

## DIPLOMATIC DILEMMAS: SOME ISSUES ARISING FROM THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE IN YUGOSLAVIA 1941–1945

During the 1920s and 1930s Britain paid scant attention to Yugoslavia – it was one of those »far away countries...« As the Second World War drew closer the British took more interest, but largely in relation to Yugoslavia's near neighbours – especially Turkey and Greece. The British initially attempted to create a neutral Balkan bloc to stand firm against Axis pressure and, when this came to nothing, hoped to utilize the Yugoslav armed forces when the British had to honour their pledge to Greece after that country was invaded by Italy. Throughout the war, British interest in Yugoslavia waxed and waned: again, it was often not directly related to Yugoslavia itself but to outside political and military needs – most often connected with the British relationship with the USSR.

The role played by the Special Operations Executive – SOE – in wartime Yugoslavia is a useful illustration of the varying degree of interest, the lack of background knowledge prevailing in circles such as the Foreign Office, and the influence of external pressures counting for more than the country itself. An examination of SOE also brings into focus the rivalries, antagonisms and confusion which prevailed within and between the various British policy-making bodies. The combination of these factors led the British first to support the resistance headed by Mihailovic who was perceived as the legitimate representative of the Yugoslav government and a bastion against »communist chaos«, then to throw all their support behind Tito and the very communists the British thought to be the authors of chaos.

The long-standing British explanation for this dramatic change of policy rested on two basic ideas: first that Mihailovic's forces were so deeply enmeshed in collaboration with the Axis occupiers that they had ceased to have any value as allies; second that the communist partisans were so superior militarily that they were the *only* possible choice for the Western Allies to back. An alternative interpretation, which did not gain such wide currency until recently, portrays Mihailovic as a tragic and heroic figure, betrayed and abandoned by his erstwhile British allies as a result of a communist plot which had its origins in the Cairo offices of SOE. Both are over-simplifications.

SOE was established in June 1940, with the purpose of organizing sabotage and subversion behind enemy lines while building up »secret armies« from potential resisters. Hugh Dalton, minister responsible for SOE, defined its role thus:

What we have in mind is not a military job at all. It concerns trade unionists, socialists etc... the making of chaos and revolution – no more suitable for soldiers than fouling at football.

SOE was created at a time when British ability to act decisively against the Axis was limited by both physical and psychological factors. It might have seemed a good idea at the time – although there were many who doubted it from the start, not least the regular diplomatic representatives and the military authorities – but the whole concept was deeply flawed. The idea of creating secret armies was all very well in theory, but considering the fact that the British were hard-pressed to supply their *own* forces at that stage of the war, it was over-optimistic to say the least. The idea of fomenting chaos and revolution to disturb the Axis occupation totally disregarded the consequences for the people in Europe who were supposed to stir up this chaos.

Finally, the concept of the whole anti-Axis population of Europe being directed and guided by SOE to dovetail their activity with British war aims totally ignored the fact that those people might have their own ideas of how to resist – or survive – occupation, *and* of how they wanted to organize their own political systems after the war. All these flaws are apparent in SOE's involvement with wartime Yugoslavia.

SOE's whole *raison d'être*, and justification for its existence, was constantly to be 'doing something'. An opportunity to 'do something' in Yugoslavia came in the winter of 1940–41 when German pressure increased on the Yugoslav Government – headed by Regent Prince Paul – to sign the Tripartite Pact. As it became increasingly obvious that British diplomatic efforts were failing and Prince Paul was about to succumb to this pressure, the FO gave the SOE agents in Belgrade the green light to organize a coup d'état against his government.

The coup came off and King Peter was declared of age six months before his 18th birthday. Although SOE was given credit for the coup by both the FO and Prime Minister Churchill, its influence had been peripheral. The coup itself was an entirely home-grown – and largely Serbian – affair, made as a result of long standing grievances against Prince Paul's government and a desire to address the internal problems of Yugoslavia.

The idea that SOE had orchestrated the coup led to a failure to appreciate its true causes which, in turn, led to the misconception at the FO that the Yugoslav government was joining the war on the British side. In fact, the new Yugoslav government – which was made up of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Moslems – continued to move cautiously in the hope of remaining neutral.

This hope was soon dashed. Hitler interpreted the coup as an act of defiance and launched a massive onslaught aimed at the destruction of Yugoslavia so that he could help out his Italian ally in Greece before returning to his main objective of invading the USSR.

