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***FALSE DAWN: THE FAILED REFORM OF THE YUGOSLAV
SECRET POLITICAL POLICE 1966–1980*****

The paper examines the 1966 reform of the Yugoslav secret political police from the legal and operational perspectives, and assesses its outcome. The analysis spans from 1966 to 1980, concluding with the death of Josip Broz, as the country's political landscape underwent substantial changes following his passing. The research hypothesis is that the reform of the Yugoslav secret political police was a failure. The examination includes political incentives for reform, the 1966 legislative reform and its legacy, the beginning of the reversal of the reform in 1971, and the full reversal starting in 1973. The hypothesis is confirmed. The crucial reason for the failure was the disappointment of the political elite with the reform results and their concerns, amid the political and economic liberalisation of the country, about preserving their monopoly on power. These concerns led to the re-bolshevisation of the country, killing the reform of the secret political police.

Key words: *Yugoslavia. – Secret political police. – Legislative reform. – Reform reversal. – Political and economic liberalisation.*

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** I am grateful to Boris Begović, Dejan Popović and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on the previous version of the paper and suggestions for its improvement. Naturally, none of them is to be held accountable for any possible remaining errors and value judgments in this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*IV Plenum Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*, the Brioni Plenum), held on the Brioni islands on 1 July 1966, was one of the momentous events in the history of socialist Yugoslavia. For the Yugoslav secret political police,¹ i.e. the state security apparatus, this marked a pivotal moment. After more than 20 years (as the secret political police was established on 13 May 1944, during the Second World War) of stability, a tectonic change emerged regarding the organisation's legal framework, operational pattern and social status.² The Brioni Plenum provided the political grounds and strong incentives for the Yugoslav political elite to reform the secret political police – a crucial pillar of the communist regime in Yugoslavia. As in every authoritarian regime, the secret political police have been an inevitable ingredient of its existence and survival (Tanneberg 2020). As empirically demonstrated, especially in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, such an establishment has been a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition for the survival of authoritarian regimes.

This paper aims to explore the 1966 reform of the Yugoslav secret political police from both the legal and operational perspectives, and to evaluate its outcome. The analysis spans from 1966 to 1980, concluding with the death of Josip Broz, the undisputed patriarch of socialist Yugoslavia, as the country's political landscape underwent substantial changes following his passing. The research hypothesis of this paper is that the 1966 reform of

¹ The secret political police was not the official name of the organisation(s), but it is the most precise description of its character and spirit. It is used following the title of the contribution by Leggett (1981) – *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police*. Nonetheless, the adjective 'secret' has also been included to emphasise the clandestine operations of the Yugoslav political police, following the doctrine and practice of the Cheka, based on the network of informers whose task was not known to the public. A more technical term – state security service – is used in this paper as a synonym for the secret political police.

² The Yugoslav secret political police was established as a section of the OZN (*Odeljene zaštite naroda* – Department for the Protection of the People, usually referred to as *Ozna* in Yugoslav languages) during the war, and following the fragmentation of the OZN in March 1946, it was organised as the UDB (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*, Department for State Security), a department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, both on the federal level and the levels of federal units, usually referred to as *Udba* in Yugoslav languages. *Udba* became and still is a colloquial name, a moniker for any secret political police in socialist Yugoslavia, although it was renamed the SDB (*Služba državne bezbednosti*, State Security Service) in 1966. Renaming the secret political police was the first, swift, although only symbolic step of the 1966 reform. In the paper, this moniker is thoroughly accepted.

the Yugoslav secret political police was a failure. To examine this hypothesis, the following is an exploration of both the historical and political context of the reform, its aftermath, legislative changes, and, finally, changes in the operation's pattern of the secret political police.

As to the methodology, the exploration is based primarily on the analysis of legislative documents, both statutory and sub-statutory texts, the review of selected primary historical sources (mainly documents deposited in the Archives of Yugoslavia), and considerations and critical examination of the insight about the topic in the literature, i.e. secondary historical sources.

The structure of the paper is organised according to its aim, with sections arranged in chronological order. The paper's first section focuses on the 1966 political decision to reform the secret political police, its motives, and its details. What follows in the second section is the analysis of the substantial legislative changes that stemmed from the 1966 political decision and its legacy. The third section examines the onset of the reform reversal, beginning in the early 1970s, its underlying political motives, and its subsequent outcome. The complete reversal of the reform of the secret political police, which started in late 1973, is analysed in the fourth section of the paper. The fifth section of the paper deals with the state of affairs regarding the Yugoslav secret political police at the end of the era marked by the death of Josip Broz. The conclusion follows.

2. THE BRIONI PLENUM AND ITS OUTCOME

As for the historical context, the road to the Brioni Plenum effectively started with the 1953 death of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin and the steadfast consolidation of Josip Broz's power as the undisputed communist leader of Yugoslavia. With all other political options in Yugoslavia being defeated and effectively eliminated, the Yugoslav political elite and its leader felt secure and confident, as their monopoly on power was protected and strengthened. The secret political police's operations were unconstrained by any legislation. They were very effective in crushing any political opposition and establishing the groundwork for a 'fear' dictatorship, so the *Udba* earned a considerable reputation within the political elite.³

³ The notion of 'fear' dictatorship, as opposed to 'spin' dictatorship, was introduced recently (Guriev, Treisman 2022). During the period prior to the Brioni Plenum, Yugoslavia was indisputably a 'fear' dictatorship.

The political context and background of the Brioni Plenum were rather complicated, as the leading political player, Josip Broz, clearly sought to accomplish several political aims with this well-prepared session. The other political aims were not directly related to the secret political police. Accordingly, the paper focuses solely on the political background regarding the secret political police.⁴

It is very likely that Josip Broz's confidence in the Yugoslav secret political police significantly declined during the 1960s, when he realised that he was no longer in full control of the organisation (Kovač, Dimitrijević, Popović-Grigorov 2020). Perhaps he became anxious about the possible political challenges from the key people in the service (predominantly Aleksandar Ranković) to whom the incumbent officials and secret political police operatives expressed unconditional loyalty.⁵ Josip Broz's introductory remarks at the Brioni Plenum provide some evidence that supports this concern, which was shared by a significant portion of the top echelon of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), i.e. the incumbent political elite of the country. Josip Broz's main remark was that it was a mistake that the secret political police had been autonomous from its inception, more than 20 years ago. Nonetheless, it is hardly convincing that the secret political police was autonomous in the 1940s and 1950s, because it was in Josip Broz's iron grip. It seems that his concern was the advent of autonomy of the secret political police (from him) in the early 1960s, setting the stage for a possible challenge to his political primacy in the country.

