

# YUGOSLAVIA-SOVIET UNION RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIERARCHY APPROACH (1945-1948)

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**Abstract:** Yugoslavia, with its unique understanding of communism and its foreign policy pursued between the Western Block and the Soviet Union, occupied a significant place in the international politics of the Cold War years unlike proportion to its resources and power. Yugoslavia, which became the first country to adopt to communism without any external intervention following the Soviet Union, had progressed towards becoming an independent power in Southeastern Europe with its own unique understanding of communism. This progress has disturbed both the Soviet Bloc under Stalin's leadership and the Western bloc. This paper aims to explain the relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union between from 1945 to 1948 utilizing the Hierarchy approach, which is one of the most important challenges recently in International Relations discipline. Within this framework, the question of why Yugoslavia, under the rule of Josip Broz Tito, challenged the Soviet Union hierarchy, will be examined at the system, state and individual levels. This examination will encompass Yugoslavia's support for communist rebels during the Greek Civil War, its divergence from Soviet Union on the Trieste issue, and the factors surrounding the formation of the Balkan Federation. The study argues that Yugoslavia attempted to challenge the Soviet Union hierarchy stemmed from a culmination pressures and disparate policies of the Soviet Union towards Yugoslavia convinced the Yugoslav leadership that the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership as a threat. There are various reasons for this challenge at the system level, state level and individual level.

**Keywords:** Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, hierarchy, challenge

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## Introduction

Although sometimes as a problematic and even undesirable country, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY or Yugoslavia) has always maintained its prominence and importance in the international community from 1945 until its civil war and disintegration in the early 1990s. In fact, it has often been argued that Yugoslavia's place in international politics is disproportionate to its resources and power (Campbell, 1967). This situation of Yugoslavia persisted throughout the Cold War period. For this reason, relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or the Soviet Union) were shaped in a very dynamic graph until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The period between 1945 and 1948 is of great importance for the relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was proclaimed by Josip Broz Tito immediately after the Second World War, was a close follower of the Soviet Union and was expelled from the Cominform<sup>2</sup> in 1948. Since then, communism in Yugoslavia has taken a distinctive form and has preferred to follow a very balanced policy in its relations with the Soviet Union.

During this period between 1945 and 1948, the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union had numerous crises and challenges. Although there were ideological similarities between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's refusal to position itself in the same bloc with the Soviet Union created a distinct hierarchical relationship between the two states. Compared to other states under the direct influence of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia enjoyed greater autonomy and independence. The fact that Yugoslavia, a subordinate state in terms of the hierarchy approach, challenged the hierarchy of the Soviet Union, one of the hegemonic powers of the period, is based on some reasons. These reasons can be individual, stemming from the internal dynamics of states and, more generally, from balances at the level of the international system and conjuncture.

Indeed, at the end of the Second World War, Britain and France lost power despite leaving the war as victors, which led to the emergence of the United States of America (the United States or the USA) and the Soviet Union as the two superpowers and the beginning of a new era known as the Cold War. During the Cold War period, both superpowers struggled to establish hegemony over other states and to include them in their hierarchy.

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2 Cominform is a communist bloc established on October 5, 1947, as a counter-initiative to the Marshall Plan, which it described as "an instrument of American imperialism." It was formed by bringing together the leaders of the Communist parties of the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France, and Italy.

As a superpower, the Soviet Union had a significant influence on the hierarchy of states within its sphere of influence. In addition to its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, a group of socialist states aligned with the Soviet Union, such as Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Albania in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, were included in the Soviet Union's hierarchy.

Yugoslavia, on the other hand, followed a different policy from these states and adopted a more independent stance. With the Non-Alignment policy it pursued, it aimed to develop its own unique understanding of socialism by standing apart from both the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union and the Western Bloc led by the United States. Although there were ideological similarities between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's refusal to position itself in the same bloc with the Soviet Union created a distinct hierarchical relationship between the two states. Compared to other Eastern European states that were under the direct influence of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia enjoyed greater autonomy and independence.

