

ANDRZEJ PURAT, PhD, adjunct  
Kazimierz Wielki University  
Bydgoszcz, Republic of Poland  
andrzej.purat@o2.pl

PAWEŁ BIELICKI, PhD, scholar  
Pilecki Institute  
Warsaw, Republic of Poland  
bielicki11@gmail.com

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## **AN ANALYSIS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND THE NEAR EAST COUNTRIES IN 1955–1970**

**ABSTRACT:** *The article represents an analysis of Yugoslavia's diplomatic relations with the Middle East in 1955-1970. The text is an introduction to in-depth research on the subject. It is extremely important for Yugoslavia's foreign policy because it was at this time that this country's diplomacy began to play an important role on the international stage. The text is based on documents available from the US Department of State, Wilson Center Digital Archive. In addition, we took advantage of available international scientific periodicals, literature in English, Serbian, and Polish, incl. papers by Alvin Rubinstein, Dragan Bogetić, Jože Pirjevec, Pero Simić, and Michał Zacharias.*

**KEYWORDS:** Near East, Egypt, Israel, Yugoslavia, USSR, USA

### **Introduction**

The Cold War was a period in international relations characterized by interesting cooperation between the communist countries and the Arab world. One of the examples of this cooperation, not well known to the public and not sufficiently explored in scientific literature, was the topic of close relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East countries, particularly Egypt under the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of the Free Officers Movement, which staged a military coup in July of 1952, forcing the corrupt King Farouk to abdicate. This article describes the most important aspects of cooperation between Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito and the Near East countries. It also analyzes the conditions and correlations characterizing their mutual cooperation dating back to the mid-

1950s. We have also traced the process of intensification of these relations taking place in the early 1960s. It included the consequences of the conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Belgrade in 1961. We present Belgrade's standpoint regarding the mounting tension between Israel and the Arab countries, particularly after the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June of 1967.

### Relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East in 1945–1955

Initially, the People's Republic of Yugoslavia paid little attention to relations with the Near East. It had been influenced by a few factors. First, the new leader of the country, Croatian communist Josip Broz Tito, had worked for years for the Soviet special services.<sup>1</sup> The complete takeover of power could be hindered only by a strong political opposition within the country. Therefore, during the first years of his rule, he intended to eliminate it. In the opinion of the Yugoslav communists, a particularly dangerous opponent was the leader of the Chetnik Movement, General Mihailović and King Petar II, who had the political support of the British Government. During that time (until 1948), Belgrade had maintained close political, economic, and military ties with Moscow. Relations with the Western countries and other non-communist countries outside the Iron Curtain were very limited. For the regime in Belgrade, only the USSR was an authority in domestic and international politics. The statement above was confirmed by Milovan Đilas, a close collaborator of J. B. Tito. According to his opinion "it was a fact that no one from the party leadership had anti-Soviet views. Neither before or during the war, nor after the war [...]. Leaders and regular members of the party would not be united or infused with ideology if not for their belief in the "leading role of Socialism." Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union were our cornerstone and mark of our spiritual birth."<sup>2</sup> This opinion was also shared by Vladimir Petrović, who, while emphasizing the limited possibilities for Yugoslavia to operate in the Middle East, pointed out that from a political point of view, in the first years after World War II, Yugoslavia identified the objectives of its own diplomacy with the global strategy of the Soviet Union, which made it impossible to pursue an independent foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tito's cooperation with the Soviet secret service during the period of the Great Terror is described by Pero Simić, Edward Radziński – the author of Stalin's biography, as well as by Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, the authors of a monograph dedicated to the functioning of the KGB. All of the mentioned authors claim that the future Yugoslav leader, alias "Comrade Walter," an agent of the Comintern honing his skills during the Spanish Civil War, contributed to the death of his main rivals in the Moscow prisons in order to take over power in his party, including Milan Gorkić. Documents confirm that Tito was particularly liked by Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Comintern, see: Pero Simić, *Tito, Secret of the Century* (Wrocław: Dolnośląskie Publishing House, 2011), 61–76, 83–102; Edward Radziński, *Stalin* (Warsaw: Magnum Publishing House, 1997), 553–554; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB* (Warsaw: Bellona Scientific Publishers, 1999), 318.

<sup>2</sup> C. Andrew and O. Gordievsky, *op. cit.*, 318.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Petrović, *Jugoslavija stupa na Bliski istok. Stvaranje jugoslovenske bliskoistočne politike 1946–1956* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2007), 29.

Another obstacle on the path to cooperation with the Near East countries was the rift with Moscow and the necessity to defend the country against a possible Soviet invasion. The economic sanctions that the Kremlin and its satellite countries imposed on Yugoslavia forced J. B. Tito to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the Western countries, particularly the United States and Great Britain. Although Yugoslavia joining the Western political and military alliances appeared impossible, the leaders of the FPRY (Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia – until 1963, then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRY) had an opportunity to break their international isolation, which had been present since the beginning of the communist rule. The pressure from the Soviet Union and countries from East-Central Europe made J. B. Tito aware that liberalization of the economy was unavoidable, maintaining his authoritarian political system in the country. On the other hand, the leader of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) (earlier, until 1952, it was known as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia – CPY) did not want to be dependent on economic support from the West. In 1950, following his own international policy agenda, he supported the leader of the National Front of Iran and later Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh, representing his country's independent approach to the Western countries; for example, on the issue concerning the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, where the British had played a leading role. J. B. Tito's new agenda encountered opposition from his diplomatic community, which was leaning toward signing a comprehensive agreement with the West. However, in February of 1950, he summed it up briefly, "We trade in goods rather than awareness and principles."<sup>4</sup>

