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THE SINO-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP AND YUGOSLAVIA  
1949-1971

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This paper discusses briefly the impact of the Sino-Soviet relationship on Yugoslavia over the past twenty years. During this period China, an external factor, a non-regional power with no historical record of presence or influence in the Balkans, has influenced in a variety of forms and has been influenced by the unfolding of Soviet policy towards Yugoslavia -- a country considered after 1945 to fall within the Soviet sphere of influence and, later, a "grey" area in both ideological and strategic perspective. The complex oblique triangular relationship which has resulted may be divided into four major stages.

Stage 1: Disappointed Revolutionary Expectations

The first stage -- one that is often overlooked -- occurred in 1949.<sup>1</sup> Throughout that year, the Tito regime attempted to survive in the face of Stalin's anathema while still holding to the revolutionary radicalism it had espoused at home and abroad prior to 1948. In the spring of 1949 -- although still keeping Stalin's name out of

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<sup>1</sup>See the author's forthcoming book on the transformation of Yugoslav Communist ideology between 1945 and 1953; John C. Campbell, "Yugoslavia and China: The Wreck of a Dream," in A. M. Halperin, ed., *Policies Toward China: Views from Six Continents* (New York, 1965), pp. 370-372.

the public dispute -- the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) had shifted from the defensive to the ideological offensive, maintaining that it was defending "Marxism-Leninism" against Soviet "revisionism." At this point, the ties with the West which were to develop so shortly were still inconceivable to the Yugoslav Politburo; rather, it still believed that a worldwide wave of Communist revolutions was inevitable and that the resulting consolidation of new socialist states untarnished by Stalin's hegemonist proclivities would end Yugoslavia's international isolation. This radical analysis was reinforced by the impending seizure of power of the Chinese Communists; in early 1949 Dedijer, for example, wrote that the "Chinese revolution ideologically arms revolutionaries throughout the world."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the CPY first looked to the Chinese Communists for a concrete revolutionary ally in resisting Stalin. Implicit in the many comparisons of Chinese and Yugoslav revolutionary experience formulated at the time lay the hope of support from China, as another *new* socialist state within its own *autonomous revolutionary* origins, against Moscow's "revisionism."<sup>3</sup> But support from the Chinese Communists was not forthcoming; although in the spring of 1948 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was apparently interested in hearing the Yugoslav viewpoint at first hand,<sup>4</sup> the doctrine of "leaning to one side" did not permit sympathy with a regime labeled by Stalin as "fascist." Hence, in the fall of 1949, the new People's Republic of China (PRC) rejected Belgrade's offer to establish diplomatic relations; a year earlier the CCP had adopted the Cominform's anti-Yugoslav line. The CPY subsequently concluded with sorrow that the Chinese revolution, like the East European "people's democracies," had been subordinated to Stalin's control. Yet the Yugoslavs never abandoned hope of future Sino-Soviet conflict which would aid

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<sup>2</sup>V. Dedijer, "O kineskoj revoluciji," *Komunist*, March 1949, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>During the celebration of May Day in 1949, the CPY devoted great attention to the Chinese Communists. Mao's pictures were displayed in Belgrade, and soon after, a translation of his selected works appeared.

<sup>4</sup>Vladimir Dedijer, *Ispravljeno pitanje J. V. Staljina* (Sarajevo, 1969), p. 169.

them in the struggle with Stalin.<sup>5</sup> Their prediction was premature; in the altered international situation a decade later, the consequences of the Sino-Soviet conflict for Yugoslavia were quite the opposite of what had been anticipated.