This study, which examines Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet Union hierarchy between 1945-1948 in the light of the developments between 1945 and 1948, using the hierarchy approach, which emerged as a new approach within the discipline of International Relations (IR), is important in terms of contributing to the literature for various reasons. Firstly, within the framework of the newly developing hierarchy approach, Yugoslavia stands out as a region that has not yet been sufficiently studied. This study aims to contribute to the literature in this regard.

Additionally, this study, focusing on Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet Union's hierarchy, demonstrates how dependent states can behave to claim more autonomy and challenge hegemonic powers in a multipolar world. Thus, the study emphasizes the importance of the current situation of the international system, the material capacities of states, geographical factors, and individual leadership in shaping state behaviors and decisions.

Moreover, by providing insights into current geopolitical structures and the strategies states use to cope with hierarchical pressures, this study sheds light on historical precedents that can help better understand contemporary issues. Therefore, the study not only aims to enrich the academic literature by contributing to it but also seeks to enhance the understanding of international relations within the context of the hierarchy approach, which emerges as a response to fundamental concepts characterizing international relations.

## Yugoslavia in the Post-War Era

During the Second World War, the territory of Yugoslavia was divided between the Axis Powers and their allies. After the occupation of the country, King Petar II left Belgrade for the United Kingdom, where he established a government in exile. During this period, the communist resistance movement, the Partisans, formed to liberate their country from Axis occupation, managed to liberate all of Yugoslavia from Axis occupation in 1944 with Soviet and Anglo-American assistance. Thus, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed on November 29, 1945. Yugoslavia, which was built on a socialist concept, consisted of six states and two autonomous regions. Within the new socialist federation, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia were given the status of separate and equal republics, while Kosovo and Vojvodina were made autonomous regions within Yugoslavia (Curtis, 1992).

This new socialist state was also considered a very important ally for the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was the first state to accept communism without any foreign intervention. In 1949, Yugoslavia remained so until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, and was the only such state in Eastern Europe until the end of the Cold War (Cook, 2000). Between 1945 and 1948, it continued to pursue an aggressive internationalist foreign policy, as one would expect from a communist state loyal to the Soviet Union and Stalin.

In fact, the Yugoslav regime during this period was more pro-Soviet than any other state in Eastern Europe dominated by the Soviet Union hierarchy (Ulam, 1952). Zbigniew Brzezinski portrayed post-war Yugoslavia as *"the most Orthodox, the most Stalinist, the most Soviet-type regime in Eastern Europe at the time"* (Brzezinski, 1971: 55) and *"... more Stalinist than Stalin"* (Brzezinski, 1971, p. 39). In addition, Yugoslavia's first constitution, adopted on January 31, 1946, was very similar to the Soviet Union's constitution of 1936 (Cook, 2000).

However, following some issues in this period, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in 1948 as a result of the disagreements between Tito and Stalin. In the face of this secession, which took the international community by surprise, Western states quickly realized the importance of this tension between Yugoslavia and the Soviets and took action. The Western bloc started to help Yugoslavia militarily and economically, which led the Soviet Union to pursue a more aggressive policy against Yugoslavia. Though, strategy of the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Stalin, had involved all alternatives short of war to overthrow the Tito leadership in Yugoslavia in the period after 1948.

## Breaking Points in Yugoslavia-Soviet Union Relations between 1945-1948

The alliance between Tito's Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union was initially built on respect for mutual interests and communist unity. Moreover, after coming to power, Tito adopted many Soviet-style institutions and policies. However, due to growing distrust between the parties, ideological differences and different political agendas, relations between the two states witnessed crises.

After the World War II, Yugoslavia sought close relations with the Soviet Union for ideological, economic and security reasons. However, tensions soon arose over Yugoslavia's distinctive independent socialist model, Stalin's desire for greater control over the countries under his hierarchy, and Yugoslavia's desire to expand its own political influence by improving its relations with the West. The Soviet Union aspired to Yugoslavia to follow the Soviet communist model and be subject to Moscow's leadership, while Yugoslavia insisted on maintaining its own democratic socialist system. This ideological disagreement and Soviet interference in Yugoslavia's internal affairs led to the deterioration of relations between the two states (Majstorovic, 2010).

