bureaucracies was not whether the analysis was more or less accurate,⁴⁸ but the political implications of the findings and the way they were displayed. The National Intelligence Officer responsible for Europe at that time, Marten van Heuven (2006, xxvii), recalled that the NIE had been approved unanimously by the National Intelligence Council, a fact that rarely happened but gave greater credibility to the final users. John Gannon⁴⁹ highlights that the Estimate's problem was that it *"did not engage the policymakers in ways that were useful"* (Fingar, 2006, 712–713). Senior officers at the NSC pointed out to the same problem. David Gompert, senior director for Europe and Eurasia, explains that what the administration wanted was a *"collapse in slow motion"* (Fingar, 2006, 713), whereas Scowcroft, considered that the NIE seemed *"unduly pessimistic"* and *"left the reader with the sense that there were no options beyond accepting the inevitable."* For Scowcroft, the collapse of Yugoslavia *"was not central to US interests as long as it could be contained"* (Fingar, 2006, 713).

At the same time, original analysis of the situation of the federation were being made in the White House. Thus, the Director of Policy Planning, Blair Dorminey, sent a memorandum to Robert Gates, then Deputy National Security Advisor, entitled "Yugoslav Disunity and the 'New World Order',"⁵⁰ in which he suggested the revision of the US discourse of supporting the federation under the light of Bush's 'New World Order' speech in September 1990 (Bush, 1990):

*We should consider carefully our opposition to disunion in Yugoslavia in light of the precedent it may set for dealing with the seemingly growing global trend toward disaggregation of ethnic groups and polities [...] while the president has yet to articulate any with any specificity his vision of a 'new world order,' that order presumably will be one of freedom and security built on the rule of law. In an environment secured against unlawful coercion and violence, greater political devolution is imaginable. Risks to stability are reduced.*⁵¹

45 CIA-NICC, "Yugoslavia Transformed," National Intelligence Estimate, 15-90, October 18, 1990.

46 The message pointed out to the implications for "how we deal with nationalities issues in the Soviet Union" (BPR-RHF, ID# 01412, "DEMARCHE ON YUGOSLAVIA," from the Secretary of State to European capitals (NATO capitals and Budapest, Bucharest, Warsaw, Vienna, Sofia, Prague, Stockholm, Helsinki, Dublin), October 28, 1990).

47 In his *Legacy of Ashes*, Tim Weiner (2007, 430) points out that the final crisis of the Cold War and the possibility of the disappearance of the USSR involved a particular crisis for the CIA and its own *raison d'être*, which contextualises the result of its work since 1989.

48 Actually, all the figures involved retrospectively acknowledge its accuracy, even though the NIE's predictions proved to be far from correct in certain aspects, like the forecast of an upheaval in Kosovo. Another question, pointed out by John Gannon, then CIA Deputy Director for European Analysis, is that *"it is important to remember that the break-up was not in fact inevitable. Tito showed that strong leadership could hold Yugoslavia together. In retrospect, analysts may not appreciate that their certainty was not entirely justified"* (Fingar, 2006, 713).

49 Who served as CIA's Director of European Analysis between 1992 and 1995.

50 BPR-NSC NF, ID# 9008332, Memorandum, Blair Dorminey to Robert Gates, "Yugoslav Disunity and the 'New World Order,'" October 19, 1990.

51 The document is preceded by recurrent arguments related to the artificiality of Yugoslavia: *"Almost instinctively, I note, we have reacted by attempting to hold this jerry-built Balkan conglomerate together"* (BPR-NSC NF, ID# 9008332, Memorandum, Blair Dorminey to Robert Gates, "Yugoslav Disunity and the 'New World Order,'" October 19, 1990).

The memorandum is relevant from the ideological point of view. Besides being inspired by Bush's speech, it fits into the scheme of the then director of policy planning of the Department of State, Francis Fukuyama, who had published his "The End of History?" in 1989, in which he managed to reconcile new nationalisms with the arrival of a new liberal order.⁵² At the same time, however, the document posed specific challenges from the strategic point of view, which Gates – its recipient – wrote down in the margins:

It is not clear to me that this is usually economically or politically sensible or sustainable if [emphasis in the original] the alternative (union/confederation) can be made voluntarily or democratically. Do you think an independent Bosnia or Slovakia [sic] is advisable? Will this end irredentist claims or bring peace? Or that each is an economically viable entity? Should we apply this to tribal federations in Africa? Where [and] how do we draw the line, such as in USSR? It's a tough problem and an intellectually and politically challenging one.