The Yugoslav government and King Peter left, eventually reaching London in June 1941 where they were accorded a hero's welcome. However, the honeymoon period between the exiles and their hosts was short-lived. News emanating from Yugoslavia painted a grim picture of suffering and deprivation in

the dismembered country. Most horrifying was the fate of the Serbian population in the newly created Independent State of Croatia (in fact an Axis satellite) where Ante Pavelic and his brutal Ustasha forces were pursuing a policy of what is now known as »ethnic cleansing«.

News of Ustasha massacres and persecution added to the existing problems within the Yugoslav government in exile – problems which they had not had time to begin to address between the coup and invasion. It created divisions between Serbs and Croats and produced a cabinet crisis: the first of many as it transpired – a factor which made their British hosts increasingly impatient and exasperated until eventually the British came to regard the Yugoslav politicians as of little or no importance when major policy decisions about their homeland were to be made.

A section of SOE – especially that located in the Cairo office – had never been enthusiastic about the post-coup government, and from an early stage pursued its own policy with regard to other exiled Yugoslavs and, later, with the Yugoslav resistance movements. Sometimes – often – in direct contradiction to the official British policy framed at the FO *and* to the line taken by London SOE.

The Yugoslav government – unaware of the fact that the various British bodies they were dealing with could be as divided as themselves – were perplexed by the conflicting signals they received from these bodies. This led them into attempts to assert their independence and sovereignty – which, in turn, further irritated the British.

In the summer of 1941 there was more encouraging news when uprisings against the Axis occupation were reported from all over Yugoslavia. However, following the invasion all the SOE agents had left the country without establishing a stay-behind organization or secure channels of communication. Lack of solid information led the British to interpret the revolts as a continuation of the April campaign, not – as was actually the case – a variety of spontaneous uprisings against particular local hardships and persecutions.

After a rather fallow period following the over-running of most of Europe by the Axis, when the majority of SOE agents had had to beat a rather ignominious retreat, the Yugoslav uprisings provided another opportunity to 'do something' there. Unfortunately, due to lack of resources – particularly aeroplanes – and, to a certain degree, personnel, the 'something' they could do was very limited. The first tentative SOE missions back into Yugoslavia reflect the lack of experience and organization in the initial stages of SOE's active existence.

In the early days of the war Yugoslavia played no part in British strategic thinking. There was a brief flurry of interest at the time of the coup d'état and again at the time of the uprisings. The latter's significance was that they were the first armed revolts against the occupying forces in Europe. The Yugoslav government had mixed feelings about the revolt. On the one hand, it enhanced their standing as allies, on the other the accompanying reports of reprisals alarmed the Serbian ministers; while emphasis on the predomi-

nantly Serbian nature of the resistance made the Croat ministers even more uncomfortable.

Out of the uprisings came the legend of Draza Mihailovic and his brave resistance forces. Mihailovic – a regular army officer – was one of a number of leaders, but his story was given a spin by an American journalist in Istanbul who wrote colourful pieces on Mihailovic and his followers. These bore little semblance to reality, but were good copy and soon gained wide coverage.

It was due to the image that had been created for Mihailovic – which was one that he never wanted – that the FO encouraged, or even pressed, the Yugoslav government to make him their minister of war. This, it was felt, would improve the Yugoslav government's standing, while in late 1941 and during the first half of 1942, Mihailovic admirably suited British needs. Regardless of the reality in Yugoslavia, he provided useful propaganda to encourage the British public and those within »Fortress Europe«. His policy of building a secret organization that could be called upon when needed fitted SOE plans. Although immediately following the summer uprisings London SOE had been keen to encourage active resistance, the repressive German response had knocked it on the head, and the attitude to Yugoslav resistance had reverted to encouraging sabotage rather than armed rebellion, especially after Lord Selbourne had taken over from Dalton as minister in charge of SOE in February 1942.

Mihailovic was also viewed as a bastion of order and continuity compared with the perceived threat of the rival communist resistance force in Yugoslavia. Mihailovic's forces and the communist partisans – headed by Josip Broz, Tito – had initially acted in concert, but their co-operation was breaking down and degenerating into what the FO termed »a form of civil war« just as the first SOE agent – Bil Hudson – arrived in September 1941. It was hoped that the combined support of the British and Yugoslav governments for Mihailovic would unite all resistance forces under his banner and undermine support for the communists. British recognition of Mihailovic was based entirely on political, not military grounds.