It also seems that one more reason for limited cooperation between Yugoslavia and the Near East was the Yugoslav leader's temporary hope of reaching an agreement with J. Stalin. Therefore, J. B. Tito tried to avoid establishing closer ties with the Arab countries and Israel, since the Soviet leader, at the end of his dictatorship, had started a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Jews in the Soviet Union and in the Communist Bloc countries, during which J. B. Tito was accused of being subservient to the Zionists. It was supposed to weaken the cohesion of the Eastern Bloc. Such thinking can be confirmed by the show trials of László Rajk and Rudolf Slánský, accused of cooperation with Israeli intelligence.<sup>5</sup> Arresting László Rajk, a Hungarian communist activist, the Soviet dictator wanted to connect his case with an alleged plot whose target was the destruction of the Soviet Union. The United States was supposed to play the central role in this plot. Underlining the international significance of the trial against L. Rajk, the prosecutor said: "This process is of international importance. [...] Not only L. Rajk, but listed as defendants are also his associates, who include foreign patrons and imperialist instigators from Belgrade and Washington. [...] According to the evidence presented at the trial, we can clear-

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<sup>4</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito* (Warsaw: SEDNO Academic Publishing House, 2018), 384.

<sup>5</sup> Paweł Bielicki, "The Iron Curtain in the Aspect of the Sovietization of Eastern Europe 1949–1953", *Studies on the History of Russia and East-Central Europe*, vol. 52, no. 1, (2017), 160–161.

ly deduce that even during the war against A. Hitler, the American intelligence services were ready to fight against the powers of socialism and democracy. [...] The plot planned in Hungary by J. B. Tito and his clique, which was supposed to be carried out by the network of L. Rajk, can be understood in full outside the context of the international plans of the American imperialists.”<sup>6</sup>

We also should mention the significant cultural differences dividing Yugoslavia and the Near East. World War II brought many human losses to the Jewish population living in Yugoslavia, which was reflected – among others – by the decreasing number of places of worship. According to some estimates, despite opening 199 places of worship in 1950, not many of them were used in accordance with their designation. Some of them were turned into museums or it was accepted that they fell into disrepair.<sup>7</sup> Despite all of this, during the post-war years, Yugoslavia glorified the Jewish population fighting hand in hand with the communists during the war and assured them about rebuilding the synagogues and municipal buildings they once owned. J. B. Tito himself made use of Jewish government officials, military men, scientists, and journalists, counting on their support in rebuilding the country. At the same time, he approved the emigration of the Jews, bearing in mind that as a result of huge population losses in the Holocaust, a significant part of the emigrants wanted to leave Yugoslavia, because only leaving the country guaranteed the possibility of reuniting with their surviving family members<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, the Yugoslav leader recognized the State of Israel, setting up diplomatic relations<sup>9</sup>. The authorities in Belgrade also used a moderate approach to the Muslims, despite Yugoslavia’s postwar atheist character. According to Jerzy Targalski, there had been two statuses of nations and ethnic groups in Yugoslavia. The first one recognized five nations living in Yugoslavia, including Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians. The Bosnian Muslims were not recognized as a separate national group, which can be confirmed by the 1948 introduction of the category of Muslims ethnically undeclared, without national affiliation. On the other hand, ethnic minority status was given to populations that had their homelands outside Yugoslavia, such as Albanians, Hungarians, Italians, and Bulgarians, although the principle based on the sense of unity of all nations and ethnic groups living in a given area, regardless of their conflicts of interests, present in every communist country was abided by.<sup>10</sup> The opening of Yugoslavia to the

<sup>6</sup> C. Andrew and O. Gordievsky, *op. cit.*, 362–363.

<sup>7</sup> Dariusz Wybranowski, “Genesis and Conditions of the Transition Process of the Muslim Community into Muslims in Bosnia in the Period between the Late 1960s and the Early 1970s”, *Przełąd Zachodni*, no. 4, (2014), 89.

<sup>8</sup> Milan Radovanović, “Migration spawning migration”, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 2, (2020), 190.

<sup>9</sup> May 6, 1980, *Behind the Headlines Tito Opposed Israel and Zionism in his Last Years but Helped the Jewry*, <https://www.jta.org/1980/05/06/archive/behind-the-headlines-tito-opposed-israel-and-zionism-in-last-years-but-helped-jewry> (accessed, October 15, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Jerzy Targalski, *Yugoslavia after the death of Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1980–1986)*, <https://jozefdarski.pl/7213-jugoslawia-po-smierci-marszalka-josipa-broz-tito-1980-1986>, (accessed August 17, 2018).

West in the period between the late 1950s and the early 1960s made possible the rebirth of some parts of Islam.

### **The Genesis of Relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East. The Role of Egypt in the Process of Intensification of Belgrade's Diplomatic Status**

Two events played a key role in the initiation of mutual political relations with the Near East countries. The first one was the death of J. Stalin, the most ardent opponent of J. B. Tito. His passing also opened an opportunity to reestablish relations with the Kremlin. The first signs of the thaw had already been noticed in the first months after Stalin's death, when Lavrentiy Beria, who at that time was Soviet Minister of Internal Affairs and informally ruled the country, made an attempt to establish relations with J. B. Tito<sup>11</sup>. Although Beria's arrest in June of 1953 froze for some time the relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the Kremlin stressed the necessity of mitigating the ideological conflict with the FPRY. Finally, in 1955, the new Soviet authorities led by Nikita Khrushchev, first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin, decided to start direct negotiations with J. B. Tito in Belgrade, which resulted in the signing of the Belgrade Declaration, in which we can read that: "internal affairs, questions of different forms of development of socialism are the exclusive business of the peoples of the respective countries."<sup>12</sup> Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade was considered a great triumph of Yugoslavia's foreign policy, all the more so as it was the Soviet authorities who extended their hand to J. B. Tito.<sup>13</sup> Expressing a distancing to J. Stalin's policy toward Yugoslavia, the Kremlin counted on J. B. Tito joining the Eastern Bloc and an improvement of its image worldwide. Moscow, however, was wrong in its calculations, since the Yugoslav dictator preferred a more independent role of his country in international relations, and above all he was craving to be appreciated in the eyes of international public opinion.