Another important insight from Josip Broz's introductory remarks relates to the aim of the secret political police: according to him, it was an instrument of class struggle, organised based on revolutionary demand for combating 'the activities of the class enemy'. As pointed out (Begović 2024, 817), it is striking, even puzzling, that the head of the state and the leader of the political party, 21 years after he and his comrades accomplished a

⁴ The other political aims have been considered in modern Serbian historiography (Piljak 2010; Kovač, Dimitrijević, Popović-Grigorov 2020) and a section of the general contributions to the history of Yugoslavia (Petranović 1988; Bilandžić 1999; Radelić 2006). There is no historiographical consensus regarding the political aims of the Brioni Plenum, with the exception of the one related to the secret political police. This lack of consensus is of no concern for this paper.

⁵ When exactly the confidence of Josip Broz in the secret political police started to decline and when it dropped below the critical point is subject to speculation. One way or the other, his action against the *Udba* came as a surprise to many senior officials of the secret political police. As pointed out by Vojin Lukić, one of these officials, Josip Broz offered warm congratulations on *Udba's* 20th anniversary in 1964 and gave its contribution to the country the highest marks (Lukić 1989, 56). The tables turned just two years later.

revolution that wiped out all class enemies and established a political monopoly, pleaded for a struggle against the class enemy. This vividly demonstrates how anxious Josip Broz was about his unchallenged supreme political position at the time.⁶

The crucial document of the Brioni Plenum was the Conclusion (*Zaključak*), which provided the political groundwork for reforming the secret political police. It was ‘recommended’ by the Plenum that the Federal Government should ‘immediately and without delay’ start reorganising the ‘organs of state security’, i.e. the secret political police. Regarding the reform guidelines, the Plenum specified that external control of the secret political police should be established by the legislative and executive branches of power, and that such control should be based on constitutional provisions and law.⁷

The problem with this guideline was that state security issues were completely neglected in the Constitution.⁸ Furthermore, no legislative legal basis existed for the operation of the state security apparatus at the time. In short, there was no law, so the secret political police was effectively above the law.⁹ Perhaps the idea of the author(s) of the Conclusion and these guidelines was to signal that appropriate legislation should be adopted, as the legal grounds for the operations of the secret political police. Furthermore, the statement emphasised that state security should be based predominantly ‘on public institutions’, relegating secret political police to a secondary role and signalling the turning of the tables. Nonetheless, the statement also includes the notion that state security apparatus should be

⁶ Alternatively, this puzzling wording can be explained as a product of the casual selection of the standard Bolshevik rhetoric about the war against the ‘class enemy’, as an indispensable ingredient of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Considering the seriousness of the Brioni Plenum preparations, such sloppiness of Josip Broz’s wording is unlikely.

⁷ There was no formal separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches in socialist Yugoslavia. Instead, there was a constitutional concept of ‘unity of power’ (Marković 2022, 134–144). Accordingly, notions of ‘legislative power’ and ‘executive power’ in this paper are both used as *terminus technicus*, according to their contemporary meaning.

⁸ Article 115 of the 1963 Constitution only stipulated that the ‘Federation shall be directly responsible for the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, security and defence of Yugoslavia and its international relations’. The term ‘security’ remained vague – whether it means national security, state security, public security or any other form of security is dubious.

⁹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs adopted some sub-statutory legal acts (instructions, guidelines, etc.), and all those texts were classified, i.e., known only to selected officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs officials. Begović (2024) provides a review of the available sub-statutory legal acts of the time.

authorised to act against ‘the activity of the class enemy’. Accordingly, the Central Committee of the LCY, following the political willpower of its leader, Josip Broz, provided a political platform for transforming the secret political police precisely into a secret political police (Begović 2024, 819).

The first step in the reform of the secret political police was the establishment of the Commission of the Federal Government for the Reform of the State Security Service (*Komisija Saveznog izvršnog veća za reformu službe državne bezbednosti*). The Commission’s first session was held only ten days after the Brioni Plenum.¹⁰ The Commission reviewed the draft theses for reorganising the state security service, prepared by the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹¹ The final version of the document was adopted by the Commission on 20 September 1966 (Leljak 2016, 61–70) and endorsed at the session of the Federal Government on 28 September 1966.¹²

There are three main sections of the theses: (1) scope of operations and authorities vested in the service, specifying that the authorities must be vested only by a statute, i.e. by legislation; (2) methods of operation of the service, prohibiting ‘indiscriminate’ monitoring of the citizens; (3) desirable ‘decentralisation’ of the service, i.e. strengthening state security services (the secret political police) of the Yugoslav federal units, and assigning them substantial authority and workload. These three main points were the basis for the legislative reform introduced in late 1966.

3. THE 1966 LEGISLATIVE REFORM AND ITS LEGACY

The main breakthrough in the 1966 legislative reform came at the end of the year when the Federal Parliament adopted a crucial piece of legislation: the Basic Law on Internal Affairs.¹³ A substantial part of this legislation (20 out of 62 sections) was dedicated to state security issues. This was the

¹⁰ The Commission’s inaugural and other meeting minutes are publicly available at the Yugoslav Archives (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*): AJ-837, KPR, II-5-d/45.

¹¹ Since the document is rather voluminous (15 pages, single-spaced) and well-developed, it is reasonable to assume that work on the document started well ahead of the Brioni Plenum. In short, the outcome of the Brioni Plenum was known well before it took place. The document is publicly available: AJ-837, KPR, II-5-d/45.

¹² Minutes from the session of the Federal Government (*Savezno izvršno veće*), including the full text of the final version of the Theses for the Reform of the State Security Service, are publicly available: AJ-130, SIV, folder 388, unit 591.

¹³ *Osnovni zakon o unutrašnjim poslovima*, *Official Gazette of the SFRY*, 49/66. The legislation was adopted on 9 December 1966.

first time that a statute in socialist Yugoslavia provided legislative grounds for the operations of the secret political police, now labelled as the state security service. The piece of legislation was rather well-written, compact, and coherent.¹⁴

According to the Basic Law, the secret political police, i.e. the state security service, was specified as ‘an autonomous technical service’ within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The service was authorised only to ‘collect intelligence’ to detect ‘organised and secret activities focused on undermining and overthrowing the constitutionally specified order’.¹⁵ Accordingly, the authority of the secret political police was limited only to gathering intelligence and discovering (no other action whatsoever) activities that were both organised and clandestine, and related to compromising the constitutional order. Although the authority of the secret political police was strictly limited to gathering intelligence, the scope of its work was not unambiguously specified, since ‘undermining and overthrowing the constitutional order’ is rather a vague notion, especially considering that the constitutional order was nothing but a LCY monopoly on power.¹⁶

¹⁴ The evaluation of the 1966 Basic Law that follows is based on the analysis of Begović (2024, 824–828). This was a basic law enacted at the level of the Federation, enabling the federal units to adopt their legislation on internal affairs, including provisions on state security, provided that they were in compliance with the provisions of the federal basic law.

