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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505
5 May 1986Yugoslavia: Reaction to US Air Strike on LibyaSummary

Belgrade reacted to the US bombing of Libya with its harshest condemnation of either superpower in recent years. The reaction recorded high measurements on virtually all the key indicators of Yugoslav leadership behavior: swiftness of response, unusually high level of authority, strikingly blunt language, lack of balance, and broad and sustained replay by individual leaders, leadership bodies, and the media. Belgrade also provided Tripoli with vigorous diplomatic support.

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Yugoslavia was motivated in part by its concern, as a leading moderate member of the Nonaligned Movement, not to be outflanked by Cuba and other radicals in advance of a Nonaligned summit this August. Belgrade's close, though sometimes troubled, economic and military ties to Libya also played a role. Its reaction may prove a bonanza in future civilian and military-related contracts. Politically, Yugoslavia probably hopes that its response will shore up its credentials in the Third World while causing only minimal harm to its ties to Washington.

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Official Condemnation

The official condemnation came the day of the attack in separate statements by the top state and Party bodies. The collective State Presidency, in an extraordinary session on 15 April, "most harshly condemned the US armed attack" as a "flagrant violation" of Libyan sovereignty and demanded an urgent end to the "aggressive US military operations." The 23-man Party Presidium similarly "vehemently denounced" the "aggression" as a "dangerous threat" to peace. [REDACTED]

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An unusually large number of individual leaders and leadership bodies also quickly jumped into the fray. The action so far has been condemned by seven of the 23 Presidium members--Slovenia's Andrej Marinc, Croatia's Jure Bilic, Serbia's Dobrivoje Vidic and Dragoslav Markovic, Montenegro's Marko Orlandic, Vojvodina's Petar Matic, and the Army's Party chief Georgije Jovicic. It has also been denounced by State President Vlackovic on two occasions, in dinner speeches for visiting heads of state on 15 and 28 April; by the national legislature's 220-member Federal Chamber on 23 April; in a resolution of a Slovenian party congress; by prominent Slovenian Party official Joze Smole; and by the trade unions and other official organizations.

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Some leaders used even stronger language than the official statements. The US was accused of "state terrorism" or "international terrorism" by the Army's Jovicic, the Slovenian Congress, Slovenian official Smole, and Slovenian party chief Marinc. The Slovenian congress charged Washington with the "crudest violation of international rights." [REDACTED]

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Media treatment was harsh and seemed calculated to build public support for leadership views. Along with the usual ample factual reportage on breaking developments, the press and radio carried numerous commentaries embellishing official Yugoslav positions. One article in the nationwide daily Borba called such attacks "Ramboism." The widely respected Serbian daily Politika, described by the US Embassy as among the more restrained of the Yugoslav papers, carried frontpage factual reports under headlines of "American Aggression" and "Solidarity With and Support for Libya." Several commentaries discounted the US reasons for the attack, and only a few so far have stressed concern about Libyan retaliation with terrorist acts. [REDACTED]

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The media gave terse, critical coverage to several large, unauthorized demonstrations against both the US and Libya by a growing Slovenian "peace movement." Reports have toned down the demonstrators' call for an end to Yugoslavia's military training for Libyans and dismissed as naive their demands to curtail Belgrade's lucrative foreign military sales. The relatively tolerant Slovenian leadership so far has taken no action against the peace activists. It probably hopes that its condemnations of the US will placate other, less tolerant republics and the military. [redacted]

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The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry did not call in the US charge for a demarche, although it had done so three weeks earlier on 26 March to protest the US actions in the Gulf of Sidra. The Yugoslavs reportedly gave the US Embassy heavy security protection during demonstrations by Arab students at the nearby Libyan People's Bureau. [redacted]

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Belgrade also has stepped up official pronouncements against terrorism, in part to address US concerns. Statements thus far, however, have either explicitly exempted liberation movements from the "terrorist" rubric or--as was the case recently in a statement by Deputy Foreign Minister Loncar before the Assembly--sidestepped the issue. In practice, Belgrade has continued to give military support to the mainline PLO and the PAC, [redacted]