The tension between Tito and Stalin dates back to the years of struggle against the Axis Powers during the World War II. During this period, there were two resistance movements in Yugoslavia, the Chetniks led by Dragoljub Draza Mihailovic and the Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito. While the United Kingdom and the United States supported the Partisans among these two groups waging a struggle against the Axis Powers, the Soviet Union initially supported the Chetniks, who had the ideal of a Serb-centered Yugoslavia, but later supported the Partisans at the request and pressure of the United Kingdom and the United States. As a matter of fact, although the Chetniks, who were fighting for a Serb-centered monarchy under Draza Mihailovic, had anti-communist ideas, they were carrying out attacks against the Partisans, who had the ideal of a federal communist Yugoslavia, with the support they received from the Soviet Union. This is considered to be one of the starting points of the tension between Tito and Stalin (Cook, 2000).

In the light of this episode during the World War II, the main points of tension between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1948 can be listed as the support for the communist rebels in the Greek civil war, the Trieste issue and the attempts to establish the Balkan Federation. Hypothetically, the reasons for Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet Union's hierarchy between 1945 and 1948 could be analyzed in the context of these three main disputes.

## Impact of the Greek Civil War on Yugoslavia-Soviet Union Relations

Yugoslavia directly supported the communist insurgent movement in Greece by providing ammunition and supplies, as well as military training assistance to the militias. Similarly, Stalin encouraged the insurgency and Yugoslavia's support for the communist groups with the hope of gaining a strategically important region costlessly through civil war instead of a direct war. While Stalin aimed to expand his sphere of influence, Tito harbored his own hopes of incorporating parts of Greece into a Balkan Federation under his leadership, thereby increasing his power and prestige in the region.

Initially, the insurgents supported by Tito and the Soviet Union managed to cause difficulty for the existing Greek government and their British supporters. However, the British informed the United States on February 21, 1947, of its intention to withdraw from its missions in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean due to economic reasons. Consequently, under the Truman Doctrine, the United States took over this mission and provided aid to Greece government (LaFeber, 1993). In addition to financial aid, the deployment of two American divisions to Greece to combat the insurgents was also considered (LaFeber, 1993). This assistance led to the civil war's progress turning against the insurgents.

Following the weakening of the insurgents with the help of the USA, Stalin ordered the cessation of support for the Greek communist insurgents. This order not only demonstrates Stalin's pragmatic perspective, but also shows that he avoided provoking the USA. Specifically, Stalin believed that the goal of establishing a communist regime in Greece would eventually be achieved. Therefore, he thought it was unnecessary to spend resources on a cause that was evidently going to be lost at that moment and that the same objective could be achieved much more easily and cost-effectively when conditions were more favorable (Gibianskii, 1998).

Thus, the Soviet support for the insurgents in Greece ended. However, Tito, who wanted to increase his influence in the region, continued his support for the insurgents in Greece, disregarding Stalin's order. While Tito's non-compliance with Stalin's foreign policy decision was seen as a problem from Stalin's perspective, from Tito's perspective, it can be assumed that his trust in Stalin as a leader and in the Soviet Union as an ideal system was damaged. This situation demonstrating that breaking the confidence situations could lead to the subordinate states and their leaders a tendency to challenge the superior states under whose hierarchy they exist.

## The Trieste Crisis and Rising of the Tito-Stalin Split

After the World War II, Tito's territorial demands towards Austria and Italy emerged as another issue that caused tensions in relations with the Soviet Union. This was because both the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership and the West did not want the balance of power formed after the war to be disturbed. Therefore, Yugoslavia's demands, which could harm this balance, provoked a reaction from Stalin. In this context, Tito's claim to the port city of Trieste, which was under Italian control at the time, holds significant importance regarding relations with the Soviet Union.