¹⁵ It is rather intriguing that the action of the secret political police ‘against the class enemy’ was specified in the official document of the Central Committee of the LCY but not used in the legislative vocabulary of the statute’s text, instead using the notion of the ‘constitutional order’. Nonetheless, the crucial substance of the constitutional order in Yugoslavia at the time was a communist monopoly on power, which could have been challenged by the ‘class enemy’. Thus, these two notions ultimately do not contradict each other.

¹⁶ The scope of work of the secret political police was specified in the sub-statutory text of the Rules of Engagement of the State Security Service (*Pravila službe državne bezbednosti*), a classified document adopted by the Minister of Internal Affairs in January 1967 (Leljak 2016, 371–415). Although some of the ‘organised and secret activities focused on undermining and overthrowing the constitutionally specified order’ that was under the scope of work of the state security service were precisely defined and linked to specific sections of the incumbent Penal Code of Yugoslavia, other activities were not criminal acts at all, even with the very loose specification at the end of the paragraph as ‘miscellaneous organised and secret actions focused to undermining and overthrowing the constitutionally specified order’, effectively meaning that secret political police could be engaged in the case of any activity that presumably could have been associated with the constitutional order. Since the constitutional order was a communist political monopoly, the character of the state security service as a political police was even reinforced by this sub-statutory text, a product of the 1966 legislative reform.

The Basic Law rather clearly delimited the turf, i.e. the terrain of activities, between the federal secret political police and those of the Yugoslav federal units, with substantial turf allocated to the federal unit's police. Notwithstanding the rather clear legal demarcation between the activities of the secret political police operations at two levels – the federal and those of the federal units – it was rather painstaking and cumbersome to follow it in day-to-day operations.

Finally, the Basic Law stipulated that the secret political police was accountable to both the executive and legislative branches of government and that it was required to provide on-demand reports on the service's operations and capacity. Although there were no provisions regarding the content of the reports and the procedures for their endorsement, the Law on the Commission for Control of State Security Services, adopted in October 1968, closed this legal gap.¹⁷

The main accomplishment of the 1966 legal reform was that the secret political police became 'civilised'. Its operations were based on a piece of legislation, and the legal obligation for external control (by the legislative and executive branches of the government) of the secret political police was introduced. The 1966 legal reform undoubtedly further decentralised the secret political police. Nonetheless, that was hardly its main accomplishment, especially considering that the service was not thoroughly centralised prior to 1966.

Apart from the legislative changes, the Commission's work resulted in two significant developments. The first was the 'revision of the documentation', an official euphemism for the destruction (by incineration) of selected secret police documentation – archived files on individuals. The revision was ordered by the Commission for Control of State Security Services, which provided a simple benchmark: all personal files not documenting that an individual was involved in 'enemy activity' were to be destroyed. The benchmark was straightforward, but the problem was that the rather vague notion of 'enemy activity' was not precisely specified, giving substantial latitude for deciding which personal files should be destroyed. The task of selecting personal files was assigned to technical commissions appointed by the heads of the secret political police departments (at the federal level, federal units level, etc.). These commissions both made decisions and implemented them.

¹⁷ Zakon o osnivanju Komisije za kontrolu službi državne bezbednosti, *Official Gazette of the SFRY*, 40/68. The legislation was adopted on 25 September 1968.

As this was the very first ‘revision of the documentation’ in the history of the Yugoslav secret political police – save some revisions in the Socialist Republic of Croatia (Dimitrijević 2001) – the starting point for revision was quite high: the number of personal files was staggering. According to the report by the Control Commission, as of 1 July 1966, there were 2,754,923 personal files in the secret political police archives, equating to 14 per cent of the country’s total population at the time. It is estimated (data for Croatia is missing) that these files took up around 12,000 liner meters of documents. The process took three years to complete. The result was that 2,141,155 files (around 78%) were destroyed (incinerated), 153,598 files (around 5%) were transferred to the military security service and academic institutions, and the remaining 460,170 files (around 17%) were retained in the archives of the secret political police.¹⁸

Although the technical commissions, appointed by the heads of the secret political police sections, were sovereign in selecting which files to destroy or retain, the Control Commission oversaw the process. The monitoring was somewhat inadequate, only relying on random checks of the retained personal files. Hence, the secret police staff was effectively free to destroy all the files they considered could compromise the image of their establishment’s track record.

The other significant development was a substantial decrease in the size of secret political police personnel, accompanied by employee reshuffling, with major shedding of the staff in the top echelons of the service. This development should be considered in light of some background information. At the inception of the secret political police, during the war or immediately after it, the recruitment criteria were stringent in terms of ability for the service and loyalty to the communist idea, manifestly demonstrated during the war. The recruitment policy was not as strict in the two decades that followed the Second World War, up to 1966. Even patronage surfaced, with excessive recruitment of loyal individuals – those who were ‘one of us’, irrespective of their abilities. New jobs and organisational units were not created in line with the operational needs of the secret political police, but with the idea of a dwelling for loyal individuals.¹⁹ That was one source of the gross overemployment in the secret political police; the other was the character of the service, based on the concept of ‘total coverage’, i.e.

¹⁸ All the data according to the report publicly available: AJ-130, SIV, folder 558, 1969. SSUP SDB, str. Pov. 01 br. 42, 5 February 1969, *Revizija dokumentacije Službe državne bezbednosti*.

¹⁹ According to the report publicly available: AJ-212, Savezni sud, folder 18, 1966, *Izveštaj o deformacijama u radu Službe državne bezbednosti*.

monitoring all citizens of the country, as anyone could be involved in 'enemy activity'. Implementing this concept was low-tech and labour-intensive, requiring substantial operational networks of those who run the informers. Hence, for targeted monitoring, which was needed at least as lip service according to the new guidelines, the secret political police staff was too big.

Precise data on the dynamics of staffing the secret political police and the number of personnel employed is not available. The total number of employees of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1961 was 3,864, and it is estimated that roughly half of them were allocated to the (federal) secret political police. In 1966, after the reorganisation of the secret political police, the number was somewhat lower, at 2,809; in April 1967, it was 1,160, and at the end of 1967, the total number of employees was 934 (342 in the secret political police). Accordingly, the decrease in the federal secret police staff over six years was approximately 83 per cent. It is reasonable to assume that some employees of the federal secret political police were transferred to the secret political police of the federal units. Since there is no data on that number, this hypothesis cannot be tested. Nonetheless, when the process of decentralisation of the secret political police was completed at the end of September 1967, the total number of staff of both the federal service and the services of the federal units was 2,245. The cumulative number of staff in the services of all federal units was 1,954 (87% of total employees).²⁰

The reshuffling and labour shedding in the top echelons of the secret political police was considered a hallmark of the reform. Two prominent heads of the service, both with impeccable wartime credentials and political heavyweights, Aleksandar Ranković²¹ and Svetislav Stefanović,²² were sacked. Borče Samonikov, the mayor of the remote Municipality of Štip in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, was appointed the new head of the federal secret political police. This was the Yugoslav political elite's choice: a person who commands no authority on their own and must occasionally but

²⁰ Data on the number of employees are provided according to Dimitrijević (2001, 80) and the publicly available document: AJ-130, SIV, folder 558, 5/68. The number does not include informants, military security service staff, or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs security service.