[redacted]

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Diplomatic Activity

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Along with condemnations at home, Belgrade launched an active diplomatic effort to call Washington to account before international tribunals. While Yugoslavia has played a prominent role in other such occasions in the past, in this instance it showed more than usual zeal. [redacted]

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Leading the effort was Foreign Minister Raif Dizdarevic, who arrived in New Delhi for a previously scheduled Nonaligned ministerial meeting just before the attack. Dizdarevic's public statements during the ministerial meeting were among the harshest from the movement's moderate wing, which includes Egypt, India, and Indonesia. [redacted]

[redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Dizdarevic, who issued the call for an emergency session of the UN Security Council to discuss Libya, was also chosen as one of six Foreign Ministers to travel to Tripoli to show Nonaligned solidarity with Libya and to present the Nonaligned view at the UN Security Council in New York. After the triple veto (by the US, UK, and France) of the Nonaligned resolution in the Security Council, Dizdarevic was among several Nonaligned delegates urging that the issue be addressed by the UN General Assembly. [REDACTED]

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According to the US Embassy in New Delhi, most other moderate Nonaligned members did not make statements during the special session held on Libya. Only India rivaled Yugoslavia in the harshness of its proclamations. However, India was speaking for the whole movement in its capacity as current Nonaligned chairman. Moreover, India took greater pains to balance its statements than Yugoslavia. For example, in his opening speech to the Nonaligned members, Rajiv Gandhi condemned all forms of terrorism without exempting liberation movements. Gandhi's statement was later cited approvingly in a speech by Ambassador Walters during the Security Council debate on Libya. [REDACTED]

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Foreign Minister's Role

Dizdarevic has often been controversial in his own right. US diplomatic [REDACTED] reporting indicates that he is disliked by prominent officials both in his own ministry and elsewhere in the regime. He has been criticized for abrasiveness and ineptitude. [REDACTED]

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Nonetheless, while Dizdarevic was clearly among the hardliners in the Yugoslav leadership on this issue, there is little he has said or done that has been out of line with official policies. Dizdarevic will probably continue to play a prominent role at least for the near future, as incoming Premier Mikulic has asked him to stay on as Foreign Minister when the new cabinet is formed on 16 May. [REDACTED]

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Local Press Treatment

Yugoslav press treatment of Dizdarevic's statements also gives little indication that Belgrade attempted to distance itself from him. While many of his remarks were carried in summary or excerpt form, Belgrade media do not normally carry texts of the Foreign Minister's statements at Nonaligned forums or during bilateral visits abroad. Media coverage of his comments at the latest Nonaligned session was fuller than at the last such meeting last summer. []

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As for his remarks in New Delhi, Politika on 16 April did not report one of his statements, carried in a Tanjug dispatch, that "an act of brutal aggression was committed by the United States of America" against Libya. But it did cite another reference he made to "the brutal act of aggression" against Libya. Borba the same day cited him as denouncing the "aggressive American act," and both papers carried his remarks that the bombing contradicted international principles and cannot be justified. []

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Moreover, both Borba and Politika on 22 April frontpaged Dizdarevic's comments in Tripoli about the Nonaligned Movement's "condemnation of the American aggression against Libya." Politika cited his reference to the "horrificing sights" he saw in the wake of the American bombing. []

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Past Precedents

Dizdarevic's remarks aside, Belgrade's reaction contrasts with its lower key response to other US and Soviet military operations against Nonaligned countries, some of which resulted in greater casualties and the toppling of regimes. []

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Belgrade delayed its official response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of Christmas 1979 for several days until 30 December, when it issued a Foreign Ministry statement. The statement failed to condemn the invasion outright, merely expressing "astonishment" and "deep concern" and saying that such actions in general were "inadmissible." Media reports on Party Presidium and State Presidency sessions held on 25 and 26 December gave no indication they discussed Afghanistan. Individual leaders generally avoided subsequent comment, which was limited mostly to statements by the Foreign Minister. Nonaligned