Claim over Trieste, whose population mostly consisted of Slovenes, seemed quite reasonable when considering Yugoslavia's need for a port and the fact that it was on the winning side of the war (Hammond, 1954). Italy, on the other hand, had deepwater ports other than Trieste and was on the losing side of the war. However, Yugoslavia's demand was not accepted by the Western states, which did not want Trieste to be under communist control. Moreover, the current Italian government was a Western-backed government and was fighting against Italian communists in domestic politics. Therefore, Western states were concerned that the loss of territory by the government they supported could also disrupt the balance in Italy (Lane, 1996). For this reason, British and American forces entered the city to prevent it from being taken over by Tito's Partisan forces. In response to these developments, Stalin stated, *"I do not wish to begin Third World War over the Trieste question"* and informed Yugoslavia to abandon this demand (Gaddis, 1997: 30).

In Trieste, where tensions were escalating, a temporary demarcation line was established between the Western allies and Yugoslav forces, and negotiations began. However, as no result could be reached despite the passage of time, it was decided to form a commission to resolve the issue. Within this commission, formed by the four major victorious powers of the war (the United Kingdom, the USA, France, and the Soviet Union), each member presented its proposals. The Soviet Union proposed Yugoslavia's request for Trieste to be annexed to Yugoslavia and for the port to have free port status (McDonald, 1973). Although Tito thanked Stalin for this support, he suffered a great defeat when France's proposal was accepted in June 1946. According to this plan, the Free Territory of Trieste was established, and its administration was divided between the Allied forces and Yugoslav forces (Calic, 2019).

The dispute over Trieste was not resolved until 1954 and saw several critical developments, including Yugoslavia shooting down two American planes in 1946



(Campbell, 1967; Hammond, 1954), threatening the Allied with war, and not allowing Italian troops into the city (Hammond, 1954). Another noteworthy aspect of this issue was that the Soviet Union withdrew its support for Yugoslavia over the Trieste issue in exchange for more reparations from West Germany despite Tito believing he had Soviet support from his meeting with Stalin a few weeks earlier. This development deepened the Tito-Stalin split and damaged the principle of mutual trust in Yugoslavia-Soviet Union relations. Furthermore, Stalin's attitude towards the Trieste issue undoubtedly influenced Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet hierarchy, both at the individual and system levels.

## **Formation of the Balkan Federation and Yugoslavia's Efforts to Gain Influence**

One of the issues where the interests of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union aligned but later caused disagreement between the two states was the efforts to form a Balkan Federation. The idea of uniting Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania under a federation was seen as highly appealing for Tito, who wanted to increase his influence in the region. While Tito wanted to make Bulgaria one of the republics within Yugoslavia, Stalin saw the federation as an opportunity to stabilize the weak communist Bulgarian regime and to improve its prestige tarnished by its alliance with the Nazis during the war.

However, the absence of a peace agreement ending the war between Albania and Bulgaria and the Allied powers, as well as the Allied powers' aversion to the idea of this federation, posed a significant barrier to the federation. The Allied powers also vetoed mutual cooperation agreements between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Although Bulgaria raised the issue of the federation again after the idea was shelved due to these reactions, both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia rejected Bulgaria's proposal. While the Soviet Union did not intend to provoke Western powers, Yugoslavia cited the reasons that the regime in Bulgaria was a monarchy, the communist party was weak, and the army was not entirely under the control of the party (Gibianskii, 1998).

Tito and Stalin's views on Albania were similar to their views on Bulgaria. Although Albania's inclusion in the federation faced similar obstacles concerning the Allied powers, Tito and Stalin envisioned a gradual transition for Albania's integration, starting with a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia, followed by a peace agreement, and ultimately the formation of the federation (Gibianskii, 1998).

Indeed, the formation of a Balkan Federation seemed to be in the interests of the Soviet Union and all regional states. From Tito's perspective, the established



federation would increase his power and influence in the region, providing economic contributions, resources, and labor to Yugoslavia. Bulgaria and Albania saw it as an opportunity to sustain their weak governments and communist regimes. Stalin, on the other hand, believed that the established federation could be a significant and powerful counterbalance against the West, thereby reducing security risks on the Soviet Union. Ideologically, the federation would be “*the first stage in the construction of a multinational Communist society*” (Brzezinski, 1971: 56).