²¹ Aleksandar Ranković was the only head of *Ozna*, predecessor of *Udba*, from 1941 to 1946, then a Federal Minister of Internal Affairs, Deputy Prime Minister, and ultimately the Vice-President of Yugoslavia.

²² Svetislav Stevanović was the head of the *Udba*, then a Federal Minister of Internal Affairs, and ultimately a Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Government.

repeatedly ask for assistance.²³ Furthermore, 16 persons, all senior officials of the secret political police (incumbent or retired), were placed under criminal investigation, a clear signal that they could be indicted.

Two of the most senior former officials of the secret political police, Aleksandar Ranković and Svetislav Stefanović, who held immunity as Members of Parliament, were not placed under criminal investigation. The Federal Attorney General informed the Federal Government (*Savezno izvršno veće*) about the investigation, implicitly requesting the lifting of the MPs' immunity.²⁴ It was decided at the top level of the political elite, i.e. by Josip Broz, that the two would not be criminally investigated or indicted. Some of the senior secret political police officials were later indicted, and some of the indicted were found guilty and sentenced.

All these developments changed the general perception of the secret political police. It was no longer ubiquitous, relentless, and unconstrained by law. Although it still commanded substantial respect, the omnipresent fear of *Udba* slowly began to subside. The notable failures of the secret political police in the late 1960s and the early 1970s further undermined its reputation, both in the eyes of the incumbent political elite and the general population, although perhaps with different sentiments.

For the political elite, the most critical failure of the secret political police at the time was the failure to anticipate and the inability to contain the 1968 student protests, which centred around the University of Belgrade. The rebellion was quite ideological – it was leftist and more to the left than the current LCY ideology, and the demands were entirely political. The rebellion was not directed against the incumbent LCY government but rather against some of its policies, with the fervent demand for an ideological shift to the left. The students were supported to a great extent by professors and other academic staff, which gave them credibility in the eyes of the general public. Considering all that, it was a significant blow to the political elite, especially since the rebellion came out of the blue, as the secret political police had not given any warning whatsoever about what was about to arise and could not contain or stop it. It was Josip Broz himself who ultimately had to deal with the student revolt. For the political elite, all that was a grave security failure.

²³ The reason for choosing a person from the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was not to disrupt the fragile Serbian–Croatian political balance in communist Yugoslavia. In that context, Macedonia was a 'neutral' party that neither the Serbian nor Croatian political elite would question.

²⁴ The document is publicly available: AJ-212, *Savezni sud*, folder 18, 1966, *Savezno javno tužilaštvo, dopis Saveznom izvršnom veću*.

In hindsight, the protest by ethnical Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija proved to be far more sinister. This was a one-day event on 27 November 1968, emphasising the right of local Albanians to self-determination, with the demand that the province of Kosovo and Metohija, referred to as 'Kosovo', become a full-fledged federal unit (*republika*). Again, not only did the secret political police not anticipate the event, but it was also unable to do anything about it, as the event was extinguished the day after by the Yugoslav armed forces.

The other failures of the secret political police were not political but deadly. This time it was a classic state security concern – terrorism. The secret political police, nominally a state security service, failed to provide intelligence and prevent the bombing of a cinema in Belgrade (during the screening) in 1968 by a Croatian political emigrant terrorist organisation. It failed to thwart another bomb being planted by the same organisation at the Belgrade railway station luggage storage that same year (the bomb did not go off, not due to any countermeasures taken, but due to its malfunction). The secret political police failed to prevent the assassination of the Yugoslav ambassador to Sweden in 1971, again by the Croatian political emigrant terrorist organisation, followers of Ustaše ideology dating back to the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945). There is no doubt that all of these terrorist events were substantial failures, which undermined the reputation of the secret political police.

Hence, the relevant question is: were these failures a consequence of the reform of the secret political police? After all, there were no such failures *before* 1966. Nonetheless, the timing alone is insufficient grounds for a conclusion about causality, constituting a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy.²⁵

²⁵ Aleksandar Ranković used these developments to justify his approach to state security and his methods of running the secret political police. According to him, the 1966 reform, which began with his sacking, was a disaster and these failures were the 'smoking gun' evidence. In short, he believed such failures would not have happened on his watch (Kovač, Dimitrijević, Popović-Grigorov 2020, II-128). One of the problems with Ranković's view is that it completely disregards the 'supply side', i.e., that the new generation of Croatian political emigrant organisations stepped onto the scene and proved to be more active in terrorist acts against Yugoslavia than the previous one. Nonetheless, the considerations regarding the transformation of the Croatian political emigrant organisations in the 1960s are well beyond the scope of this paper, as is the worldwide surge of terrorism in the late 1960s and the early 1970s – nonetheless, the 'supply side' matters.

There is hardly any evidence to support the hypothesis that the 1966 reform of the secret political police caused the security failures of the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁶

One way or another, the political elite at the time was anxious about the security breaches. It blamed the reforms of the secret political police in the late 1960s for the occurrences, and decided to reverse the reforms, with a redirection of institutional development and secret police operations. Exploring the historical and political context is essential for gaining insight into the specific direction.

4. THE BEGINNING OF THE REVERSAL: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AND TURNING BACK POLITICAL CLOCKS

As for the historical context, the late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of economic and political liberalisation in Yugoslavia. The economic liberalisation introduced several market elements into the Yugoslav economy. It enabled the creation of socialist, self-managed enterprises, which undermined the power of the incumbent political elite.²⁷ Political liberalisation turned out to be an even bigger problem, as a series of developments proved very challenging for the political elite.

Apart from the already mentioned 1968 student revolt, it was the advent of the ‘Croatian Spring’, also labelled as the ‘Mass Movement’, whose substantial acceleration occurred in the spring of 1971,²⁸ even though its beginnings can be traced back to 1967.²⁹ That movement was focused on

²⁶ Perhaps the only exception to this insight could be the 1968 Kosovo and Metohija rebellion and demonstrations, as the reorganisation of the secret political police in this province was done hastily and without a clear plan, mainly to alter the ethnic composition of its staff.

²⁷ Economic liberalisation was significant but should not be confused with the country’s democratisation (Vujić 2007). It was merely the introduction of some, but not all, market elements into the economy, rather than the advent of political pluralism.

²⁸ It is the political liberalisation of the 1960s in the country that is considered to pave the way for the Croatian Spring (Mihaljević 2017).