Mihailovic and his »secret army« could have been left quietly alone to do small acts of untraceable sabotage (and keep up the spirits of their own people and the rest of occupied Europe) if it had not been for the developing paranoia of the British about the Soviets. In the summer of 1942 Soviet propaganda suddenly switched from echoing western enthusiasm for Mihailovic to attacking him as a collaborator, while asserting that only the communist partisans were resisting the Axis in Yugoslavia.

This came at a very delicate time in Anglo-Soviet relations. One of the strongest assertions of the new line appeared in the *Soviet War News* on the very day that Churchill arrived in Moscow to give Stalin the unwelcome news that the Western Allies would not be opening a second front in western Europe in 1942. The realization that this hoped-for distraction of the German offensive on the Eastern front was not to be forthcoming made the Soviets view Yugoslav guerrilla activity in a different light. They probably now felt less compunction in

breaking ranks on the common propaganda line: the fact that Moscow had until this point reproached Tito for the divisiveness of his allegations of collaboration against Mihailovic point to this. In addition, the British at this time were strenuously discouraging the Yugoslav government from signing a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union: the implied mistrust and possible rivalry in post war Yugoslavia between the British and Soviets could not have been lost on the latter.

Appeals by the Yugoslav government to the Soviets to cease their propaganda attack on Mihailovic were of no avail. While denying they had any contact with the partisans, the Soviets produced a list of Mihailovic's alleged collaboration. In addition, the thorny question of the Yugoslav government's lack of direct communications with its minister of war was used by the Soviets. Whenever the question of relations with Mihailovic and the partisans was raised, the Soviet response was to ask whether the Yugoslav government had independent communications with Mihailovic, and made it clear that, if not, the Yugoslav ministers were not qualified to speak for him. The obvious implication was that the British – not the Yugoslav Government – were in control. This, in fact, was true: SOE had steadfastly refused to allow independent communications to ensure that they did retain control.

In response to the Soviet propaganda campaign against Mihailovic and his followers in summer 1942, the FO appeared to expect that the Yugoslav minister of war should actually live up to the heroic public image that had been manufactured, and were sadly disappointed to discover that it was a false one. Mihailovic was not a super hero and was certainly not prepared to sacrifice his people regardless of the cost. The Yugoslav government and its minister of war had their own conception of how opposition to the Axis should be conducted: it was essentially a defensive policy to ensure that the Yugoslav people – particularly the Serbs – would survive and still have the strength to oppose the occupiers when it was sensible to make a move in concert with the Allies.

The increased activity that the FO wanted from Mihailovic's forces held no long-term benefit for Yugoslavia. In fact, although portrayed as being of use to the Allies in North Africa, its main purpose was to mollify the Soviets and justify British support. Meanwhile the FO held in reserve the possibility of contracting the Yugoslav partisans if this could not be accomplished.

The solution proposed by London SOE – who stood by their support for Mihailovic – was to despatch SW »Bill« Bailey, an old Yugoslav hand who had experience of the country and its politics. By the time Bailey arrived to pull the chestnuts out of the fire it was almost too late to do so. Hudson had fallen out with Mihailovic at an early stage: by attempting to mediate between the rival resistance movements at the start of the civil war he had simply antagonized both. The relationship had been further complicated by the refusal of SOE to allow direct communications between Mihailovic and his government and compounded by SOE's inability to provide any reasonable amount of military supplies. The combination of these factors had led Mihailovic to question the wisdom of

getting involved with SOE. Bailey *might* have saved the situation if SOE had the capacity to supply adequate – or even just more – aid after his arrival. As it was Bailey was left trying to obtain more from Mihailovic than the latter thought reasonable to give, without being able to produce the level of support that might have overcome the detrimental effect of reprisals. By the time SOE had increased manpower and resources available, British policy was turning away from Mihailovic and towards the partisans.

Tito and the partisans, despite attempts to contact them, had the good fortune during the early part of the war not to have an SOE mission attached to them. Although they later complained that they had been ignored and received no help from any quarter while they continued their struggle alone, they were able to make their mistakes out of sight of SOE. While Hudson and Bailey sent long – and often apparently contradictory reports about Mihailovic's organization, the partisans went about achieving their own particular aims unreported. By the time that SOE made contact with the partisan movement it had toned down its extreme revolutionary character – with a few sharp prods from Moscow – and had transformed itself into a national liberation movement.