The second reason that had an impact on the decision of J. B. Tito's participation in the Near East equation was the conference of the non-aligned nations at Bandung in 1955. The Yugoslav, as one of the first international lead-

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<sup>11</sup> On the day before his arrest, Jun 25, 1953, Beria wrote a letter to Aleksandar Ranković, chief of the Yugoslav security agency, regarding the readiness of the Soviet Union to start talks to normalize mutual relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia. This document became the reason to accuse the former head of the ministry of internal affairs by conspirators of secret diplomacy without consulting with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. After the imprisonment of the Soviet dignitary, the supervision over the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow was restored, see. Françoise Thom, *Beria. Oprawca bez skazy* (Warsaw: Prószyński Media, 2016), 890, 909.

<sup>12</sup> Michał J. Zacharias, *Communism, Federation, Nationalisms. The System of Power in Yugoslavia 1943–1991. Foundation, restructuring, breakup* (Warsaw: Neriton Publishing House, Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN), 2004), 168–169.

<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Petrović, *Titova lična diplomatija* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2010), 125; Ljubodrag Dimić, „Josip Broz i Nikita Sergejevič Hruščov. Razgovori u Beogradu 27. maj – 2. jun 1955“, *Istorijski glasnik*, br. 1–2, (1997), 35–68.

ers, realized the potential that can be brought to the global situation by an association of neutral states, frequently distrustful toward the West, and more favorably inclined to the communist world. Not by chance, his activity increased immediately after his meeting with N. S. Khrushchev. At the same time, he gave arguments to postcolonial countries that by normalizing relations with the USSR, Belgrade could become an important player on the international stage and can serve as a bridge between Europe and Asia. The talks in Indonesia facilitated his relations with Indian Prime Minister J. Nehru, who, like J. B. Tito, proclaimed the idea of non-involvement and independence. Third World country politicians emphasized that no one had the right to impose any decisions upon them and for this reason they intended to establish international structures, partially incoherent with the directions of activity of the UN. The leaders of the movement were not willing to establish more comprehensive agreements with developing countries and the United States of America. Henry Kissinger rightly said that in their approach to rule, the colonial leaders were fundamentally different from the founders of the United States. They represented authoritarian tendencies, although formally they believed in democratic ideas. They treated the East-West conflict as an opportunity to overturn the “old imperial system.”<sup>14</sup> In general, according to the founders of the “Movement,” it was supposed to represent countries that should conduct a policy of non-involvement in international conflicts and neutrality policy in all disputes between the socialist and capitalist blocs.

Finally, an important element of the Yugoslav involvement in the Near East region was the stance of Egypt and this country’s endeavors to achieve full neutrality and independence from all international entities. After the revolution, in the face of British domination and control of the Suez Canal, the country’s ruler, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of the Free Officers Movement, which in 1952 forced the corrupt King Farouk to abdicate, started to look for allies who might have similar views and would be able to help him implement the ideas of abolishing this hegemony. There is no doubt that this friendly attitude of Egypt allowed J. B. Tito to expand his reputation in this region, since both leaders shared similar views in international relations, i.e. achieving balance and neutrality (Egypt from Great Britain and Yugoslavia from the USSR and the USA), an idea to develop its own, original political doctrine, based on respecting the national interests and ideological similarities of both countries to a communist superpower.

Despite all of these similarities, there were also differences between both of these countries. First of all, Egypt had a well-established international position, recognized frequently as the center of the Arab world and an inspiration for many Arabs. In addition, for Cairo, the Soviet Union did not pose any political threat, but as a result of its weapon supplies it could potentially facilitate a prospective aggression against Israel.<sup>15</sup> Egypt accepted the stance of the

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Warsaw: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1996), 573.

<sup>15</sup> Alvin Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970), 234.

Yugoslavs, declaring from the very beginning full support for the activities of G. A. Nasser and ready to provide any assistance in terms of infrastructure according to their possibilities and political support, based on any attempt to counter foreign interference in the internal affairs of Egypt; for instance through the western plans of defense of the Middle East, which the Egyptian leader regarded as a threat to the safety and sovereignty of his country.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, J. B. Tito played a significant role in establishing relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt. During the mentioned N. S. Khrushchev's visit to Belgrade in 1955, recalling the meeting with the prime minister of one of the Arab countries, he said: "Nasser was a young man without much political experience, but if we gave [him] the benefit of the doubt, we might later be able to exert a beneficial influence on him, both for the sake of the communist movement and the Egyptian people."<sup>17</sup> The president said that "Nasser is well disposed toward the USSR."<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt that this hint given by J. B. Tito significantly helped the Kremlin establish relations with Cairo.

The first opportunity to pursue J. B. Tito's plans was provided by the events related to the signing of the Balkan Pact, which initiated the accession of Greece and Turkey to NATO in 1952. This initiative required regulation of mutual relations between Belgrade and both entities, particularly Greece, where J. B. Tito's partisans in spite of J. Stalin's intentions supported the local communists. During his visit to Yugoslavia in January 1953, Mehmet Fuat Koprulu, Turkish minister of foreign affairs, accepted Belgrade's reluctance for joining NATO. The contract was signed on February 20, 1953.<sup>19</sup> Not without justification Wiesław Walkiewicz wrote: "Through its new legal-pact infrastructure, Yugoslavia was undoubtedly accepting duties toward the Balkan members of NATO, although officially it continued to shy away from joining this military and political organization."<sup>20</sup> In this context we see the importance of J. B. Tito's letters and words spoken during a conversation with Khrushchev in May of 1955, when he said that the Pact should not be strengthened in military terms, but should be an element uniting the Balkan nations in the cultural, economic, and political spheres.<sup>21</sup> Finally, after Stalin's death and the normalization of Soviet-Yugoslav relations, the importance of the Balkan Pact was considerably diminished, mainly due to the different political organisms of the signatories, as

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 237.