However, as aforementioned, the vetoes from Western powers, primarily the USA and the United Kingdom, against the federation and other agreements between these countries led Stalin and Tito to shelve the idea of a federation to avoid issues with the West. By 1946, Stalin, moving with thought that the West did not pose a threat to the Soviets’ interests in the Balkans, communicated to Tito his view to sign a friendship and cooperation agreement with Bulgaria and form a federation. Believing that this would stabilize the communist regime in Bulgaria, Tito, albeit reluctantly, acted on this directive and facilitated the signing of a mutual assistance and friendship agreement between these two countries in 1947 (Gibianskii, 1998).

Nonetheless, following the announcements of the USA initiatives like the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, Stalin conveyed to Tito his instructions to cancel the signed agreements and the federation efforts. Due to Stalin’s sudden policy changes, it was clear that Tito, even if he did not want an outright confrontation, needed to make his own decisions to increase his influence in the region and balance relations with the West. Stalin also wanted the federation idea with Albania to be postponed, as it was evident that Albania’s merger with Yugoslavia would bolster Tito’s power (Brzezinski, 1971). Interestingly, while conveying this unpredictable policy to Tito, Stalin reiterated the same reasons Tito had provided when rejecting the idea of forming a federation with Bulgaria.

Against Stalin’s policies, which aimed to avoid a possible conflict with the West, faced Tito in a difficult situation. Thus, Yugoslavia under Tito, claiming the Greek territorial demands over Albania as an excuse and sent troops into Albanian territory with the allegation of a potential occupation attempt. This action, which occurred without informing of the Soviet Union, was perceived as an open challenge to the Soviet hierarchy and became one of the significant factors that led to the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948.

## Theoretical Framework and Hierarchy Approach

International Relations (IR) theories that explain interstate relations based on the assumption that the nature of the international system is anarchic have faced a significant challenge recently. At the forefront of these challenges is the hierarchy approach, which argues that the prevailing principle in world politics is still the stratification system, where actors are ranked as superior or inferior to one another. The hierarchy approach is based on the assumption that a hegemonic state provides security, welfare, and status to a weaker state in exchange for the partial relinquishment of its sovereignty. In this context, it asserts that besides anarchy, a hierarchy also dominates the international system (Balcı, 2019a; Balcı, 2019b; Balcı, 2021; Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990; Lake, 2007; Lake, 2009a; Lake, 2009b; Wendt & Friedheim, 1995; Yetim & Balcı, 2016; Zarakol, 2011; Zarakol, 2014; Zarakol, 2017).

Primary methods used in this study are the case study method and the comparative historical method. The study utilizes primary and secondary data sources such as books, articles, research reports, theses, documents, and texts published by government and non-governmental organizations, as well as compilation books and reports related to the topic. By aiming to identify the causes and consequences of Yugoslavia's relations with the Soviet Union and its attempts to challenge the Soviet hierarchy between 1945-1948, as well as the findings on the conditions under which subordinate states challenge superior states, this study examines the respective state by using within-case comparison methods that analyze processes over a certain period of time, process tracing that analyzes the mechanisms that connect relevant phenomena, and causal narrative analysis that analyze causal determinants and the reconstruction of historical processes. Likewise, the study utilizes the comparative historical method.

These methods are among the most suitable for examining the reasons why subordinate states challenge superior states within the context of the hierarchy approach. This is because the hierarchy approach has many structural aspects, and the best levels for analysis are generally at the macro or meso level. Therefore, prominent figures in the hierarchy approach, such as David Lake, Robert Powell, David Kang, Ayşe Zarakol, John Ikenberry, and Amitav Acharya, utilize comparative historical methods in their studies on the hierarchy approach. The comparative historical method also allows for analyzing how both individual actors and structural and institutional environments shape individual actions and considers the relationships between individuals and structures. Thus, it is also possible to analyze the impact of leaders and other significant figures at the individual level in challenges by subordinate states against superior states.