As a result, Cairo SOE was able to describe it as a predominantly military organization which, although headed by communists was mainly composed of people who were essentially politically moderate. This assessment coincided with the Chiefs of Staff March 1943 directive to SOE to step up guerrilla activity in the Balkans as part of a deception plan to draw Axis troops away from the Eastern front. In order to maximize Balkan guerrilla activity, both Yugoslav resistance movements were to be supported. By the summer it had been decided to send high level missions to both sides and to give equal support to the two movements. The idea that SOE missions with the partisans would enable the British to capitalize on their military prowess, while possibly guiding the rank and file towards a more democratic future, entirely missed the basic nature of partisan resistance. The very reason that Tito's forces were more active than Mihailovic's was that they were engaged in a social revolution.

From the middle of 1942, British policy towards Yugoslav resistance was increasingly governed by the relationship with the USSR. The continuing postponement of the second front in western Europe left the Western allies open to the charge of bad faith from the hard pressed Soviets who felt they were bearing the brunt of the war in bloody battles on the Eastern Front. This factor raised the spectre of a separate peace if the Allies could not provide some relief for the Soviets. With the continuing Soviet propaganda campaign against Mihailovic, the FO and military also became increasingly worried about being at odds with the USSR over Yugoslavia.

What the British were unaware of was the fact that the Soviets were also prey to the same fears of a separate peace and, certainly in the early stages of the war, of Tito fomenting communist revolution in Yugoslavia, which, they felt, would put them at odds with the West. That was one of the reasons that Tito

was instructed to co-operate with nationalist resistance and concentrate on fighting the common enemy rather than play politics. The Soviets, however, had a better poker face than the British, constantly denying any contact with, or control over, the Yugoslav partisans. Everyone knew that this was not true, but seemed unable to do anything in the face of denial or silence. However, the British might have paused to wonder why it was that the Soviets made no attempt to send any missions to the partisans until SOE had contacted them, established missions and commenced large-scale military aid. The Soviet mission only arrived once the British had decided – and declared – that they were abandoning Mihailovic.

The idea that switching support from Mihailovic to Tito was the result of a communist plot in Cairo SOE is one that has gained ground over recent years, especially since Michael Lees and David Martin published their books which dealt extensively with this scenario. Both point to James Klugmann – a British communist, and apparently a long-time Soviet agent, as one of the main protagonists in these machinations. In addition to Klugmann, there were plenty of fellow travellers who were inclined to support the communist resistance rather than that recognized by the royalist government. This was also the case in other organizations, where the pro-Tito climate was as strong as – or even stronger than – in Cairo SOE, who could not have put across the idea of supporting the partisans without the complicity of the Secret Intelligence Service, Political Warfare Executive and the BBC.

In addition, as the war progressed, it became not only a fight *against* fascism, but a fight for a brave new world, particularly for the younger people involved. In the process, the USSR had ceased to be portrayed as the great eastern menace of the 1920s and 1930s and had become a heroic ally. Stalin moved from being the orchestrator of show trials, purges and persecution and became instead »Uncle Joe«. It is perhaps not surprising that Mihailovic came to be perceived as representing the old order while Tito appeared to be surging forward to that brave new world. By a combination of plotting and prejudice, a situation developed in which all the cards were stacked in favour of Tito and the partisans.

Nevertheless, all the plotting and colouring of opinion in Cairo would have come to nothing without the massed conservative forces of the FO, Churchill and Fitzroy Maclean – Churchill's »ambassador-leader« with Tito's forces. Well before the campaign in Cairo SOE to contact the partisans was put in train the FO – because of its nervousness about the Soviets – had been preparing to override London SOE's objections on the question.

The major achievement of Cairo SOE was capturing Churchill's attention. By a combination of good luck and opportunism, Bill Deakin, who had been Churchill's research assistant on his *Life of Marlborough* was on hand to present Churchill with a report on the efficacy of the partisan movement – just at a time when the second front was again being postponed until 1944. Deakin's was also the first official SOE mission to partisan HQ – thus ensuring Churchill's continued attention. In the long term Deakin was much more influential than Klug-

mann or any of the fellow travellers. His reports not only confirmed the idea of the partisans as a mighty guerrilla force, but also set in train the thought that it was not worthwhile to back both Yugoslav resistance movements – and the one to choose was Tito's.