<sup>17</sup> John Gaddis, *We Now Know. Rethinking Cold War History* (Warsaw: Amber Publishing House, 1998), 221.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War* (Warsaw: Bellona Scientific Publishers, 2007), 69.

<sup>19</sup> Ivan Laković and Dmitar Tasić, *The Tito–Stalin Split and Yugoslavia's Military Opening toward the West 1950–1954. In NATO's Backyard* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2016), 67–70.

<sup>20</sup> Sławomir L. Szczesio, "American Policy Toward Yugoslavia 1948–1960", in: *Exploring the Balkans. History – Politics – Culture – Languages*, Katarzyna Taczyńska and Aleksandra Twardowska (ed.), (Toruń: Doctoral Students' Self-Government of the Nicolaus Copernicus University, 2013), 128.

<sup>21</sup> V. Petrović, *Titova lična diplomatija*, 109.

well as territorial disputes related to the Greek-Turkish conflict over Cyprus, and the unsettled issues between Yugoslavia and Greece. Therefore, in later years, despite a formal alliance, no significant cooperation between these countries was reported.

Another important factor, completing the image of relations between Yugoslavia and the Arab community, was the Baghdad Pact. It was described by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Reporting to the State Department his conversation with Vladimir Popović, [one of the co-workers of J. B. Tito, discussing the issue related to this Pact and suggesting that Great Britain was more persuasive than the United States to sign it – A.P., P.B.] wrote that two and a half years earlier (in May of 1953) the United States of America was one of the initiators of a similar document, but as a result of change in the stand of American diplomacy that was disinclined toward any pacts, it was torpedoed. According to the conversation, it can be deduced that despite an improvement in relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the activity of J. B. Tito in the region, he was afraid that Moscow would want to play a more independent role in the Near East. The American politician replied that he talked three times on this matter with V. Molotov and found no interest in his eyes in this region.<sup>22</sup> The Soviet diplomat clearly stated that an agreement on supplying Soviet weapons to Egypt was strictly commercial. In his response to the statement above, V. Popović said that every new factor in the Near East seems “rather worrying.”<sup>23</sup> A similar opinion was heard during the private meeting between J. B. Tito and A. Dulles in November of 1955. During that time, the LCY leader, informing the US official about his visit to India, Burma, and Egypt, emphasized that one of the main goals of his trip was an attempt to establish direct relations between Israel and Egypt. This initiative met with strong protest from the Egyptians. The Yugoslav president added that considering the above statement, an agreement between these two entities was particularly difficult, although it could not be completely abandoned in some distant future. According to him, the only solution was bilateral talks between the disputing parties. J. B. Tito considered it a mistake to create pacts modeled on the Baghdad Pact, which constituted an attempt to divide the Arab world and were some of the worst ideas, instilled in the structures of the Near East region. In addition, he said that in order to solve the most important problems of the region, the super-

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<sup>22</sup> According to William Taubman, the author of N. S. Khrushchev’s biography, V. Molotov was against the opening of the USSR to the liberation movements in the Third World, including the Near East, calling such opening adventurism. Being aware of the impending collapse of colonialism, Khrushchev cited Molotov’s stand during his conversation with Nasser - saying – “Attack is the best form of defense. I said that we need a new, active diplomacy to prevent a nuclear war, and that the fight between us and capitalists takes new forms. I told him (Molotov) – I am not an adventurer, but we have to support national liberation movements,” see: William Taubman, *Chruszczow: Człowiek i epoka* (Wrocław: Bukowy Las, 2012), 402.

<sup>23</sup> Geneva, November 8, 1955–8 p.m., *Telegram From the Secretary of State to the Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v26/d265>, (accessed December 29, 2018).



powers had to involve themselves economically and the Arab countries had to recognize the State of Israel. Otherwise, there would be the constant threat of war, which could result in negative consequences, also for Yugoslavia, which was very interested in the Near Eastern area and in maintaining peace there. On the other hand, the Yugoslav leader suggested that the main blame for the growing pressure should fall on Israel.<sup>24</sup>

An important event in terms of common policy was the acceptance during the Brioni meeting held on July 18–19, 1956 a declaration written by J. B. Tito, J. Nehru and G. A. Nasser. Those leaders intended to draw a document, which was supposed to not only lay the groundwork for the Non-Aligned Movement, but also materialize the establishment of a third power, independent of the existing political blocs. In the final joint statement we read that “The division of the modern world into power blocs perpetuated these fears. Peace cannot be reached by divisions, but only through a system of collective security on a world scale, the enlargement of the area of freedom and the ending of domination by one power over another.” Not without reason, it was contested in West Germany that J. B. Tito broke free from the communist regime, in which he was previously active and got involved in international politics.<sup>25</sup> J. B. Tito himself, after his conversation with G. A. Nasser, agreed that there was an increasing group of countries ready to accept an active and constructive approach to the basic problems regarding peace and international cooperation”.<sup>26</sup> The pro-Egyptian position of J. B. Tito had continued in the months that followed. On August 11, 1956, he publically recognized the right of Egypt to nationalize the Suez Canal, confirming that the London Conference should not discuss the legal aspects of Egypt’s affairs. A month later, on September 13, 1956, the Yugoslav government supported Cairo one more time, convinced that the Egyptian government would handle the situation concerning the Suez Canal and would be able to operate it for the benefit of the international community. During the Suez Crisis, the authorities in Belgrade, in their numerous statements, including a UN Security Council meeting, supported Egypt, for which G. A. Nasser publicly expressed his gratitude in 1958.<sup>27</sup> The Yugoslav president’s diplomatic activity concerning the matter in question enabled the participation of this country in the activities of the UNEF<sup>28</sup> after 1956. This organization, established