## Why Did Yugoslavia Challenge the Soviet Union Hegemony?

Developments between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1948, reveal that Yugoslavia generally tended to show loyalty to the Soviet Union even in situations of conflicting interests. However, it should be noted that the differences in perspectives of Stalin and Tito led Yugoslav authorities to make decisions that they believed best served the interests of the international socialist movement according to their own interests and, consequently, their own view of socialism. The most prominent examples of this situation in Yugoslav-Soviet relations are the support given to Greek communist insurgents, the developments regarding the Trieste issue, and the disagreements during the process of forming the Balkan Federation. In this context, various reasons may be noted why Yugoslavia challenged the Soviet hierarchy.

### System Level

At the system level, the most important reasons for Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet Union can be listed as the existence of multiple poles in the international system, its capability to address the need for security risk protection, and its geographical location. In a system where multiple poles exist, subordinate states are more likely to show a tendency to exit the hierarchies they are in. The rapprochement between Yugoslavia, which challenged the Soviet hierarchy, and the West, followed by its role as one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, is a crystal clear example for this condition. Many states, including Yugoslavia, which challenged the obligation to side with either bloc in a bipolar world, united under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement. Additionally, during the period of tensions with the Soviet Union, the aid provided by the West to Yugoslavia in an attempt to draw it into the capitalist camp, or at least ensure its neutrality, reduced Yugoslavia's concerns about the potential crisis caused by the cessation of Soviet aid and increased the likelihood of challenging the Soviet hierarchy. This situation indicates that subordinate states may tend to challenge hegemonic powers when they find options to enter another hierarchy.

Furthermore, the fact that the Soviet Union was not geographically close to Yugoslavia, and that Yugoslavia bordered the Western Bloc, was also a significant factor in its tendency to challenge. In terms of military capacity, Yugoslavia did not need the Soviet Union to counter threats from the West or the West to counter threats from the Soviet Union, illustrating the importance of military capacity in establishing a place at the system level. Yugoslavia's highly defensible geography also played a role in making it a significant actor at the system level.

## State Level

Improvement in the military and economic capacity of a subordinate state can profoundly affect its position within the hierarchical order. In this context, the distribution of material capacity is quite crucial. When components such as the military, natural resources, economic tools, and other resources are unevenly distributed, a subordinate state finds it difficult to unilaterally and peacefully abolish the hierarchy. However, even though Yugoslavia was not strong or capable enough to compete with the Soviet Union in terms of material capacity, its ability to pursue a self-sufficiency policy allowed it to challenge the Soviet hierarchy. Indeed, while the Soviet Union demonstrated its intent to exploit Yugoslavia's material power through cooperation and economic investment agreements, Yugoslavia perceived the Soviet Union's colonial intentions as a threat and perceived the challenge as a matter of existence.

In short, as the material capacity of a subordinate state increases, the likelihood of seeking more autonomy and challenging the hegemonic state also increases. This situation was seen as valid in the case of Yugoslavia challenging the Soviet Union. As a state that survived Nazi occupation through its own struggle, Yugoslavia adopted a self-sufficiency policy and aimed to become a regional power, particularly by increasing its military capacity. This increasing material capacity of Yugoslavia was one of the factors that gave Tito confidence in challenging the Soviet hierarchy.

Additionally, likelihood of challenging the superior state increases when the reliability of the hierarchy decreases from the perspective of the subordinate state. Ambivalent of the Soviet Union stance towards Yugoslavia on the issues of the Trieste matter and the Balkan Federation led to a loss of trust in Yugoslavia and thus increased the likelihood of challenging the Soviet hierarchy. The Percentages Agreement, a secret deal between the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, is another example of distrust between subordinate and hegemonic states. According to this agreement, the influence over Yugoslavia was divided equally between the two great Powers (the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom), indicating an awareness of Yugoslavia's capacity to challenge. Both hegemonic powers, realizing that Yugoslavia did not trust either of them and could not draw Yugoslavia into their respective hierarchies. Consequently, they competed to achieve equal spheres of influence over Yugoslavia to prevent it from joining the opposing hierarchy.