Deakin set the scene, and the tone, which led to Churchill taking a personal hand in matters by appointing Fitzroy Maclean as leader of the new high level mission to the partisans, despite objections from SOE. Although Eden later queried Maclean's judgement and wondered what course he was charting with the partisans – certainly not the one favoured by the FO – in the summer of 1943 the foreign secretary was as eager for Maclean's appointment as the PM. Maclean was the most unexpected factor of all. Who, in their wildest imaginings, would have foreseen an ex-member of the FO and Conservative MP aiding the establishment of a communist regime? Certainly the partisan sympathisers in Cairo SOE, whatever else they managed to achieve in terms of cooking the books and slanting the evidence, could not have had any influence in Maclean's appointment. The »ambassador-leader« upstaged SOE and relegated it to a back-up organization for his mission.

When the idea of backing both sides was first raised, London SOE had cautioned that this would mean falling between two stools and, inevitably, a choice would have to be made: on political grounds they claimed that this could *only* be Mihailovic. They were over-ruled on the first count by arguments of military necessity, which, in turn, had been born out of the relationship with the USSR. They were over-ruled on the second by the advent of Maclean.

The British military – which also tends to be rather a conservative body – claiming no interest in matters political, pushed for short-term military advantage. In response to the Chiefs of Staff's March directive, SOE had managed to co-ordinate opposing guerrilla forces in Greece, where the National Bands agreement produced considerable military benefit; the Chiefs of Staff thought that SOE could do the same in Yugoslavia. Although the National Bands agreement was short-lived, it demonstrated that it was possible to make use of both resistance movements: since they could not be united they could at least be run in tandem.

However, the situation in Greece was quite different to that in both Yugoslavia and Albania. The SOE missions in Greece operated as a single unit under the command of CM Woodhouse, and were not attached to particular rival guerrilla groups. This gave them the advantage of being able to move between groups at will, and of having a single finger on the pulse. In addition, Greece was more strategically important to Britain than was Yugoslavia, and ultimately short-term military advantage was not allowed to take precedence over long-term political interests.

By contrast to Greece, there were two distinct missions in Yugoslavia, operating independently and employing two distinct styles of liaison. Maclean, supported by SOE Cairo [later Bari], was able to supply material aid to the partisans on a scale undreamed of by the SOE officers with Mihailovic's forces, appearing to ask nothing in return for aid and political recognition – simply hoping



that it would bind the partisans to the British, rather than to the Soviets, in the long-term. At the other end of the scale was Brigadier Armstrong's mission (Maclean's counterpart at Mihailovic's HQ), which was more or less disastrous from the outset, not least due to the failure of back-up and the sometimes bizarre activity of Cairo SOE and the BBC. The differences between the two missions was compounded by the fact that there was no liaison or communication between them; the original plan when the two high level missions were being organized, which envisaged close co-operation between the two, went out of the window as soon as Maclean arrived in Yugoslavia since he had managed to escape the control of SOE with his own direct wireless communications and his superior status as Churchill's personal emissary.

Maclean's opinions on the future of Yugoslavia superceded the policy of backing both sides. Having asserted that the communists would be the dominant factor in Yugoslavia, he advised that the only possible course for the British government was to be with them not against them. The fund of goodwill built up by giving Tito all-out support, he argued, would assure a continuation of British influence in post-war Yugoslavia. He also painted a picture of a reconstituted federal Yugoslavia, in which the divisions between the various groups would be healed because of the multi-ethnic composition of the partisan movement.

The FO had never fluctuated in their aim of reconstituting Yugoslavia after the war; otherwise, it was felt, the small states that would emerge would not be strong enough to survive on their own. By 1943, it was obvious that Mihailovic could not deliver this.

While the FO had been amenable to backing both resistance groups, it had reservations about exclusive support of the communists, not least because of the potential effect on Yugoslavia's central European neighbours. The FO was also still clinging to the idea that it might yet be possible to form a united resistance. Finally, in view of the strong military case put forward by Maclean and SOE Cairo, and Churchill's personal enthusiasm, FO reluctance seems to have been overcome by a mixture of hope – that the majority of partisans might not be committed communists and Tito might be more nationalist than communist – and expediency: if the partisans were really as strong as they seemed then they were an essential element in the military equation in the Balkans. It was also preferable to have them on the Allied side, rather than as a possibly hostile force.