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<sup>24</sup> November 6, 1955, 3–5:40 p.m., Island of Vanga, *Record of the Meeting Between Secretary of State Dulles and President Tito on the Island of Vanga*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v26/d263>, (accessed November 25, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> J. Pirjevec, *op. cit.*, 467.

<sup>26</sup> A. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 245.

<sup>28</sup> UNEF I- the First United Nations Emergency Force. It was established by United Nations General Assembly by a resolution on November 7, 1956. Its mandate was to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities during the Suez Crisis, as well as the withdrawal of armed forces of all parties in the conflict, the United Kingdom, France, Israel and Egypt. UNEF troops served as a buffer between the Egyptian and Israeli forces. It also was supposed to provide impartial supervision over the ceasefire, see *United Nations Emergency Force*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unefI/mandate.html>, (accessed January 15, 2019).

after the Suez Crisis, assumed the maintenance of peace in the Near East, met with the full approval of Yugoslavia, which was the only communist country participating in this association until 1967, when as a result of the Six-Day War it was dissolved.<sup>29</sup>

J. B. Tito's policy drew frequent criticism from representatives of the US political and scientific establishment. According to George Hoffman, who visited Yugoslavia and met with local activists in 1958, the heads of states, speaking about their political independence, bordered on megalomania, "with their eyes stuck on Nasser and the non-aligned Arab, African, and Asian countries [...] are clearly convinced about their pivotal role among other forces, and are under the illusion that Yugoslavia is an important and decisive factor in international policy". To his comment that it was a small country, the leaders responded to G. Hoffman that "indeed, but not in a political sense".<sup>30</sup> This position was also continued in the next decade.

### **The Development of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Belgrade and Cairo Conferences**

The Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade held in April of 1961 completed the first stage of strengthening the position of Yugoslavia on the international scene. At the same time, it strengthened J. B. Tito's image as a statesman of international renown and an advocate of peace. During the discussions, the Yugoslav leader noted that "Coexistence is the one and only foundation on which to build cooperation and gradually solve the urgent problems of our present time," whereas the "peaceful coexistence of blocs is a short-time solution, which should prevent a conflict; in the meantime, most of the world is outside the blocs, thus peaceful coexistence should be implemented not only between states and nations choosing different social systems, but also between nations and states with identical political systems. Every nation should judge for itself which political system best suits its needs".<sup>31</sup> Similar opinions had been heard during another meeting between J. B. Tito and G.A. Nasser, held also in April 1961, during which the leaders expressed their deep concern regarding developments in international relations on the lack of agreement in talks between the United States and the USSR regarding disarmament, the situation in the Congo, Algeria and Laos, and "foreign interference in Cuba" [the Conference in Belgrade coincided with the US invasion in the Bay of Pigs – A. P., P. B]. The leaders declared that the debates of the countries associated with the "Movement" were imperative for strengthening world peace, safeguarding the independence of all nations, and eliminating the danger resulting from interference in the affairs of neutral countries. According to their opinion, the summit that had just ended was supposed to help strengthen cultural and technical coopera-

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<sup>29</sup> A. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, 142–143.

<sup>30</sup> J. Pirjevec, *op. cit.*, 504–505.

<sup>31</sup> P. Simić, *op. cit.*, 203.

tion for the good of the people of the non-aligned countries. The signatories of the "Movement" adopted a seven-point final document concerning the struggle against imperialism, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, racial discrimination, disarmament, peaceful coexistence, the role of the United Nations, and problems of economic development.<sup>32</sup>

The conclusions set above should be interpreted in several dimensions. First, they confirm the LCY leader's somewhat overstated role on the international scene. It seems that the Yugoslav president has significantly recalculated his country's position as an intermediary between the USSR and the Western countries, as well as between the non-aligned countries and the superpowers, without noticing that Yugoslavia does not have enough strength or resources to play such an ambitious role on the international scene.<sup>33</sup> Presenting himself as a defender of the postcolonial countries not involved in political disputes, J. B. Tito wanted to show himself in the regions of Asia and Africa, including the Near East, as a charismatic leader, committed to world peace. His efforts to become recognized worldwide had almost resulted in winning the Nobel Peace Prize. It also aimed at improving his image in Yugoslavia as a globally respected politician. The conclusions of the conference – adding to it another dimension – had considerably moved the emphasis of Yugoslavia's foreign policy in the beginning of the 1960s toward Asia and Africa, to the concurrent neglect of the European continent, particularly Western Europe. Noticing the potential of national liberation movements in the Near East, the Yugoslav president believed that this region in the future could pose a threat to the hegemony of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe. In his opinion, during the time of colonial processes and involvement of superpowers in numerous Near East social and political problems, the fate of the world would be decided globally rather than in Europe. It also should be mentioned that his conviction led to the weakening of the position of Belgrade in the 1970s and the subsequent economic crisis, which contributed indirectly to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars in the Balkans.