#### Stage 2: Anti-Yugoslavism Reinforced

The following two phases of the Sino-Soviet Yugoslav relationship will be indicated here cryptically, since they have been well analyzed and documented.<sup>6</sup> In the second stage, following the turmoil of 1956 in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia found the CCP egging on the CPSU to formulate and enforce a militantly anti-Yugoslav line within the Communist bloc. (It is true that at the Eighth CCP Congress [fall 1956], references to Yugoslavia were rather positive, while at the close of 1956 the CCP took a middle position on the Soviet-Yugoslav polemics over Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution. At that time, Peking was pursuing "rightist" policies at home and abroad -- supporting the new Gomulka regime in Poland and seeking to encourage in general Soviet respect for Communist autonomy.) Although the Hungarian revolution of 1956 interrupted the post-1954 Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement, early 1957 brought an effort on the part of both Tito and the Soviet leadership to return to that relationship. By the fall, however, Tito's refusal to attend the Moscow meeting of the ruling Communist Parties demonstrated that the Khrushchevian and Yugoslav concepts of a Communist bloc could not be reconciled. It was at the Moscow meeting that the CCP -- its foreign and domestic policy outlook having undergone a marked shift toward a militant "leftist" line in mid-1957 -- first presented itself as more anti-revisionist than Khrushchev; one consequence was that Mao succeeded in sharpening the anti-Yugoslav statements of the 1957 Moscow Declaration.

<sup>5</sup>"Povodom potpisivanja sovjetsko-kineskog ugovora," *Borba*, February 25, 1950; V. Teslić, *Kineska revolucija i Moskva* (Beograd, 1953).

<sup>6</sup>Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict 1956-1961* (Princeton, 1962); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge, revised edition, 1967); William E. Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, 1964).

If the dynamics of reconsolidating the Soviet hold over Eastern Europe after 1956, as reflected in the Moscow Declaration, made renewed Soviet-Yugoslav friction inevitable, publication of the draft Yugoslav Party program in early 1958 -- with its strong universalist character -- portended a renewed conflict of major proportions. While strongly denouncing the Yugoslav conceptions as heretical, Khrushchev nevertheless sought to maintain "normal" state relations with Yugoslavia, apparently fearing that any greater degree of ostracism would only focus undue attention on the Yugoslav heresy and prove counterproductive in Eastern Europe. For the now militant CCP, this amounted to an intolerable blurring of the outer demarcation line of the Communist camp which could only detract from single-minded pursuit of the frontal global strategy which the Peking outpost was seeking to force on the Moscow center. Hence the anti-Yugoslav diatribe of May 5, 1958, in *People's Daily*, which, in reminding all concerned that the 1948 Cominform Resolution had never been revoked, sought again to place Yugoslavia beyond the socialist pale. Matching words with deeds, the PRC withdrew its Ambassador from Belgrade in September. The CCP's militant anti-Yugoslav stance was only partially successful in sharpening Moscow's renewed hostility toward Yugoslavia, for although Party ties were interrupted in 1958, chilly (if not "normal") state relations were maintained. But for the next eleven years, apart from ideological polemics (a major document of which on the Yugoslav side was Kardelj's *Revolution and War* [1960]), Sino-Yugoslav bilateral relations were practically non-existent.

### Stage 3: Common Enemy

By the end of 1962, only four years later, the Chinese Communist role vis-à-vis Belgrade had undergone a transformation from that of goader of Soviet anti-Yugoslavism to the anvil of Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement. Throughout the second Soviet-Yugoslav dispute (1958-1961), Tito remained eager for an improvement in relations which would not involve a limitation of Yugoslav independence. The interest of the LCY (League of Communists of Yugoslavia, as the Yugoslav Party now called itself) in a renewed rapprochement in 1962 was doubtless

heightened both by the increasing inroads made by the Chinese "dogmatists" in the "Third World" and the turn toward somewhat less reformist domestic economic and political measures signified by Tito's Split speech of May 1962. The decisive factor in the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement of 1962-1968 was, however, the shift in the Soviet attitude towards Yugoslavia, which was in turn a direct function of the worsening (now public) Sino-Soviet conflict. Given the extent to which Sino-Soviet relations had deteriorated by 1962 and Soviet success (outside Asia) in limiting the CCP's factional activity in the Communist movement, Khrushchev was no longer vulnerable to the Chinese charge of being "soft" on the Yugoslavs; on the contrary, the LCY could serve as a conditional ally in the Soviet effort to isolate the CCP within the international Communist movement. Two secondary considerations also influenced Khrushchev's decision to promote a rapprochement with Yugoslavia in 1962. From the Soviet point of view, closer relations with Belgrade entailed only a fraction of the risk present in 1957-1958 of a destabilizing influence on Eastern Europe, for in the intervening years orthodox Communist rule and Soviet influence in the area seemed to be firmly reestablished. On the other hand, a conditional alliance with the LCY could be viewed in Moscow as promising to further Soviet influence among "national liberation movements" in the Third World.