## Individual Level

Personal views, beliefs, character, and educational levels of individuals can also be influential in challenges to hierarchies. As a leader who achieved victory in World War II, Tito's charismatic leadership allowed him to rally his people to his side when he diverged from Stalin. Although his policies sometimes caused Yugoslavia to fall out of alignment with the Soviet Union, Tito's ability to garner popular support enabled him to challenge Stalin, even at the height of Stalin's popularity. Furthermore, Tito's unique understanding of socialism and his desire to transform Yugoslavia into a regional power were also significant factors in Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet Union. In this context, subordinate state leaders with broad visions and their own imaginations are more likely to oppose the roles and imposed limits within the hierarchical order and challenge the superior states under which they are subordinated.

Additionally, Tito had a more inclusive view of Communism compared to Stalin. Stalin's ultimate vision of the Communist state was centered around the Soviet Union. Consequently, he often clashed with the leaders of Communist parties in countries like the USA, France, the United Kingdom, Poland, and Italy. Tito, on the other hand, was less inclined to share his advantages and the strength of his charismatic leadership with the Soviets and Stalin, having more power than these leaders who had either not yet established a communist regime in their countries or had weak regimes.

At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the political atmosphere in Yugoslavia at that time and Tito's position within the Yugoslav political system. Tito, who monopolized the bureaucracy, military, and economy in his country, was the undisputed leader of Yugoslavia. Indeed, the hypothesis that leaders who minimize the influence of other political powers in their countries tend to make broader and more strategic decisions in line with their beliefs was also valid for Tito.

Furthermore, as Serbian historian Latinka Perovic noted, *"at a juridical and at a symbolic level, Tito was Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia was Tito"* (Goldstein, 2020: 20). Considering that there was a similar relationship between Stalin and the Soviet Union, the divide between these two leaders can be better understood. When the advisors and administrators surrounding a leader are homogeneous, the leader's decisions become much more decisive even in the most strategic and significant issues. Given that the main decision-makers in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were Tito and Stalin, respectively, it can be asserted that one reason for the Tito-Stalin split lies in the individual characteristics of these two leaders.

## Conclusion

Existence of a pole in the international system other than the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's defensible geography, the distance between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and the Western states' aid to Yugoslavia to draw it to their side or ensure its neutrality were significant factors of Yugoslavia's challenge to the Soviet hierarchy, at the system level. At the state level, Yugoslavia's self-sufficiency policy, its increased material capacity, having a strong military, and the perception among Yugoslav leaders that the Soviet Union's ambivalent policies posed a threat to the Yugoslav state contributed to Yugoslavia's tendency to challenge the Soviet hierarchy. Simultaneously, the impact of individual leaders like Tito and Stalin on hierarchical challenges is quite significant. As a leader who had liberated his country from occupation during World War II, Tito did not wish to use the charisma and power he gained after the war for Stalin's Soviets and acted with the intention of expanding his own regional power. Tito being an undisputed figure within Yugoslavia was also a significant factor in his challenge to the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership.

In conclusion, Tito's conflict with Stalin weakened Yugoslavia's regional influence and forced Tito to abandon his plans for the expansion of Yugoslavia. Ultimately, Tito had to abandon the vision of Yugoslav dominance in the Balkans and focus on protecting Yugoslavia's borders from both neighboring Soviet satellite states and other neighboring NATO member states. While ideological factors are cited as decisive for the Soviet-Yugoslav split, it is possible to say that the primary cause was the political disagreements between Tito and Stalin regarding Yugoslavia's expansionist ambitions, which led to its expulsion from Cominform, and Stalin's policies on Soviet expansionism. Indeed, Tito's desire to expand Yugoslavia's influence in the Balkans and his interventions in Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria, combined with Stalin's complex foreign policy aimed at balancing relations with the West and expanding his own influence, created discontent within Yugoslav leadership. This led the subordinate state of Yugoslavia, which had often remained loyal to the superior state of the Soviet Union, to challenge the Soviet hierarchy.

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