Although military considerations had taken precedence in deciding which resistance movement to back, the long-term political relationship of Britain and Yugoslavia was still an important factor, although not as important as that with Greece. Both the FO and Churchill perceived King Peter as the key to any continued British influence in post-war Yugoslavia, regarding his reinstatement as a safeguard against the Soviet aims and ambitions in the area which had caused the FO concern for a considerable time. Accordingly, they set about attempting to reconcile Peter and Tito. Bizarre though it now seems to imagine that king and communist could be compatible, this idea epitomizes Churchill's strongly royalist sympathies and his then romanticised concept of Tito.

Once this idea had taken hold, it was the end of the line for Mihailovic: the Chiefs of Staff Middle East advocated a policy of neglect, but this was no good – Mihailovic had to be repudiated by the king in order to be taken to Tito's bosom. To this end, all minus points against Mihailovic were brought into play. Accusations of narrow pan-Serbism were not justified on a personal level, but the actions of some of Mihailovic's commanders and advisers left him open to this. Serbia was perceived by the FO – and by Tito – to be the lynch-pin of Yugoslavia: this was the terrible dilemma – Tito held the military potential, while Mihailovic held Serbia. The FO agonized over the question: despite Maclean's reports of partisan strength in Serbia, and SOE attempts to build them up there, the partisans had only a limited constituency in Serbia. By the time that Eden and Churchill began to become seriously concerned about communism being imposed on Serbia, it was rather late in the day. The question was settled by the arrival of the Red Army.

Being minister of war was a major drawback for Mihailovic: the post had been thrust upon him largely because of the early propaganda campaign. He was certainly not a politician, by contrast with Tito whose greatest asset was his political skill and ability to see – and take – the clearest path to achieving his political ends. Nevertheless, Mihailovic took his role as minister of war seriously, and felt, probably in an exaggerated way, that he was actually in command of the various local leaders who remained loyal to the king. Mihailovic's dealings with his SOE liaison officers was also coloured by the fact that he was the official representative of his own government in his own country and, therefore, entitled to follow his own path. This did not make the relationship any easier; the SOE officers noted that, because of his position, Mihailovic felt that he could do what he wanted, assuming that all would be forgiven and his reputation redeemed by the *Ustanak*. If the Allies had planned an invasion of Yugoslavia, this might have been the case: as it was, Mihailovic – in conjunction with the Yugoslav government – was still following a policy that had long since ceased to be considered useful.

For their part, the commanders, particularly those outside Serbia, while willing to acknowledge Mihailovic as the representative of the king, did not necessarily come under his direct control: some because they were at too great a distance, others because they wanted to run their own show. The arrangements some of them made with the Axis forces left Mihailovic open to accusations of collaboration. Whether he approved of their actions or not, he was constrained to retain their loyalty so that he would have them available to secure the country for the king at the time of the *Ustanak*. He could not afford to follow the advice proffered by SOE and denounce them to save his own reputation.

When the time came for the parting of the ways, this proved to be extremely useful. The British abandoned Mihailovic because he would not fall in with their plans to fight the occupiers, but it could not be admitted that he was being thrown over simply because he was not as active as the partisans: While Cairo SOE claimed to have evidence of Mihailovic's collaboration, the FO was never entirely convinced of it. Nevertheless, when support was switched to Tito the pu-

blically stated reason was that some of his commanders had been in collaboration with the enemy. This was probably enough to establish the idea of guilt by association in the mind of the British public to justify the transformation from super-hero to hasbeen. The British, who were fortunate enough not to have had to live under occupation, were probably unable to distinguish between collaboration and accommodation. Had Britain been occupied, there would have been no shortage of Petains, Quislings or Nedics, but no-one was willing to acknowledge that at the time. The only British who did come under occupation were the Channel Islanders; instances of their collaboration were later swept under the carpet as unsuitable for public consumption.

SOE's warning in late 1942, that to attempt to back both sides would merely serve to fan the flames of civil war, proved to be totally accurate. By the time that SOE was operating with the two resistance movements in Yugoslavia, both Mihailovic and Tito were well aware that the Germans were ultimately heading for defeat, and accordingly both set about winning the civil war. Mihailovic was determined to ensure that the communists would not take over when the occupation ended, while Tito was equally determined to complete the revolution and be in a position to establish a communist state. For all the debate over long-term political interests being sacrificed to short-term military ones, the British did not in fact obtain very much in terms of the latter. The main beneficiary was the German occupier. The deception plan did little in the way of drawing German troops away from the Russian front, and the Germans who were in Yugoslavia could almost sit back and allow their opponents to do their job for them. When either side did actually engage them, the Germans stood a fair chance of the opposing side attacking the attackers in the rear. The Germans were able to take advantage of the civil war right to the end, when they facilitated the movement of Mihailovic's forces and the rag-bag of other anti-communists to the north-west borders; the conflict this produced allowed them to continue their withdrawal in fairly good order.