Tito's official visit to the USSR in December 1962 thus inaugurated a six-year period of rapprochement, major landmarks of which were Yugoslavia's renewed dependence on the USSR for certain types of military supplies, a common interpretation of the respective roles of Yugoslavia and the USSR in World War II (the old controversy of "who liberated Yugoslavia"), and Tito's participation in multilateral Communist meetings of 1967 related to the Six-Day War in the Middle East. Although the continued applicability of the other factors mentioned above reinforced the perpetuation of this rapprochement, it rested most fundamentally on the fact of a common dogmatic Communist enemy in Peking and quiescence in Soviet Eastern Europe. The triangular political relationship of the day was reflected quite accurately in the major Yugoslav study of the Sino-Soviet conflict published in 1963

by Belgrade's leading expert on China. The present historical period -- this study maintained -- could be reduced to the struggle of two conceptions of the development of socialism: one progressive, the other regressive.

In this respect, the PRC has taken up the second position, representing conservative, Stalinist conceptions, while the USSR, in contrast, boldly confronted the old conceptions and decisively took the road of struggle for world peace, socialism, and new socialist ideas. . . .<sup>7</sup>

During this period, Yugoslavia was particularly concerned about neutralizing the influence of Chinese "dogmatism" on the "non-aligned" states.<sup>8</sup>

#### Stage 4: Full Circle

In the fall of 1967, Soviet-Yugoslav relations were the best they had been since the 1948 break. Common perceptions of the Middle East crisis led the Yugoslavs, *inter alia*, to mount an "anti-imperialist" campaign of proportions unprecedented since the 1950s. A year later, the post-1962 rapprochement was a shambles, an indirect casualty of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Earlier in 1968, the first public manifestation of Soviet disapproval of the Czechoslovak "Spring" had led to Soviet-Yugoslav friction, as the LCY publicly and enthusiastically sided with the Czechoslovak reformers. After the Warsaw Pact (sans Rumania) had unequivocally stated its opposition to Dubcek's policies in the Warsaw Letter, Tito put his personal prestige squarely behind the cause of Czechoslovak sovereignty in his visit to Prague in early August. When, eight days later, the Soviet-led forces invaded, the immediate Yugoslav response was to denounce the act as "an attack against the independence of a socialist country in order to hinder its

<sup>7</sup> Sonja Dapčević-Orešćanin, *Sovjetsko-kineski spor i problemi razvoja socijalizma* (Beograd: Institut za medjunarodnu politiku i privredu, 1963), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> See Alvin F. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 284-317.

independent socialist development and to subject it to [the will of the occupiers]."<sup>9</sup> Polemics became mutual as Soviet bloc media again criticized the Yugoslav economic and political system.

How seriously Yugoslavia took the invasion of Czechoslovakia as a threat to its own security is shown best by the radical revamping of the Yugoslav military establishment and the sharp reorientation of Yugoslav defense doctrine "after Czechoslovakia" to deter or resist by means of "all-people's defense" an invasion from the East. By the fall of 1969, some reduction in tension between the two countries had been achieved, and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko paid an official visit to Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, bilateral relations are today clearly not characterized by anything like the warmth that existed prior to August 1968 -- above all because, in the Yugoslav view, the specter of the Brezhnev Doctrine being applied to Yugoslavia -- if not today, then "after Tito" -- has not satisfactorily been laid to rest. Gromyko's visit was reciprocated by Yugoslav Foreign Minister Tepavac only in February 1971. Moreover, friction arose between the two countries on specific issues. According to Western press reports, in 1970 -- a year after Gromyko's official visit to Belgrade -- the USSR sought to utilize the expiration of a five-year agreement on supply of military equipment to Yugoslavia as an instrument of political pressure.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, given the rise of inter-nationality frictions within Yugoslavia and the imminence of the "post-Tito" period, the USSR seemed to be attempting to encourage dissension inside the country. Yugoslav and Western press reports suggested that, more and less openly, the USSR was attempting to encourage surviving "Cominformists" of 1948, to embolden anti-reformist and anti-Western (if not pro-Soviet) elements among the purged apparachiki and other political "has beens" in South-eastern Yugoslavia, to exploit (in quite self-contradictory fashion) national and economic grievances in various parts of the country, to