The confirmation of J. B. Tito's involvement in Near East affairs rather than in European matters was the second Conference of Nonaligned Nations, organized in Cairo in October of 1964. Regardless of the conflicts in the organization itself, particularly between Yugoslavia and Indonesia, which, unlike Belgrade, was against opening the Movement to countries outside the Afro-Asian region,<sup>34</sup> it was very well highlighted by A. Rubinstein that the significance of these talks was relatively low, which was confirmed by the poor attendance at the summit and additionally of negligible importance on the international scene. The analyst emphasized that the debate was organized under pressure by the

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<sup>32</sup> Yitzhak Oron (ed.), *Middle East Record*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: The Reuven Shiloah Research Center by Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1961), 57.

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Petrović, "Josip Broz Tito's and Summit Diplomacy in the International Relations of Socialist Yugoslavia 1944–1961", *Annales Series Historia et Sociologia*, vol. 24, no. 4, (2014), 585.

<sup>34</sup> Dragan Bogetić, „Sukob Titovog i Sukarnovog koncepta na Samitu nesvrstanih u Kairu 1964“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 2, (2017), 102.

Yugoslav president, who was forcing the issue in order to underline the importance of the “Movement” in global politics. According to a close associate of G. A. Nasser, quoted by Rubinstein, the conference was attended by too many representatives of countries, particularly from Africa, regarded as minor players in the international political system. In addition, the Yugoslav authorities were ready to pretend that politicians who attended the conference remained neutral regarding the superpowers. According to him, Belgrade expected that some formally nonaligned countries would follow the path of their own independence and sovereignty in the future. J. B. Tito’s predictions proved correct in a long-term perspective, but insufficient in order to ensure the success of the Cairo conference. According to the interlocutor, the authorities in Cairo agreed to the summit only because of the good relations between Yugoslavia and Egypt.<sup>35</sup> In addition, it was apparent that the members of the Movement were more preoccupied with their own internal problems, which over time led to a progressing institutional crisis in the organization. Finally, the last contentious issue was the wars between the Movement countries, for instance, India and Pakistan, Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Arab countries.<sup>36</sup>

### **Tito’s Stance on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict The Six-Day War and its Consequences for Yugoslav Foreign Policy**

In the context of the described topic, we should also focus our attention on the Yugoslavia’s position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. J. B. Tito, who maintained close ties with G. A. Nasser, did not formally oppose his participation in mediations between the parties in the conflict. In a letter to Dwight Eisenhower dated November 30, 1955, he expressed his opinion in the following way: “I have no aspiration whatsoever to mediate in the conflict between Israel and Egypt. As I have already told Mr. A. Dulles, I will try in my talks with the Egyptian leaders and President G. A. Nasser to act in the direction of easing the tension, in accordance with the principles of our foreign policy.”<sup>37</sup> J. B. Tito’s position remained unchanged in the years that followed. In 1958, Goldman, who served as president of the World Jewish Congress, in his private conversation with Tito, suggested the readiness of the Jews to talks with Egypt, but this proposal was rejected by G. A. Nasser, despite the efforts of J. B. Tito and J. Nehru to persuade him and Goldman’s proposal to hold talks with the Egyptians without the auspices of the Israeli government.<sup>38</sup> Another sign of the diplomatic activity of

<sup>35</sup> A. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, 247–248.

<sup>36</sup> Dragan Bogetić, „Doprinos Konferencije u Lusaki 1970. institucionalizaciji saradnje nesvrstanih zemalja i njihovom reaktiviranju u međunarodnim odnosima“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 1, (2018), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Belgrade, November 30, 1955, *Letter from President Tito to President Eisenhower*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v26/d269>, (accessed January 13, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Ido Yahel, *Covert Diplomacy Between Israel and Egypt During Nasser Rule: 1952-1970*, Sage Open, October 2016, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244016667449>, s. 6, (accessed January 11, 2019).

J. B. Tito in the matter in question is his conversation with the ambassador of Egypt on May 30, 1967, attended by the already mentioned Popović. Driving attention to the deteriorating international situation in the region, Tito pointed out the great success of President Nasser when he managed to successfully mobilize all the Arab states, except Libya, in the fight against Israel. The LCY leader said that the “imperialists would like to force Egypt to capitulate and we cannot afford to let this happen.” He also said that Yugoslavia’s main mission was “to fight for peace,” for Egypt and other non-aligned countries. Tito believed that it was necessary to draw the line for Israel and its allies. Highlighting the defensive approach of Nasser to Israel, he mentioned the failed attempt to convince the Egyptian leader to approve the contingent of the UNEF in the border area, since he believed such activity to be harmful and pro-Israeli.<sup>39</sup>

The situation in the Near East had escalated by the Six-Day War and the victory of the Israeli army. Warfare became another opportunity to preserve the image of J. B. Tito as a person interested in peace in the region. It can be confirmed by numerous contacts between the authorities in Belgrade and the Washington Administration. One of them was the conversation between President Johnson and Yugoslav Foreign Minister Marko Nikezić on August 30, 1967, during which the diplomat presented to the US President a message from J. B. Tito. In it, he proposed the withdrawal of all troops from the territories occupied by the Israeli forces as of June 4, under the control of UN observers; the guarantee of the security and borders of all states in the region by the UN Security Council or the four great powers, pending the definitive solution of the issues under dispute; free passage for all ships through the Straits of Tiran pending a decision by the International Court of Justice regarding its status; the restoration of navigation in the Suez Canal as before the war, and steps by the Security Council for resolving all the other questions under dispute, including the problem of the Palestinian refugees, with the direct participation of the parties concerned.<sup>40</sup> George Christian, White House press secretary, declined to disclose the contents of J. B. Tito’s proposal, but said “We are interested in any effort to arrange a durable peace in the Middle East.” The diplomat added that the conversation with Nikezić was described as “part of a continuing exchange with a number of interested governments on the current situation in the Middle East, in an effort to bring about a just and peaceful solution.”<sup>41</sup> In a later period, Yugoslav diplomacy embarked upon finding a *modus vivendi* in the region. In October of 1967, at the UN General Assembly, Nikezić said that the right of all countries to existence is beyond dispute for Yugoslavia. It also applies in full to