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resolutions on Afghanistan in the UN backed by Belgrade, unlike in the latest instance, have stopped short of criticizing the attacker by name. [REDACTED]

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A similar pattern held true in the case of the US military action in Grenada on 25 October 1983. Official reaction came the following day by the Foreign Ministry's press department, which expressed "profound concern," called such actions "inadmissible" and contrary to international principles, and called for an "urgent end" to the intervention. [REDACTED]

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The latest response is roughly on a par with Belgrade's sharp and authoritative reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, an event of graver consequences for Yugoslav security. A government statement issued on that occasion expressed "extreme concern" over the "most brutal form of trampling" on a country's sovereignty. A Party Central Committee declaration voiced "profound indignation and protest" over the use of "crude force." [REDACTED]

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Other Comparisons

Yugoslav's current stand was also strong compared to that of many of Moscow's East European allies. While some of the East Europeans were more vitriolic, few issued such an authoritative and sustained reaction as did Belgrade. Yugoslavia was also the only East European country other than Bulgaria whose leader reportedly sent a personal message to Qadhafi, and Belgrade was the most assertive in East Europe in pushing for a condemnation by the UN. [REDACTED]

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Belgrade's response in the latest case also marks stepped up diplomatic support for Libya, particularly compared to the more temperate position taken in late February on the growing tensions. The two countries have had an often uneasy political relationship because of Qadhafi's unpredictable behavior and his hostility to other, moderate Nonaligned countries like Egypt with which Belgrade has had close ties. Tripoli vied with Belgrade last year to host the Nonaligned summit. [REDACTED]

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Political Motivations

Belgrade would be expected to criticize the US air strike in any case, as it has long perceived such actions, [REDACTED]

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rightly or wrongly, as having implications for US and Soviet policy in the Balkans. The decision to respond so sharply, however, is due partly to several political factors:

Nonaligned Jockeying: Belgrade sees a tough reaction as important to strengthening its hand toward Nonaligned radicals like Cuba in advance of the summit this August in Zimbabwe, a forum held only once every three years. Yugoslavia stands a chance of being chosen as host of the next summit in 1989 should a deadlock develop over a Latin American candidate.

Libya's Proximity: The geographical proximity of Libya, as a fellow Mediterranean littoral state, probably also played a role. The interventions in Afghanistan and Grenada, by contrast, were geographically remote.

Prior Warnings: Belgrade probably believes it gave Washington adequate advance notice of its likely response. The State Presidency on 25 March condemned the US action in the Gulf of Sidra in similarly unbalanced terms, even if the language was more temperate.

Limited Political Risk: Belgrade probably also calculates that its condemnation will result in only minimal, temporary damage to its ties to Washington. Yugoslavs generally recognize that the US supports Belgrade's independence and stability.

US Naval Actions: Yugoslavia's sensitivities about US military actions in the Mediterranean were heightened by several recent alleged US naval incursions in Yugoslav territorial waters, actions that have resulted in a diplomatic demarche.

Yugoslav Lives: Belgrade was probably also angered by the threat posed by the US attack to the some 16,000 Yugoslavs working in Libya, some of them on projects--like the naval academy--hit by US aircraft.

Domestic Factors: The Yugoslav leadership also probably sees the issue as one that can help galvanize the many factions in the fractious political system, even if only temporarily.

Institutional Rivalries: The intensity of the leadership's reaction reflects in part increased competition

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among top leadership bodies for a say in both foreign and domestic affairs. Not to denounce the action could suggest that the body was out of the policymaking loop. [redacted]

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Economic Motivations

Yugoslavia's close, though sometimes troubled, economic ties to Libya also were probably a factor in its response. Libya is Yugoslavia's second most important partner for foreign civilian and military construction work, behind only Iraq, accounting for about 15 percent of Belgrade's total overseas construction earnings. Yugoslav builders completed construction projects worth \$1.5 billion in Libya during the past four years, including over \$400 million in 1985. The Libyan contracts have assumed added importance in recent years as the volume of new construction in Yugoslavia and worldwide has fallen sharply. [redacted]