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<sup>9</sup>Resolution of the Tenth LCY CC Plenum (*Review of International Affairs*, September 5, 1968).

<sup>10</sup>*Economist*, May 30, 1970; Bourne, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 16, 1970.

encourage Bulgaria's continuing refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Macedonian nation, and perhaps even to assist anti-Communist separatist emigrees.<sup>11</sup> Indirect corroboration of such subversive activities was to be found in a spate of angry warnings by Tito in late 1970 against outside attempts to take advantage of Yugoslavia's internal problems. As he told an audience in Serbia

. . . devils abroad try . . . to destroy us from within; to destroy our [Yugoslav] community . . . these people are predominantly those . . . who should be our best friends . . . abroad there are all those ravens who have their long necks and their beaks aimed at Yugoslavia wondering whether they might obtain some easy pickings and whether [the time] is perhaps already ripe for this.<sup>12</sup>

Yugoslav officials have explicitly interpreted such actions by Yugoslavia's presumptive "best friends" as intended eventually to lead Yugoslavia back into the Soviet bloc.

For the first year after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, judging by the indirect public discussion, Soviet intentions were appraised in Yugoslavia almost exclusively in ideological terms. Today, this factor has been reinforced by a perception of the greater strategic importance of the Balkans for the USSR, given the great increase of its power in the Mediterranean. Indeed, General Ljubirić, Minister of Defense, articulated the fear that, for this reason, détente in Central Europe could lead directly to a greater threat by the "Great Powers" to the small Balkan countries.<sup>13</sup> For both ideological and strategic reasons,

<sup>11</sup>E.g., Soviet officials reportedly made loan offers on exceptionally favorable terms in Serbia and Montenegro; a "retired" Yugoslav-born Soviet officer was sentenced to prison in Bosnia for anti-Tito statements; according to the head of the Serbian security police, subversive leaflets have been disseminated on a large scale from emigrees in both Western Europe and the Soviet bloc. See M. Sundić commentary, Radio Zagreb, February 24, 1970; R. Djaković interview, in *Nedeljne Novine*, March 22, 1970; Z. Djordjević, in *NiN*, April 12, 1970; Tanjug dispatch, June 27, 1970; interview with R. Stijačić and Mišković, *Pravda*, April 1970; *Serbian Vogel*, July 6, 1970; B. Conrad, in *Die Welt*, September 22, 1970.

<sup>12</sup>Speech in Smederevo, November 25, 1970, as carried by Radio Belgrade.

<sup>13</sup>Addressing the Conference of the LCY in the Yugoslav People's Army (Tanjug, in Serbo-Croat, January 15, 1971).

then, for the foreseeable future the Yugoslav leaders seem to have very little hope of a third major rapprochement with the USSR; Yugoslavia has again been confronted with a threat to its independence from the USSR which -- if today passive and implicit -- seems to Belgrade less likely to diminish than to increase.