Hence, Gates' dismissal of the proposal was not related to the situation of Yugoslavia as such, but to its consequences in the regional context and the policy of the administration. By the end of 1990, Yugoslavia was not a tangible reality anymore, but, at the most, an instrumental artefact that could only be significant as a precedent for the Soviet Union's fate. The administration had assumed that the Yugoslav republics and the army – excluding the federal institutions and bureaucracies – were the only actors that would define the political shape of the dying country's territory.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Leaving aside interpretations and justifications contained in policy-makers' accounts, including aforementioned pessimistic stances, sources obtained in the George H. W. Bush library regarding the administration's views on Yugoslavia and the foreign policy-making process during 1990 confirm much of the information contained in their description. The absence of material support to the Yugoslav government's project of economic transformation was decided early on, before Marković's visit to Washington, DC in October 1989. Since that moment, all the rhetoric of support to the Yugoslav transition was

deliberately empty and detached from political developments in the field. During 1990, the fact that Yugoslavia applied the economic measures promoted by the US did not affect the decision not to assist the country. This decision affected a pivotal aspect of the federal transition plan led by Ante Marković.

The lack of correspondence between proclaimed intentions and the actual policy during 1990 was not a product of flawed information or inaccurate analysis. The administration was aware of the precarious situation of the federation and the consequences of its drift, including the possibility of the outbreak of violence. However, the discourse of support of the country's unity was maintained even after the administration assumed that, in the event of the proclamation of new statehoods, it would start considering the recognition of new polities. This can be concluded by taking into account the meeting between Lawrence Eagleburger and the president of the Slovene assembly, France Bučar, in October 30 1990, in which the former assured that the US would not turn its back on an independent Slovenia, even though its ability to help would be limited in the short term.⁵³ Actions like these had specific implications in the field and contributed to the progress of disintegration tendencies. A few days after, the republic's ruling coalition decided to convene a referendum that would speed up Slovene independence (Pesek, 2007, 226–227). Moreover, at that time, Slovenia and Croatia were starting to work in their programs for the procurement of new weaponry from abroad, which, in some cases, were made public by republican leaderships.⁵⁴

This contradiction between the discourse and the actual implementation of the policy relies on the instrumental role assigned to Yugoslavia. Considering the precedents of the policy towards the country during the Cold War, the US geopolitical reasoning in relation to socialist multinational federations, and the approach assumed by the NSC/DC of October 12 1990, the reasons for the rejection of the National Intelligence Estimate 15/90 were not related to the situation of Yugoslavia, but to the timing of the dissolution and its potential effects in the political developments in the Soviet Union. The Heritage Foundation – a think tank that exerted a strong influence over the administration – expressed its critical stance of Bush's policy towards Yugoslavia in this vein, when combats were already taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina in mid 1992:

52 According to this author, "nationalism is not one single phenomenon but several, ranging from mild cultural nostalgia to the highly organized and elaborately articulated doctrine of National Socialism. Only systematic nationalism of the latter sort can qualify as a formal ideology on the level of liberalism or communism. The vast majority of the world's nationalist movements do not have a political program beyond the negative desire of independence from some other group or people, and do not offer anything like a comprehensive agenda for socio-economic organization. As such, they are compatible with doctrines and ideologies that do offer such agendas" (Fukuyama, 1989).

53 BPR-RHF, ID# 01412-023, "Chronology of USG Consultations & Demarches," in Memorandum from the American Embassy in Belgrade to State Secretary, February 21, 1991. The then president of the federal Presidency, Borisav Jović, noted this episode in his diary without mentioning the actors involved (1996, 271).

54 Rearming plans in Croatia and Slovenia were advanced by autumn (Silber, Little, 1996, 107–110). In particular, the Slovene leadership publicly presented weapons imported from Singapore few days before the celebration of the referendum (EU Screen – "TV DNEVNIK," RTV SLO, December 17, 1990).

*One reason for the Administration's failure is that its policies toward Yugoslavia have been formulated less for their intended impact on Yugoslavia itself than for their anticipated effects in other places, most important in the former Soviet Union. The Bush Administration's stubborn insistence last year [1991] that Yugoslavia be kept intact stemmed directly from its number one priority of preventing the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Independence for the Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Croatia was resisted strongly because of fears that this would encourage independence for Ukraine, Georgia, and the other Soviet republics, and thereby bring about the breakup of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.*⁵⁵

The Heritage Foundation was criticizing the fact that the administration was operating under the logic of what Headley (2008, 61–66) defined as “mirror factors.” This mechanism, shared by the American and Soviet leaderships, was the result of the awareness of the similar features of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in terms of their national composition, and the existence of internal diasporas and minorities. The ultimate implication of the application of this logic was the belief that the disintegration of Yugoslavia could precipitate the unwanted breakup of the USSR. In this vein, the administration promoted a policy intended to delay and contain the most negative effects of the most negative effects of the developments in the Soviet Union, which took into account the fate of Yugoslavia. The epitome

of this approach was represented by Bush's visit to the USSR in the summer of 1991, in which, along with Gorbachev, signed a declaration in support of Yugoslav unity in Moscow only few weeks after the European Community tacitly accepted the independences of Slovenia and Croatia in Brijuni. Also in this frame, the US president made an anti-secession plea in front of the Ukrainian parliament, praising Gorbachev's efforts for democratising and liberalising the USSR (Plokhy, 2014, 64), and preventing lawmakers to take steps towards independence: “Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with local despotism” (Bush, 1991).