²⁹ The inception is considered to be the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language, published on 17 March 1967 and signed by representatives of prominent Croatian institutions, and it has been considered a bellwether of the Croatian Spring. The Declaration is available at: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f2/Deklaracija.jpg>, last visited July 14, 2025.

further decentralisation and devolution of Croatia within Yugoslavia, and was led by the Croatian political elite.³⁰ Hence, it was perhaps one of the biggest challenges for Josip Broz, whose aim was the preservation of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav federation, if possible.³¹ Another challenge, somewhat less significant, came from the Serbian political elite – from the LCY officials labelled ‘liberals’. These developments, particularly the ‘Croatian Spring’, were the crucial ingredient to the mother of all questions in the Second Yugoslavia: the issue of decentralisation or the balance of power between the Federation and the federal units.

Furthermore, political liberalisation in the country has also led to cultural liberalisation, resulting in the ‘Black Wave’ in culture, particularly in film, literature, and theatre. Movies, books, and plays belonging to this movement offered an alternative view of history and everyday life, distinct from the official narrative of the political elite.³² The ‘Black Wave’ authors questioned some of the communist movement’s ‘sacred truths’, effectively undermining the LCY’s political monopoly.

One of the frequently overlooked aspects of political liberalisation was the liberalisation of passport issuance, removing administrative barriers for Yugoslav citizens to travel abroad, particularly to Western Europe. With the increased frequency of travel to countries of liberal democracy, some elements of their culture of public life, quite distinct from the grim Yugoslav

³⁰ The ‘Mass Movement’ in Croatia was rather heterogeneous. Although it was led by the Croatian (communist) political elite, there were various actors in it, some with no links to the elite, and in hindsight, some of them with an eye on independence in due course (Irvine 2011).

³¹ There is additional evidence that this crisis was perhaps the most serious for Josip Broz since his split with Stalin in 1948, mainly because it originated from his own LCY. According to the KGB files transferred to Great Britain in 1991 by former chief archivist of the Soviet secret political police Vasili Mitrokhin, operation code-named Progress was underway in various Eastern European countries, consisting of nine KGB agents (all of them illegals, i.e. without diplomatic coverage) deployed in Yugoslavia in 1971. They were given a long list of institutions, universities, institutes, academies of science, and media outlets – none of which were governmental – and were instructed to ‘strike up acquaintances’ (Andrew, Mitrokhin 1999, 304–305). The aim was to gather intelligence and perhaps identify relevant and influential persons with a pro-Soviet stance. Some reports were sent back to the KGB Moscow Centre and ‘were judged sufficiently important to be forwarded to [Leonid] Brezhnev’ (Andrew, Mitrokhin 1999, 305).

³² Perhaps the most prominent art contribution to the Black Wave, a symbol of it, was the movie *Zaseda* (The Ambush) by Živojin Pavlović (both screenwriter and director), which dealt with the historical events of 1945 and was released in July 1969.

authoritarian reality, were transferred back to the country, changing the cultural pattern of the local population – not necessarily in favour of the incumbent political elite and their desire to preserve their political monopoly.

On the international scene, the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia produced a credible threat to the national security of socialist Yugoslavia. In the 1960s, within the nominal framework of the non-alignment movement, Yugoslavia began shifting its international alignment towards the Soviet Union, and the political pendulum swung from the West to the East. Accordingly, the 1968 Soviet intervention was both a surprise and a bitter disappointment.³³ The Yugoslav political elite took this event very seriously – and for good reason.³⁴

In the political context, the incumbent political elite viewed these developments as grave challenges to their political monopoly. It is rather apparent that they felt anxious about their political monopoly being threatened, and Josip Broz was concerned for his position as the undisputed autocrat in the country. In hindsight, this concern was quite rational.

The answer to these challenges was consisted of two parts. The first one was a reversal of the liberalisation, both the political and the economic. The process of re-bolshevisation started.³⁵ The second was the devolution of the Yugoslav Federation, transforming it into an effective confederation – a loose community of (con)federal units. Both these reforms substantially impacted the constitutional and legislative grounds for the operations of the secret political police.

The adoption of the 1971 Constitutional Amendments (Amendments XX–XLII) triggered legislative and organisational changes in state security and the operation of the secret political police.

Amendment XXXVI created the country's top collective federal executive body – the Presidency (*Predsedništvo*), which was chaired and whose work was decisively directed by Josip Broz. According to Amendment XXX, the

³³ Tripković (2008) considers Yugoslavia's international relations position before and after the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in detail. Jakovina (2005) offers a perspective on Soviet–Yugoslav relations, considering the impact of the 'Mass Movement'.

³⁴ Memories of the 1956 Soviet intervention in Hungary – much more violent and with significantly heavier casualties than the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia – were at the time still very fresh in the minds of the Yugoslav political elite.

³⁵ The term 're-bolshevisation' was introduced by Mirko Čanadanović, a former high-ranking communist official dismissed in the early 1970s (Popov 1990, 226).

Federation was empowered and responsible only for providing the grounds for the operations of the state security service, not for conducting the operations themselves.

Furthermore, Amendment XXIX introduced a notion of ‘social self-protection’ (*društvena samozaštita*) – an extraordinarily vague and thoroughly incomprehensible concept. It was the pinnacle of the socialist self-management ideological narrative in creating a neologism with no clear meaning, or, in this case, no meaning at all.³⁶

A new piece of legislation was introduced in late 1971, significantly increasing the authorities of the secret political police.³⁷ According to this legislation, the service was authorised not only to ‘collect intelligence’ aimed at detecting the ‘activities of individuals, groups and organisations focused on undermining and overthrowing the constitutionally specified order’ but also to take actions for both ‘detection and prevention’ of these activities. In addition, according to the 1971 legislative change, the activities targeted by the service did not need to be ‘organised and clandestine’.

In short, the legislation provided the legal basis for targeting any activity presumed to be against the constitutional order. It even established the legal obligation for the service to address them. There is no more necessary cumulative legal condition that the activity against the constitutional order must be both clandestine and organised. The legal constraints on the secret political police imposed by the 1966 legislation were abolished. Effectively, this was the beginning of the end of the 1966 reform.

Additionally, the Presidency, as vested with the power by Amendment XXX, decided to inaugurate the Council for State Security Affairs (*Savet za poslove državne bezbednosti*), which commenced its operations in 1972. Its heavyweight political composition (the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the three ministers: for defence, foreign affairs, and internal affairs) testifies to the Josip Broz’s strong political determination to hold on to state security and to control the secret political police directly. In other

³⁶ Even a pianistically inclined reading of two apologetic papers on ‘social self-protection’, which have academic ambition, at least those published in academic journals of the time (Simović 1978; Simić 1981), did not provide any clue about the meaning of the notion or the essentials of the concept. The motivation of the political elite of socialist Yugoslavia at the time, to create such unintelligible notions, remains elusive, but this issue is definitely beyond the scope of this paper.