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<sup>39</sup> May 30, 1967, *Report on the talks of Josif Tito with UAR Ambassador Abuzeid in Vanga*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113626.pdf?v=9735fc75739def3972d519ae24669cd3>, (accessed November 20, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Washington, August 30, 1967, 7:15 p.m., *Memorandum of Conversation*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v19/d432>, (accessed January 11, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> September 1 1967, *Tito’s Plan for Settlement of Arab-Israeli Conflict Presented to Johnson and Rusk*, <https://www.jta.org/1967/09/01/archive/titos-plan-for-settlement-of-arab-israeli-conflict-presented-to-johnson-and-rusk>, (accessed November 22, 2018).

the State of Israel, whose existence and equality of rights with other countries is unquestionable.<sup>42</sup> The authorities in Belgrade also continued support for Egypt, leading to a reduction of contacts with Israel, reflected by the suspension of the signing of scientific and cultural contacts, lack of possibilities of involvement in various international campaigns in the Jewish State, and the limitation of mutual relations exclusively to trade. Interestingly, despite the declared friendship with Egypt, not all Yugoslav officials supported unconditionally the Arab policy.<sup>43</sup>

The actual stand of Yugoslavia on the Near East question was outlined during the talks between J. B. Tito and G. A. Nasser held on August 11, 1967. At that time, the Yugoslav leader reported to his counterpart the discussion he had with Elbrick, the US ambassador in Belgrade, who – considering the good relations between both leaders – brought a message from L. Johnson regarding mediation. J. B. Tito told the ambassador that he had no intention of being a mediator, but because he was traveling to Cairo, he was interested in knowing the situation in that country and in the Middle East. During this conversation, the LCY leader expressed his opinion; he explained the whole history of events in the region, since 1948 on, and pointed out that Israel had been the aggressor three times, and that during its latest aggression, it had been supported by the United States. He also highlighted that Israel had gone unpunished even though it had not respected a single UN decision. Therefore, it is absurd to demand capitulation from a 100 million Arabs, since they will never give up their independence. According to the Yugoslav leader, one day they will be forced to right the injustices carried out against them and they will be completely justified to fight in whatever way they want.<sup>44</sup> Tito also added that further economic and military development of the Arab states was in the international community's best interests, since their strong position would enable negotiations with Israel, satisfying also the Arabs. The Yugoslav leader also believed that Belgrade's "realistic" view would be rejected by the United States; on the other hand, the solutions accepted by Washington could not be accepted by the Arab community. Thanking Tito for supporting his dispute with the Jewish State, Nasser said that the United States was promoting an "unfriendly" policy toward Egypt and their main goal was the liquidation of his regime. The Arab leader added that in its politics, Washington resorted to various political instruments: to have inspection rights of the atomic research centers in Egypt; to prevent the development of Egypt's missile-building capabilities; to stop obtaining arms and agree on an arms balance with Israel; and to use economic blackmail in such issues as stopping wheat supplies.<sup>45</sup> During another talk with J. B. Tito, held on July 11, 1968, the Egyptian said with resentment that the United States had been helping

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<sup>42</sup> A. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, 249.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 249–250.

<sup>44</sup> August 11, 1967, *Notes on Yugoslav-Egyptian Talks*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113628.pdf?v=c25fd354309ce3b24ffb5d97f726f648>, 4, (accessed December 21, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 6–7.

Israel from the very beginning in military, financial, and economic aspects, while Great Britain, despite its limited role in the region, had a pro-American attitude. According to Nasser, France had taken a “fair” stand; they would like to see a meeting with the representatives of the four great powers where the situation would be discussed and a solution would be found. According to him, the Soviet Union provided genuine support to Egypt and helped find a peaceful solution. The President also believed that a year after the defeat, thanks to Soviet support and the arrogance of the Israelis, criticized on the international stage, the Egyptian side was in a better position. Tito, who shared this opinion, added that if the problem could not be solved by political means, then one day it would have to be solved by force. Otherwise, Israel will never abandon the territories occupied during the Six-Day War. In his opinion, a year after the Israeli aggression, public opinion had changed a great deal in favor of the Arab states due to Israel’s refusal to implement the Security Council Resolution.<sup>46</sup> The above views confirm that J. B. Tito and G. A. Nasser strived to settle the dispute with Israel amicably. On the other hand, Michael Sharnoff, an author of one of the monographs dedicated to the Six-Day War, admits with justification that the Egyptian leader, expressing his will to enter into talks with Israel and restore diplomatic relations with the United States, laid down conditions that the Jews found impossible to meet, maintaining in this way his image as a hero of the Arab world. Otherwise, his prestige in the Near East would be destroyed.<sup>47</sup>

The death of G. A. Nasser in August of 1970, led to a recapitulation of relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East. At that time, Tito said that his death was a great blow and obstacle to prospects for a peaceful settlement of the situation in the region. Praising the deceased leader, his charisma and flexibility in solving political affairs, he highlighted that no one could fully replace him. He also hoped that G. A. Nasser’s successors were likely to continue his policy of seeking a peaceful solution to Arab problems with Israel. The Yugoslav president also stated that the further development of the situation in the region depended on the attitudes of the Egyptian leadership, Soviet policy, and reactions of other leaders of the Arab world. The LCY leader added that the main problem of the Near East was Israel’s insistence on retaining the occupied territories and in order to ease the tensions, Tel-Aviv had to demonstrate a more flexible attitude in its future steps; for example, it should refrain from its planned use of napalm against a factory near Cairo. According to J. B. Tito, such situations feed radicalization among Arabs in Syria, Iraq and Algeria, and leaders of these countries along with the new authorities in Egypt may try to settle the issue with Israel by war with it, since no one wanted to concede any captured territory to the Jewish State, because undoubtedly it would lead to a total lack of their pres-