Faced with this perceived long-term threat, the primary Yugoslav response has been a "return to Europe." Quite independently, the dynamics of Yugoslavia's economic development led to the closer integration of the Yugoslav economy with that of Western Europe embodied in the series of agreements between Yugoslavia and the European Communities. Well over half-million Yugoslav workers are employed in Western Europe, while an international banking consortium is beginning to have some success in encouraging the flow of private Western venture capital into the country. Tito's unprecedented series of official visits to Western European countries in late 1970, a political pendant to these economic ties, was to be explained by the altered international environment in which Yugoslavia found itself after 1968; the same holds for Yugoslavia's greatly enhanced interest in European security issues and advocacy of the early convening of a conference on European security. In broad perspective -- although Yugoslav commentators are still quick to deny it -- Yugoslav foreign policy, in part as a direct consequence of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, has deemphasized the "third-world" "non-alignment" orientation of the 1950s and 1960s in favor of a "European" outlook. At the same time, Yugoslavia has sought to improve its relations with the United States, as symbolized by President Nixon's official visit in October 1970.

But Yugoslavia's efforts to overcome the perceived long-term threat from the USSR have not been limited to thus improving relations with Western Europe and the U.S. Belgrade has also sought to improve its ties with all other Communist states -- no matter what their domestic political system or ideological outlook -- confronted with a similar security threat from the USSR. This applies first of all to Rumania -- which believed itself to be confronted with an even graver threat to its national independence in the immediate wake of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Since that event, Tito and Ceausescu have

met four times, numerous other high level delegations -- including military delegations -- have been exchanged, and Rumanian and Yugoslav spokesmen have pledged on many occasions their joint support for the principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs" of Communist countries. Indeed, with the most recent Ceausescu-Tito exchange (in Yugoslavia in early November 1970), Yugoslav-Rumanian relations have taken on the character of an open if informal alliance.

Yugoslavia also found political support from a most unexpected quarter -- Communist China. Throughout late 1968 and most of 1969, it is true, Sino-Yugoslav polemics continued; for example, Peking published greetings on its October 1, 1969, holiday from the "Djuro Djaković Marxist-Leninist organization" allegedly existing in Yugoslavia. Yet, in comparison with the ideological diatribes of the early and mid-1960s, these polemics were at a reduced level. In early 1969, a different Sino-Yugoslav relationship was first indicated by an improvement in economic relations; a new long-term trade agreement was concluded in March. In the course of 1970, high-level trade delegations were exchanged for the first time since 1958, trade jumped sharply from a commodity exchange of 1.5 million dollars in 1969 to 14 million dollars in 1970,<sup>14</sup> and state relations were reelevated to the ambassadorial level. (While it is true that the CCP selectively normalized its relations with other East European states during this period, nowhere else were state relations improved to the extent they were with Yugoslavia.) In January 1971, the Yugoslav Federal Executive Council and committees of the Yugoslav Assembly resolved on further improvement of relations with the PRC.

Even more remarkable than this rapid expansion of economic and representational ties was the sharp turnabout in Sino-Yugoslav political and ideological relations. In late 1969, Yugoslav commentaries began to register the renewed flexibility of Chinese foreign policy.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Tanjug in English, March 1, 1971.

<sup>15</sup>E.g., I. Golub, "New Accents in Chinese Foreign Policy," *Review of International Affairs*, October 20, 1969. A thorough and relatively detached Yugoslav study of Chinese domestic and international doctrines sent to the publisher at the end of 1969 gave no hint of the changing

In September 1970 -- at the multilateral Communist meeting in Budapest which sought to further the organization of an "anti-imperialist" conference (called for by the 1969 Moscow Communist conference) -- the Yugoslav representative insisted that the PRC participate fully in any such gathering.<sup>16</sup> Today, the LCY describes Communist China's role in international affairs as a positive one in general, while it has favorably contrasted the Chinese attitude toward "non-aligned states" with the Soviet position.<sup>17</sup> In turn the CCP -- implicitly reaffirming the continuation of ideological disagreements with the LCY -- took the occasion of Yugoslav National Day in 1970 -- celebrated in Peking with great publicity -- to call for good relations with Yugoslavia based on the "five principles,"<sup>18</sup> thus formally abandoning its militant anti-Yugoslav posture of 12 years standing (without yet formally acknowledging what it had denied since 1958 -- that Yugoslavia was a "socialist" country).