³⁷ It was The Law on Conducting Internal Affairs in the Competence of the Federal Authorities (*Zakon o vršenju unutrašnjih poslova iz nadležnosti saveznih organa uprave*), *Official Gazette of the SFRY* 60/71. The legislation was adopted on 28 December 1971.

words, his intention was to not repeat the mistake of losing personal control of the secret political police, which he had made before 1966, and obviously hasty, from his point of view, reform of the secret political police in 1966.

One of the most significant conclusions of the April 1972 meeting of the Council for State Security Affairs was that the new legislation on state security should be based on the vague concept of social self-protection. The other insight, effectively a guideline, referred to 'enemy theoretical constructions and platforms' that 'have appeared on our political scene recently' and that the 'LCY should address'. So, it was not about state security but politics, after all. In short, the Council became the primary mechanism for the executive branch of government to direct the secret political police in line with the political priorities of the incumbent communist elite and its leader, Josip Broz.

A national security disaster struck immediately after these institutional changes were implemented. Perhaps the most significant breach of national security in socialist Yugoslavia occurred in June and July 1972, when a group of 19 terrorists of the Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood, a Croatian political emigrant organisation, crossed into Yugoslavia from Austria and travelled unnoticed for a week to the central geographical location in the country, aiming at triggering an armed rebellion (Operation *Feniks*). Although their mission failed and only one member of the 19 of the terrorist group survived (as a minor, he was not sentenced to death like five other captured terrorists), 13 member of the Yugoslav Army and other security/armed forces were killed during the counterterrorist action (Operation *Raduša 72*). The intelligence failure was immense, as was the operational disaster once the terrorist group was finally detected.³⁸ The sinister episode proved that essential state security issues were neglected due to a service being overwhelmed with secret political police tasks.³⁹

³⁸ In hindsight, Operation *Feniks* was not a substantial, perhaps not even a significant threat to national security or the constitutional order, especially compared to the effective and recurring terrorist activities around Europe at the time with the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, i.e. the Baader-Meinhof Group) in Germany, the Red Brigades (*Brigade Rose*) in Italy, the IRA (Irish Republican Army) in the UK, with ubiquitous terrorist groups around the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) operating all over Europe. Nonetheless, for the purpose of examining the context of the secret political police reform, it is not hindsight that is relevant, but rather the perception, however biased, of the incumbent decision-makers. For them, this was a disaster.

³⁹ According to Begović (2024, 912), the secret political police's effectiveness, or rather the lack of it, should be corroborated by the report it sent to the President of Yugoslavia on 10 January 1972. According to this 42-page report, titled 'Evaluation of activities of internal enemy and foreign intelligence services in the Socialist

Nonetheless, the Yugoslav political elite decided that re-bolshevisation was the right strategy – including enhancing the role of the secret political police – and it should only be enforced with greater vigour and speed. This was the political context for the full reversal of the 1966 secret political police reform and the beginning of the last phase of Josip Broz's reign in socialist Yugoslavia.

5. A FULL REVERSAL: THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW BOLSHEVIK AGE

The hallmark of the country's full reversal to the new Bolshevik age, not limited solely to the domain of secret political police, was the 1974 Constitution. Regarding the constitutional grounds for the operations of the secret political police, the 1974 Constitution only confirmed the changes introduced by the 1971 Amendments. Even Preamble IV further developed the concept of social self-protection, although it only increased the confusion without clarifying this vague notion.

New legislation on state security was enacted in late 1973, shortly before the 1974 Constitution was adopted. This was the first law in socialist Yugoslavia on state security that encompasses the term 'state security' in its name – the Law on the Bases of the System of State Security.⁴⁰ This legislation was poorly written, riddled with self-management ideology neologisms, and extremely difficult to read (Begović 2024, 907). Furthermore, there were three significant developments, all representing a change for the worse compared to the 1966 and even the 1971 legislation.

Firstly, the scope of work of the secret political police was legally broadened, as the service was responsible for all 'activities focused on undermining and overthrowing the constitutionally specified order'. In the case of activities, there was no qualification whatsoever, such as 'organised'

Republic of Serbia', the main threat to the constitutional order came from within, from the 'internal enemy'. What follows, save one page on foreign intelligence services, is essentially a list of people who should be considered 'internal enemies'. The list comprises many highly educated individuals, including prominent intellectuals, writers, painters, actors, and university professors, primarily from the social sciences and humanities. It was the intellectual *crème de la crème* of Serbia. This was a clear signal that the political elite did not count on the intellectual elite for support at that time. It was also a clear signal of the priorities of the secret political police. The report is publicly available: AJ-837, KPR, folder II-5-d/80.

⁴⁰ *Zakon o osnovama sistema državne bezbednosti*, *Official Gazette of the SFRY*, 01/1974. The legislation was adopted on 27 December 1973.

or 'clandestine'. Accordingly, the thoroughly public activity of a single individual was now legally within the scope of the secret police's work. Furthermore, in addition to 'the constitutional order', the secret political police was responsible for 'activities that compromise the security of the country' – a somewhat ambiguous specification, as many activities can be considered as 'compromising the security of the country'.⁴¹ Clearly, the scope of work of the secret political police was substantially broadened legally, perhaps to the pre-1966 level.

The second important feature of the 1973 legislation was that the secret political police was now legally authorised not only to collect intelligence and prevent activities within its scope of work but also to 'initiate actions and proceedings'. Hence, there was a surge in the authorities of the secret political police. In the 1966 legislation, the service was only authorised to collect intelligence on the activities. In 1971, the legislation authorised the service to collect intelligence on activities and take action to prevent them. According to the 1973 legislation, the service was authorised to collect intelligence on the activities and to initiate actions and proceedings to prevent or undermine them.⁴²

The third important feature and substantial novelty was that the executive branch took full operational control of the secret political police, as the legislation stipulated that the President (Josip Broz), the Presidency, and the Federal Executive Council 'shall direct the operations of the state security services and specifies the aims, taking into account the interest of the entire country'. Accordingly, the secret political police was no longer an 'autonomous technical service', as it had been under the 1966 legislation, but rather a service under strict, hands-on control of the country's executive government. The task of monitoring the secret political police was assigned to the legislative branch of power. Both the executive and legislative branches of government were firmly under the control of the LCY and the ailing autocrat, leaving virtually no room for discrepancy.

⁴¹ Hypothetically, a journalist who had written an article for the daily press discussing government irregularities (the incompetence of an official, for example) fell within the scope of the work of secret political police – although their activity was their own, as opposed to be organised with others; it was public, as opposed to clandestine; and it revealed to the public the incompetence of government officials – and could have been considered 'compromising the security of the country'.

