

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/>

No. 328

Published on 19 October 2011

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane N. Labrosse

Web and Production Editors: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Robert Niebuhr. "Nonalignment as Yugoslavia's Answer to Bloc Politics." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2011). DOI: 10.1162/JCWS_a_00072.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00072.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR328.pdf>

Review by **A. Ross Johnson**, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

This article examines Tito's contribution to co-founding and promoting the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in the late 1950s and 1960s. It draws on a variety of contemporaneous sources, including Yugoslav monographs, newspaper accounts, Radio Free Europe analyses (deposited at the Open Society Archive), and archives of former Yugoslavia, as well as standard Western works. It argues that nonalignment (*nesvrstanost*) and the NAM provided Tito both with a platform where he could act as a world statesman and a source of legitimacy for the liberalizing but still authoritarian domestic political system of self-management (*samoupravljanje*).

For this reviewer, the former rationale is more persuasive than the latter. Tito was never one to doubt his own importance -- whether in Moscow in the 1930s, leading the People's Liberation Struggle during World War II, or challenging Joseph Stalin on Trieste, Greece, Balkan federation, and other issues prior to 1948.¹ Dependent on Western economic and military assistance for survival after 1948, Tito's rapprochement with Khrushchev in 1955 defused the Soviet threat but left Yugoslavia in international limbo. The emergence of the NAM promised to fill this void, help Yugoslavia overcome diplomatic isolation, and offer Tito an international platform -- an opportunity he exploited to the hilt in the 1960s in association with Nehru and Gamal Nasser. Niebuhr traces Yugoslavia's important role in shaping the NAM between the 1961 Belgrade conference and the 1970 Lusaka conference. Part of the Yugoslav foreign affairs elite adopted nonalignment as their cause. Some joined Tito as he traveled the world and welcomed world leaders to his residence on Brioni island. Yugoslav publications on nonalignment that asserted its international significance and Yugoslavia's important role -- many footnoted in the article -- multiplied.

¹ Leading to Stalin's rebuke in early 1948: "Mistakes are not the issue: the issue is conceptions different from our own." Vadimir Dedijer, *Tito* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1953) 317.

Involvement with the NAM was only one element of Yugoslav foreign policy in the 1960s. Yugoslavia expanded its military and security ties with the USSR and contracted those with the United States. But it continued to expand relations with West European countries. Trade was primarily with the West, not the NAM or the Soviet bloc.² Opening of the borders allowed mass travel of Yugoslavs to the West. Niebuhr acknowledges Leo Mates' view that the NAM was never a natural association for Yugoslavia and brought limited foreign policy benefits (150). Mates added in the cited work that Yugoslavia adopted nonalignment because it found itself isolated in Europe and argued that its international situation improved only when it could "develop very good relations with some of its neighbors" and "find its place in a circle of European countries not mutually alienated by the Cold War."³

Niebuhr contends nonetheless that a "key reason the Yugoslav leaders latched onto the idea of nonalignment and involvement with the Third World was the regime's effort to help build domestic legitimacy through foreign-policy victories." (159) Although not fully accepting (152) William Zimmerman's view of "self-management as an outgrowth of nonalignment,"⁴ Niebuhr argues that "nonalignment meant that [the Yugoslavs] could export ideology" (171) and that with the decline of the NAM in the early 1970s "Tito's challenge... was to find an alternative external source of legitimacy for self-management and the Yugoslav government." (171)

That overstates the domestic legitimizing function of nonalignment. The Tito regime sought to legitimize its authoritarian political system with a non-Soviet, post-Leninist doctrine of socialist democracy and self-management. That doctrine was crucial to regime legitimacy in the first years after 1948.⁵ But by the end of the 1960s, "social self-management" as elaborated especially by Edvard Kardelj had become an arcane corpus of little relevance or interest to most elite as well as ordinary Yugoslavs. Freedom to travel, a relatively high standard of living, a residual threat from the Soviet Union, and memory of recent national fratricide were more important factors contributing to regime stability. Tito indeed "used his external successes to fortify his regime," but one may question how much this involved "build[ing] legitimacy for a domestic program of socialist self-

² A. Ross Johnson, *Yugoslavia: In the Twilight of Tito, The Washington Papers*, No. 16 (Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications, 1974) 31ff.

³ Leo Mates, *Nesvrstanost; Teorija i savremena praksa* (Beograd: Institut za medjunarodnu politiku i privredu, 1970) 224

⁴ William Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Nonalignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) 28.

⁵ A. Ross Johnson, *The Transformation of Communist Ideology; the Yugoslav Case, 1945-1953* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972) 159ff.

management.”(178) The regime-legitimizing function of self management was still important in the 1960s, but this was not derived from nonalignment but evolved from dismantling of Soviet-style institutions and practices, establishment of workers councils, decollectivization of agriculture, abandonment of a command economy, and relaxation of the police state in the early 1950s.

By the second half of the 1960s, another dynamic was at work – economic and political decentralization. Economic nationalism, “republicanization” of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and territorialization of defense followed. Yugoslavia became a quasi-confederal state. That set the stage for all that was to follow after Tito’s death in 1980. Regional decentralization engendered regional majority nationalism. By then, Yugoslav doctrines of nonalignment and self-management had become equally irrelevant to the Yugoslav political system and survival of the second Yugoslav state.

A. Ross Johnson is Senior Scholar at the Wilson Center, Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, and Senior Advisor to RFE/RL. His publications include *The Transformation of Communist Ideology: The Yugoslav Case, 1945-1953* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1972; *Yugoslavia: In the Twilight of Tito, The Washington Papers*, No. 16 (Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications, 1974; *The Yugoslav Military Elite* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, R-2131, 1977); *Political Leadership in Yugoslavia: Evolution of the League of Communists* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1983).

Copyright © 2011 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.