Once Tito had been recognized and began to receive material aid, he concentrated most of his energy on his domestic rivals, particularly on the drive to get back into Serbia. By the time that Churchill woke up to what Tito was really about, it was too late to make another 180 degree turn. Apart from the problem of getting the British public to swallow such a move for the second time, there was also the proximity of the Red Army. To challenge Tito at that late stage would have been tantamount to throwing down the gauntlet to Stalin, whose true colours had also become more visible at the time of the Warsaw uprising. In addition, Churchill was more concerned with the future of Greece, in which British interests were much stronger than Yugoslavia: he needed Stalin to stick by the 90%–10% agreement on spheres of influence there, and as Tito's new state was independent – after all, it was Churchill who had laid the foundations for the Tito–Subasic agreement – he could not claim that Yugoslavia had turned out to be other than »50–50«. It was all very well for Churchill to say later that SOE had cooked the books and that he had been misled, but his own misplaced

faith in Tito and his personal involvement in trying to establish a hybrid monarch-communist system in Yugoslavia could hardly be laid at the door of SOE.

The same pattern of high expectation – particularly the expectation inherent in the original concept of SOE, that they could organize and deliver the required outcome from resistance movements – is visible in both the relationship with Mihailovic and Tito. Having failed to bend Mihailovic to their will, SOE put forward the idea that a few British officers on the spot could solve all the problems and maximize the potential of the communist resistance. Laying aside the implications of conspiracy, the fact that this idea found credence is indicative of the echoes of imperialism that are to be found in the whole concept of SOE. Decisions were taken by all British bodies concerned which would affect the future of the people of Yugoslavia without any reference to the aspirations of those people themselves.

At the end of the war, most of the British who had helped to turn a collection of hardy and hunted guerrillas into a government went home, leaving the people of Yugoslavia to make what they could of Tito's concept of democracy. They were all rather quiet until 1948, when the Tito–Stalin break allowed them to claim that their judgement had been vindicated. Tito was a good chap after all; they had been right in thinking that he was his own man and not Moscow's. Tito, always the consummate politician, settled comfortably into his new position between East and West.

ХЕДЕР ВИЛИЈАМС

## СЛУЖБА СПЕЦИЈАЛНИХ ОПЕРАЦИЈА У ЈУГОСЛАВИЈИ 1941–1945

### Резиме

Склоност ка преувеличавању сопствених способности, која је била присутна и у првобитној концепцији Службе специјалних операција (СОЕ) и огледала се у њиховој убеђености да могу да организују и усмере сваки покрет отпора у правцу који њима одговара, видљива је и у односу према Михаиловићу и Титу. Управо то чини окосницу овог текста. Пошто нису успели да утичу на Михаиловића, припадници СОЕ су протурили тврдњу да би неколицина британских официра послатих на лице места могла да реше све постојеће проблеме и увећају потенцијал комунистичког покрета отпора. Остављајући по страни оптужбе о наводној завери, чињеница да је овај предлог уопште озбиљно прихваћен најјасније указује на остатке империјалистичких схватања у целокупној концепцији СОЕ. Сви британски органи који су били укључени у

решавање овог питања доносили су одлуке које ће утицати на будућност народа Југославије а да се при том нису ни најмање освртали на жеље тих истих народа.

Кад се рат завршио, већина Британаца који су помогли партизанима да преузму власт отишла је својим кућама, остављајући југословенске народе да се сналазе како знају и умеју са Титовим поимањем демократије. Вративши се у своју земљу примирили су се све до 1948. године, када им је раскид између Тита и Стаљина пружио прилику да журно нагласе како се њихова процена Тита ипак показала тачном. Он се, ето, упркос свему показао као добар и испоставило се да су га с правом сматрали човеком који мисли својом главом а не по диктату Москве. Тито је, пак, будући савршени политичар, одмах схватио све предности које му пружа новостечена позиција између Истока и Запада.