⁴² The addition of 'proceedings' to the 'actions' was sinister, as it provided grounds for legal actions (within administrative law) of the secret political police against those considered 'compromising the security of the country'.

The adoption of the legislation on the federal councils further strengthened the executive's grip on the secret political police.⁴³ This was followed by the creation of the Federal Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Savezni savet za zaštitu ustavnog poretka*), whose mandate was to serve as a specialised authority for the executive power's hands-on management of the secret political police. The Council was presided over by Josip Broz, a clear signal of who the ultimate and undisputed decision-maker was, even in the secret political police's day-to-day operational matters.⁴⁴

Finally, the 1973 legislation provided a legal basis for the thorough decentralisation/devolution of the secret political police, with almost full devolution to the secret political police of each federal unit and with the federal service actions only being taken in exceptional cases, as specified by the executive branch of government. Furthermore, the federal secret political police was also split up between the security services within the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs, with the executive branch of government ruling in the event of any turf war at the federal level. This was a strong incentive for officials of those services to be fully cooperative with the executive branch of the government. The concept of the secret political police as an 'autonomous technical service' became ancient past only eight years after it had been introduced.

The 1973 legislation was a hallmark of a new political equilibrium established after the failed 1966 secret political police reform experiment. From the viewpoint of the political elite, the experiment produced only trouble, so turning back the clock was an obvious, although not necessarily the best choice. Nonetheless, in the 1970s the country differed significantly from the early 1960s. However moderate, the freedom experienced in the late 1960s did not vanish. Although there was no organised political resistance to the increased repression in the 1970s, many people were not happy about it and had strong opinions against it.

The political elite understood this rather well, so the focus of the secret political police – now under the thorough control of the executive branch – was redirected towards 'internal enemies'. This insight is corroborated by

⁴³ *Zakon o savezним savetima* [The Law on Federal Councils], *Official Gazette of the SFRY* 66/74. The legislation was adopted on 26 December 1974.

⁴⁴ Perhaps this was the reason for the condescending stance of Franjo Herljević, the Federal Minister of Internal Affairs and *ex officio* the head of secret political police, to Josip Broz in his address on 18 March 1975. Cvetković (2008, 134–5) provides details about the context of this event. The address is publicly available: AJ-803, Predsedništvo SFRJ, folder 24–1976, 26. mart 1975.

the secret political police reports to the political elite, in which the taxonomy of the 'internal enemies' is highly developed.⁴⁵ There were two basic groups of 'internal enemies': (1) the 'old school', bourgeois opposition, and (2) the new, socialist opposition. The bourgeois opposition was then further divided, for analytical purposes, into: (1) the descendants of wartime anti-communist forces (*ustaše, četnici, ljotićeви*, etc.), (2) the 'remnants' of the bourgeoisie as a social segment, (3) the clerical opposition, and (4) the bourgeois liberals, i.e. liberal democrats. In short, they all aimed to restore capitalism, possibly including political pluralism.

The new socialist opposition aimed to preserve socialism, albeit with ideologies and policy models that were quite different from the incumbent one. For analytical purposes, it was divided into: (1) Stalinists and Neo-Stalinists (*dogmatsko-birokratske snage*), (2) anarcho-liberals (New Left), (3) communist liberals (followers of dismissed Serbian communist officials), and (4) technocrats (who believed in meritocracy, entrepreneurship and market solutions under socialism). It is curious that the specific group of 'nationalists' was divided into two main groups, consisting of, for analytical purposes, right-wing nationalists and left-wing nationalists – apparently both threats to the 'constitutional order'. Effectively, anyone who did not fully subscribe to the ideas and policy of the LCY, i.e. of the incumbent political elite, its values, and its fuzzy self-management socialism ideological narrative, was an internal enemy, one way or another. The level of repression went up.

A private, clandestine meeting of Stalinists and neo-Stalinists in the city of Bar (Socialist Republic of Montenegro) on 6 April 1974, ambitiously named 'Congress of the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia', was interrupted by the secret political police operatives, and its participants were detained. Already in 1974, 54 participants of the 'Congress' were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 5 to 15 years in prison (Cvetković 2012, 152). That operation by the secret political police demonstrated the rising level of repression in socialist Yugoslavia with the re-bolshevisation process in the 1970s. It also testifies to the increasing anxiousness of the incumbent political elite, since the 'Congress' gathered complete political outsiders, believers in Stalinism, without any political clout whatsoever. In hindsight, this group did not pose a threat to the incumbent political elite, yet the elite decided to take decisive

⁴⁵ Detailed taxonomy of the 'internal enemies' is provided in the secret political police reports publicly available to the executive branch of government: AJ-803, Predsedništvo SFRJ, folder 45, 74. sednica, *Specijalni rat protiv SFRJ*, 23. april 1977. Also, AJ-837, KPR, II-5-d, *Ocena delovanja unutrašnjeg neproizvatelja i stranih obaveštajnih službi u Srbiji*, 10. januar 1972.

repressive action against ineffective adversaries – if they were adversaries at all. This demonstrates how nervous the incumbent political elite were about preserving its political monopoly in the 1970s.

Perhaps the most telling episode about the anxiousness of the incumbent political elite, the iron grip of executive branch over the secret political police, and the level of repression at that time was an international incident that took place on 9 August 1975. Federal secret political police operatives abducted Yugoslav political emigrant Vlado Dapčević from neighbouring Romania, inadvertently killing two of his companions. The operation, which was a grave violation of both international and national law, was ordered by the ailing Yugoslav dictator (Josip Broz), arranged in direct contact with his Romanian counterpart (Nicolae Ceaușescu), and executed in cooperation of the secret political police of the two countries.⁴⁶ For his ostensible political activities against Yugoslavia, Dapčević was sentenced to death on 5 June 1976, and later on appeal the sentence was commuted to 20 years in prison (Cvetković 2012, 161–162).⁴⁷

The crucial question is whether Vlado Dapčević, a political emigrant who lived in Belgium and was a quiet citizen, a family man, although with somewhat exotic political views (at the time he rejected Soviet communist doctrine and subscribed to Enver Hoxha's Albanian variant), was *any* threat to the Yugoslav political elite and Josip Broz himself. In hindsight, the answer is negative. Nonetheless, the episode demonstrates the substantial level of anxiety, perhaps even paranoia of Josip Broz who was the undisputed leader, with the ambition of becoming a non-hereditary monarch. Even with the substantial risk of damaging international relations with the West (especially with Belgium, whose citizen was lured to Romania by the Yugoslav secret political police and then abducted), in the immediate aftermath of the Helsinki Conference, the advent of the Helsinki Accord and the founding of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), Josip Broz undertook the action of highly dubious value against at best a negligible, in reality imaginary opponent, just for the preservation of his undisputed and

⁴⁶ General Ion Mihai Pacepa, the incumbent head of the Romanian secret political police at the time, who defected to the West in the mid-1980s, provided first-hand testimony on the joint Yugoslav-Romanian top-level preparations for this abduction (Pacepa 1987, 344–362).