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More than 50 Yugoslav work organizations, employing roughly 14,000 workers, reportedly participated in construction projects in Libya last year. Projects have included civilian and military airfields, housing, schools, factories, agricultural enterprises, hospitals, pipelines, and irrigation, water, and energy supply systems. Some 2,250 other workers reportedly are involved in medical work. According to Western press reports, some 500 Yugoslav workers over a period of five years helped build the naval academy hit by American bombs. [redacted]

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Libya accounts for about 15 percent of Yugoslavia's oil import needs. In recent years exports of Libyan crude oil, averaging about 1.5 million tons annually, have comprised almost all of Tripoli's exports to Yugoslavia, which in 1984 totaled \$447 million. Roughly one-third of these oil deliveries have been in payment for Yugoslav construction services. [redacted]

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Trade ties also have helped Belgrade's sagging balance of payments. [redacted]

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[redacted] Yugoslavia has enjoyed a trade surplus with Libya in recent years of \$40-90 million annually. Yugoslav exports to Libya are comprised largely of manufactured goods--consumer items, machinery, semi-finished goods, and aircraft. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Belgrade's financial dealings with Tripoli in the past often have been difficult. Since 1982, Belgrade has grudgingly agreed to allow Libya to settle claims for Yugoslav construction services with deliveries of crude oil.

[REDACTED]

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Military Factors

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[REDACTED] and assistance. This assistance includes arms, equipment, training, and military-related construction. Since 1980, Belgrade's total arms trade has increased by 15 percent annually. In view of Yugoslavia's \$20 billion hard currency debt, coupled with military leaders' support for arms sales, this business is unlikely to be affected by protests like those of the Slovenian peace activists. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Among the weapons systems Yugoslavia supplies Libya are mini-submarines, as well as Galeb jet trainers, which are easy to fly and of which Libya now owns about 120. Belgrade also is probably building at least one patrol boat for the Libyan Navy. The remainder of arms sales have been largely light arms, ammunition, and some defensive chemical warfare equipment. [REDACTED]

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One of the more critical and unique military services the Yugoslavs provide is the maintenance of Libyan submarines. Six Foxtrot submarines, of Soviet origin, are routinely taken to the Montenegrin port of Tivat for overhauls. [REDACTED] Yugoslavs also regularly repair Libyan ships, aircraft, and ground force equipment, both in Libya and Yugoslavia. [REDACTED]

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As for training, there are presently some 500 Yugoslav military instructors in Libya and probably 150-200 Libyans

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[redacted]
in Yugoslavia, [redacted] Midlevel
Libyan officers are trained at Yugoslav staff colleges, and
enlisted men receive technical training. [redacted]
[redacted] 30 Libyans currently are being trained to
repair Soviet-made radars; the figure was 100 in 1983.
Instructors in Libya train pilots and naval cadets. [redacted]
[redacted]

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Outlook

Barring renewed US-Libya clashes, Belgrade probably is counting on letting its strong support for Tripoli speak for itself. In the coming weeks it will probably try to repair damage caused to its ties with Washington through public statements and private assurances. Should the US take further military action against Libya, however, Belgrade is likely to renew its rhetorical and diplomatic activities.

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Its actions so far probably will put it in good stead within the Nonaligned Movement leading up to summit this August.

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Yugoslavia may reap significant economic and military benefits from its stand. Should the Libyans be concerned about Moscow's level of support, and should strains between Tripoli and Western Europe grow, Belgrade may prove an increasingly attractive alternative as a capable and reliable supplier of arms and related services. The fall in oil prices, however, could constrain the extent of Libyan purchases from Belgrade. [REDACTED]

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Bilateral relations, otherwise, will probably return to the past mixture of cooperation and strains. Belgrade will continue to suspect Libyan designs against Yugoslavia's moderate friends in the Arab world. Financial cooperation will probably continue to be strained by differences over payments policy, although the Libyan market is too important for Belgrade to risk an open confrontation. [REDACTED]

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