After twenty years, Sino-Soviet-Yugoslav relations have thus come full circle. The anti-Soviet relationship with Peking that Belgrade expected in 1949 has been achieved at last.

Parallel to the emerging Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement, Yugoslav-Albanian relations, too, have witnessed a marked improvement. On the Albanian side, the new relationship is to be explained both by a heightened perception in Tirana, too, of a greater external threat in view of the invasion of Czechoslovakia (which led Albania to formally withdraw from the Warsaw Pact) and the Soviet-American confrontation in the Mediterranean, as well as the necessity of adjusting to China's new attitude toward Yugoslavia. Unlike China, Yugoslavia has not found the Tirana regime willing to suspend its "anti-revisionist" attacks. But in the interest of ending conflict with a neighboring state which,

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relationship. (Jordan Dinić, Dušan Lazić, *Narodna Republika Kina* [Beograd: Institut za medjunarodni radnički pokret, 1970.]

<sup>16</sup>Speech of D. Kunc, in *Komunist*, October 8, 1970.

<sup>17</sup>E.g., Radio Belgrade in Russian, January 15, 1971, 1430 GMT; R. Petković, "The Non-Aligned and China," *Review of International Affairs*, October 5, 1970.

<sup>18</sup>NCNA in English, November 27, 1970.

potentially, could seriously exacerbate Yugoslavia's inter-nationality conflicts (the Kossovo problem), Yugoslavia has declared itself willing to improve ties with Tirana notwithstanding the continuation of this ideological criticism.<sup>19</sup> On this basis, in the course of 1970 educational exchanges between Albanian and Kossovar institutions occurred, economic ties were expanded, and cultural exchanges and tourism were renewed. In February 1971, state relations were restored to the ambassadorial level.

As in the past, the decisive factor in the altered Sino-Yugoslav relationship is the radical shift in the Chinese attitude, a consequence of the end of the Cultural Revolution and resumption of international contacts. In the context of some limited restoration of Sino-Soviet contacts, but little progress toward agreement on the multitude of issues disputed between the two countries, the PRC has shown itself ready generally to normalize state relations with the Eastern European countries. At the same time, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the PRC has displayed a heightened desire to fan anti-Sovietism in East Europe, presenting itself as the defender of East German interests after the signing of the Moscow Treaty, as the defender of Polish sovereignty in December 1970, and as a continued supporter of Rumanian and Albanian independence. In this situation, Peking's more flexible international position has led it to support as well the cause of Yugoslavia's independence from Moscow -- Belgrade's "revisionism" notwithstanding. On the Yugoslav side, the decisive factor explaining Belgrade's interest in the rapprochement is -- to repeat -- the perception of a heightened threat to Yugoslavia from the USSR, a consequence of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia and thus -- more fundamentally -- the instability of Soviet Eastern Europe. Just as in the case of Yugoslavia's ties with Western Europe (and the U.S.), the Yugoslav-Chinese rapprochement, with its Balkan-wide ramifications,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>V. Teslić, "Normalizacija," *Borba*, February 6, 1971.

<sup>20</sup>Given the further improvement of Rumanian-Albanian relations, the consolidation of an informal Rumanian-Yugoslav alliance and the improvement of Yugoslav-Albanian relations signify the emergence of a tacitly anti-Soviet Communist Balkan grouping which -- if still lacking multilateral forms -- enjoys a measure of Chinese backing.

seems certain in turn to have an exacerbating negative feedback effect on the Soviet-Yugoslav relationship, promising to make any real improvement in bilateral relations even more difficult.

The importance of the rapprochement with China for the preservation of Yugoslavia's independence "after Tito" should not be exaggerated; that will depend primarily on the country's internal cohesion, its ties with Western Europe, and the Soviet-U.S. relationship vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. The PRC cannot today serve as an external guarantor of Yugoslavia's independence, as it did for Albania in the 1960s and as the then-militant Yugoslav Communists thought it would in 1949. But, as with Sino-Polish relations in 1956 and Sino-Rumanian relations in the 1960's, the Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement can reinforce other tendencies favoring preservation of Yugoslavia's independence.