⁴⁷ According to the incumbent Penal Code of Yugoslavia at the time, 20 years of imprisonment was the harshest prison sentence.

unconstrained power. This episode of political whim, which led to quite a politically unreasonable action,⁴⁸ testifies to the state of mind of Josip Broz in his final decade and its impact for the role of the secret political police.

6. THE END OF THE EPOCH AND ITS LEGACY

The death of Josip Broz and, consequently, the end of his reign, occurred on 4 May 1980. His funeral was considered a demonstration of both domestic and international support for the man and his achievements. His followers were enthusiastic about such a reception.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, the grim reality of Josip Broz's legacy emerged shortly after the funeral. He left the country with the secret political police under the full operational control of the executive government, issuing operative orders to the service, with a fuzzy legislative basis for the operation of the secret political police, effectively without legal constraint on its operation, and with a substantial level of repression.

At the time of Josip Broz's death, no trace remained of the 1966 reform of the secret political police, and the situation in that area looked much like it had before 1966 – as if no reform of the service had occurred at all, as if no political liberalisation had taken place. The problem for the incumbent political elite after Josip Broz's death was the lack of political legitimacy, comparable to the one that he had gained at the very start of his political career – as the winner in the war against Nazi Germany and domestic political opponents, and the one who stood to Stalin at the peak of his power. His successors lacked comparable political credentials and did not possess his political clout – let alone his charisma. Nonetheless, he left them with bespoke institutions for himself, i.e. adjusted for his personal charisma, authority and political might. One almost feels pity for the successors who found themselves in shoes too large for them. They were simply incapable

⁴⁸ Although there is no consensus among historians regarding the motivation and character of Josip Broz's political action against the leaders of the Croatian Spring in 1971 and the repression of the movement, there is no doubt that the defeated Croatian political leaders and their movement were a palpable threat to Josip Broz's unconstrained power. Hence, his actions were reasonable from the perspective of his interests and ambitions. Contrary to that, there was nothing reasonable in the case of Vlado Dapčević.

⁴⁹ Broz's funeral could, up to a point, be compared with Winston Churchill's. Churchill's widow, in the evening, said to her daughter: 'It wasn't a funeral, Mary – it was a triumph' (Fielding, Schwarz, Toye 2020, 115). Is not known what Broz's widow commented in the evening, as she was an unperson at the time.

of walking in that outfit. Roughly ten years after the death of Josip Broz, the communist party's monopoly was abolished and even the country itself collapsed.

There is a difference in the role of the secret political police between the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia and the dissolution of the USSR. It was the 1991 failed KGB putsch that was the final blow to the USSR (Zubok 2021). The Yugoslav secret police proved incapable of mounting a similar operation. The collapse of Yugoslavia was violent. Segments of the secret political police probably contributed to this violence, but the service did not contribute to the breakup of Yugoslavia. Nor was it able to prevent it. The clock could not be turned back after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

7. CONCLUSION

The research hypothesis of the paper – that the 1966 reform of the Yugoslav secret political police was a failure – has been confirmed. It failed utterly and miserably. The dawn of a civilised state security apparatus, which many contemporaries made out, was false, because the reform was not sustainable.

The apparent reason for the failure was political determination and a decision to stop the reform. Nonetheless, it is crucial to explain the sources of that political decision. The move by the political elite to embark on a substantial, deep reform of the secret political police was hasty, without a clear plan, and it lacked a comprehensive, consistent picture of the reform's political effects. In short, a radical reform was not well thought out – particularly its political effects and their mitigation. Furthermore, the reform of the secret political police coincided with the country's political and economic liberalisation. All these reforms led to developments that the political elite was unprepared for; the elite perceived them as challenges to its political monopoly, especially when the Yugoslav communist patriarch felt that his absolute power was threatened. Consequently, the reform of the secret political police was stopped and reversed. For survival, an autocracy needs a secret political police as a crucial pillar (Tanneberg 2020). Because the liberalisations at the time were perceived as a threat to the political elite and the communist political monopoly – they were stopped. Accordingly, the political liberalisation in the socialist Yugoslavia did not result in political pluralism and democracy. The economic liberalisation in the country did not result in a market economy. Both liberalisations just faded away.

The failed reform of the secret political police in Yugoslavia is the only case of a substantial reform attempt of the state security service in Eastern European autocratic countries, including the USSR. Some reforms took place, such as the reorganising of the state security apparatus in the USSR, in the aftermath of Stalin's death. The KGB (*Комитет государственной безопасности*) was created as an agency independent of the USSR's Ministry of Internal Affairs and accountable directly to the Council of Ministers.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the scope of work and the authorities of the Soviet secret political police did not change at all. The socialist countries in Eastern Europe followed the Soviet example and reorganised – rather than reformed – their secret political police from time to time. The secret political police in Eastern Europe underwent substantial reform after the demise of socialism. Accordingly, as the Yugoslav secret political police reform case was clearly an outlier, there is no methodologically correct way to generalise the findings of this case study. Perhaps one specific finding could be of some merit: the perfect storm of unexpected adverse outcomes for the political elite (security failures, disturbances brought about by the political liberalisation, and political challenges of economic liberalisation) killed the secret political police reform in Yugoslavia.

This outcome does not preclude the possibility of reforming the secret political police in autocracies. The existence of non-socialist autocracies, especially those classified as 'spin dictatorships', provides for the role of secret political police that is quite distinctive from the traditional 'fear dictatorships'. Accordingly, it seems that if an autocracy is transformed from fear to spin dictatorship, the country's secret political police would have to be reformed. These reforms could be successful and sustainable. It is, after all, an autocracy, albeit transformed, and it is the secret political police, after all – nothing like the state security services that operate in democracies. Nonetheless, a reformed secret political police should be expected. Perhaps, such research should focus on the post-Soviet independent states that abolished socialism and fear dictatorship, but have not yet fully embraced democracy. This could be a relevant academic contribution to the field of reform of the secret political police in autocracies.

Returning to Yugoslavia, the counterfactual narrative could be: Had the Yugoslav political institutions shifted from fear to spin dictatorship, would the reform of the secret political police have been successful? The answer is that the probability of success of such a reform in conditions of a spin dictatorship would be much higher. Nonetheless, the problem with this counterfactual narrative is that no socialist spin dictatorship has been

⁵⁰ Albats (1994) provides ample evidence about this reorganisation.

recorded. With the political monopoly of the communist party and a strong ideological commitment to socialism, it seems implausible that socialist Yugoslavia could have become a spin dictatorship. Given all these historical constraints, it appears that the failure of the Yugoslav secret police reform was inevitable.

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Article history:

Received: 9. 6. 2025.

Accepted: 20. 8. 2025.