The US only turned its position in relation to the fate of the Soviet Union after the August coup d'état, when the faction of the administration that supported Yeltsin and the dissolution of the USSR – the “*regime Transformers at the Pentagon*”⁵⁶ and certain figures of the NSC, like Robert Gates⁵⁷ – finally imposed its views.⁵⁸ Since then, the fear that the Soviet Union would emulate Yugoslavia – turning it into a “*Yugoslavia with nukes*” (Plokhy, 2014, xvi) – was replaced by the discussion on specific issues of the breakup; especially, the question of the Soviet nuclear power. After assuming the fate of the old enemy, the administration started to consider the timing for the recognition of the new post-Yugoslav states – subject to the initiative of the Europeans – and, at least from September 1991, to quietly participate in developments in the field through the active support of the Slovene importation of weapons.⁵⁹

52 According to this author, “nationalism is not one single phenomenon but several, ranging from mild cultural nostalgia to the highly organized and elaborately articulated doctrine of National Socialism. Only systematic nationalism of the latter sort can qualify as a formal ideology on the level of liberalism or communism. The vast majority of the world's nationalist movements do not have a political program beyond the negative desire of independence from some other group or people, and do not offer anything like a comprehensive agenda for socio-economic organization. As such, they are compatible with doctrines and ideologies that do offer such agendas” (Fukuyama, 1989).

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55 BPR-SRF, ID# 01621, Doug Seay, “US and Bosnia: Too Late, Wrong War,” The Heritage Foundation, July 20, 1992. The report was written by Doug Seay, a Foreign Service Officer who, at the time, was the Deputy Director of Foreign Policy of the Heritage Foundation.

56 Gathered around Paul Wolfowitz and his staff, who were “actively supporting Soviet breakup, particularly through their support of Ukrainian independence” (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003, 348).

57 In relation to the turning point of the August coup, Gates managed that Yeltsin received information about its preparation and that he had at his side US intelligence experts (Andrew, 1995, 528).

58 These actors were actively enhancing the position of Boris Yeltsin in front of the White House since May 1990 (Gates, 1995, 501–503).

59 In a report from September 1993, the minister of defence, Janez Janša, highlighted the “active and silent support of the United States” in the arrival of weapons to the republic since September 1991: “Poročilo o Orožju od 15.5.1990 do 1.9.1993”, September 1, 1993 (Šurc and Zgaga, 2012, 187).

OD 'PESIMIZMA' DO GEOPOLITIČNE INSTRUMENTALIZACIJE: REVIZIJA POLITIKE
ZDA DO PROPADAJOČE JUGOSLAVIJE

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POVZETEK

Članek se ukvarja z zunanjo politiko ZDA do Jugoslavije od oktobra 1989, ko je premier Ante Marković obiskal Washington, do oktobra 1990, ko je ameriška administracija postavila temelje svoje politike do vprašanja razkrajjanja jugoslovanske federacije. Raziskava temelji na analizi arhivskih virov, ki so bili na osnovi zakona o svobodi informiranja pridobljeni v predsedniški knjižnici Georga Busha, in virov dostopnih na spletnih straneh različnih ameriških zveznih agencij. Ugotovitve ne omajajo do sedaj znanih dejstev, ampak dodatno osvetljujejo razlage, podane v pričevanjih tedanjih odločevalcev. Na eni strani se je administracija ZDA še pred Markovičevim obiskom odločila, da ne bo finančno podprla načrtov njegovega Zveznega izvršnega sveta za ekonomsko in politično reformo, na drugi strani pa avtor zavrača idejo, da ZDA Jugoslaviji po koncu hladne vojne niso pripisovale geopolitičnega pomena. Ameriški prehod k novemu svetovnemu redu so zaznamovale tako spremembe kot kontinuitete pri njihovem pristopu k zunanji politiki. V kontekstu konca hladne vojne se je Jugoslavija sicer znašla na geopolitičnem obrobju, a je v smislu svoje podobnosti s Sovjetsko zvezo in njeno multietnično prebivalstveno sestavo ostala objekt geopolitične instrumentalizacije. Ameriška administracija je do konca leta 1990 ostala razpeta med skrbjo za verižne učinke, ki bi jih utegnil imeti izbruh nasilja v Jugoslaviji na Sovjetsko zvezo, hkrati pa je predvidevala, da demokratizacija tega območja vodi do širših procesov decentralizacije in uveljavljanja načel samoodločbe.

Ključne besede: Jugoslavija, zunanja politika ZDA, geopolitika, konec hladne vojne, novi svetovni red

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