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<sup>46</sup> July 11, 1968, *Minutes of Talks between Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and UAR President Gamal Abdel Nasser in Brijuni, Croatia*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111167.pdf?v=f6942b00c3902789a1a733be81d571da,3-8>, (accessed December 13, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Michael Sharnoff, *Nasser’s Peace: Egypt’s Response to the 1967 War with Israel* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 127.

tige among their own societies and to a highly probable loss of power and replacement by younger co-workers. The Yugoslav leader also specified that both the Americans and Soviets should get involved in solving the problems of the region and create a plan for solving all main problems in the region and focus their efforts on peace between the parties in dispute. He also believed that it had been a mistake not to include an independent Palestinian state in the Rogers Plan, regarding the explosive region of the Near East.<sup>48</sup> He also focused his attention on the changes that had taken place in the Palestinian movement, emphasizing in it generational changes and a different character of action, based on its own military and logistics resources, very determined in its fight to achieve goals, despite insufficient forces and means. Clearly defending the attitudes of the Arab states, J. B. Tito said that existence of Israel as a state was not an issue among the Middle Eastern societies, and G. A. Nasser himself considered it a political reality. Not without some bitterness, the Yugoslav leader stated that by the judicious use of moderate politics Israel had a better opportunity than ever to achieve its goal of Arab recognition of its existence and a restoration of diplomatic relations. The only solution for the region, according to the LCY leader was for Israel to renounce its territorial claims in the Arab world and return to its pre-1967 boundaries.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

Summarizing the events taking place in 1955–1970 in regard to the bilateral relations between Yugoslavia and the Middle Eastern countries, it should be stated that during this time period they reached their peak. For Yugoslavia, such close relations, particularly with Egypt, provided an opportunity for an actual increased significance on the international stage, including J. B. Tito himself, recognizing his country as a link between the two political blocs, in which the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was predestined to play a special role. Considering his friendship with President G. A. Nasser, an opinion of the authorities in Belgrade was for a long time an important factor taken into account by the superpowers participating in solving the most important problems of the Arab world. After the death of the Egyptian leader, Yugoslavia's role in Middle Eastern processes, which had additionally experienced its own economic and ethnic problems, had significantly weakened. The next Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, realized that only direct

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<sup>48</sup> The Rogers Plan of December 9, 1969, proposed by William Rogers, United States Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon, assumed an end to hostilities in the Suez Canal region. The document was not implemented since Israel accused Egypt of breaching the ban on stationing Egyptian missiles closer than within 30 miles from the Suez Canal. In addition, another factor that stopped the implementation of the plan was the death of Nasser on September 28, 1970, see Jerzy Zdanowski, *International Relations in the Middle East in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cracow: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM Publishing House, 2012), 309.

<sup>49</sup> Belgrade, October 1, 1970, 9:45–11:30 a.m., *Memorandum of Conversation*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v29/d221>, (accessed December 11, 2018).



negotiations with the Americans and Israelis could help him resolve the regional conflicts. A similar conclusion was reached by other Middle Eastern leaders, noticing that Belgrade was no longer a link between Moscow and Washington. Without the support of Egypt, the role of the Non-Aligned Movement, held together by the authority of J. B. Tito, had declined. It turned out that some members of this organization had more often pursued their individual interests, becoming dependent on the superpowers, which was confirmed by the conference of this Movement in 1979 being organized in Havana, which was economically and politically dependent on the USSR.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, starting from the early 1970s, Yugoslavia's role on the Middle East stage had started to become more insignificant and was never fully restored because of the economic crisis and the Yugoslavia's breakup that took place in the 1990s.

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<sup>50</sup> Wojciech Roszkowski, *Half a Century. Political History of the World after 1945* (Warsaw: PWN Scientific Publishers, 2005), 350.

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ANDRZEJ PURAT, PhD, adjunct  
Kazimierz Wielki University  
Bydgoszcz, Republic of Poland  
andrzej.purat@o2.pl

PAWEŁ BIELICKI, PhD, scholar  
Pilecki Institute  
Warsaw, Republic of Poland  
bielicki11@gmail.com

## AN ANALYSIS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND THE NEAR EAST COUNTRIES IN 1955–1970

### *Summary*

The main purpose of our discussion is a presentation of the most important conditions and correlations describing the relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East in 1955–1970, based on available documentation on this subject matter. We also intend to analyze the important conditions that contributed to establishing diplomatic and economic relations between Yugoslavia and the individual Arab states, particularly Egypt in 1955. In the beginning, we describe the situation in Yugoslavia immediately after World War II and changes in its foreign policy, forced by the conflict between this country's leader Josip Broz Tito and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Implications resulting from it enabled J. B. Tito to achieve a rapprochement with the Western countries, which led to Yugoslavia joining the Balkan Pact and getting active support by the West for the communist authorities in Belgrade. Then we will present the reasons for the foundation of the Non- Aligned Movement and follow the development of this organization, without which the close cooperation between Yugoslavia and the authorities in Cairo would not be possible. In addition, an important matter that requires a more comprehensive approach is Yugoslavia's position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Belgrade's role in the conciliation process between the warring sides. In summary, we emphasize the fact that the analyzed period was of key importance in the relations between Yugoslavia and the Near East. These relations were never so strong again.

**KEYWORDS:** Near East, Egypt, Israel, Yugoslavia, USSR, United States