

The geopolitics of the Danube in CIA reports during the Tito-Stalin split

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Abstract: *The end of World War II soon brings about a confrontation between the former allies. The American intelligence service quickly orientated itself by building networks of informants in all the countries that fell under Soviet rule. In this context, the Danube acquires a special geopolitical status: it is the only river that connects the west with the east, it flows into the Black Sea, which is also on the border between the west and the east. After 1948, the geopolitical role of the Danube increases even more, with the Tito-Stalin schism: now a fissure occurs, a segment of the Danube not being The string of pro-Soviet regimes is spreading with astonishing speed from east to west, catching the West off guard. controlled and supervised by the Soviets. American CIA reports on the Danube area are increasing in number, breadth and depth. The main subject is the movements of Soviet troops, their location, armament, etc. The Americans are carefully watching all the movements of the Soviets, trying to answer the question "Will Stalin attack Yugoslavia?" Their reports are sometimes very detailed: there are sketches of the barracks where the Soviet troops were stationed, drawings of the ships entering the ports, and partial maps of the Danube sectors. On this occasion, analyses are made on the Romanian ports on the Danube (traffic, security, infrastructure, etc.). Practically, this information is regularly updated, until 1955 without missing. In addition to military information, there is no lack of industrial, telecommunication, education (arrest of 10 high school students who were spreading anti-communist manifestos), political (anti-communist resistance, the Maniu group), including listening to the Voice of America or the censorship of letters from abroad. After Stalin's death, Soviet-Yugoslav relations are restored, in 1955 the Belgrade protocol is signed, a month before the Treaty with Austria is signed. The Romanian Danube was no longer as important. The Hungarian revolution, and then the withdrawal of the Soviet troops will cause, for the time being, a center of gravity to move from the Danube to another place.*

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December 1947. Amidst a heavy snowfall, a train arrived at Mogoșoaia Station, carrying Marshal Josip Broz Tito, the hero of the Balkans and Stalin's close ally. The Romanian leadership, eager to please, organized a grand reception with banners, flowers, bread and salt, and cheering crowds. The newspaper *Scântea* devoted its front page to slogans such as "Long live the glorious Marshal Tito, leader of the friendly Yugoslav people!", "The entire capital came out to welcome Tito!", "Tito", along with speeches from Petru Groza and Tito². The hero of the Balkans immersed himself in the crowd, meeting peasants, workers, and political officials, receiving gifts, dining, and signing treaties. The Romanians appeared tense, suspicious, and intimidated, uncertain about how the Soviets would react, as rumors had circulated about disagreements between the Soviet and Yugoslav leaderships. Tito, assured of his status, tested the political waters but quickly realized that Romania had already chosen its allegiance. In a snowfall just as heavy as when he arrived, the marshal boarded the train.³ Not long after, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej declared at a Cominform meeting in Budapest that Tito was the leader of a "band of spies and assassins"⁴ and at the same time the Romanian press began publishing harsh attacks, branding Tito as a traitor⁵.

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This article does not focus on Romanian communists, or Stalin, Tito, the Tito-Stalin schism, or Romanian-Yugoslav relations; it is not about US involvement, nor is it a history of the CIA. Instead, it examines the geopolitical role of the Danube and its hinterland in the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict through the lens of CIA reports and analysis.

Since ancient times, the Danube has held immense geopolitical significance:

1. It was a Roman and Byzantine frontier against barbarian invasions.
2. It separated Slavic and non-Slavic territories.
3. It formed a natural border between Romanians and the Ottoman Empire⁶.

² *Scântea*, 16, nr. 1004, December 19 1947, p. 1.

³ Stelian Tănase, *Zvonuri despre sfârșitul lumii. București, 1944-1953*, București, Ed. Corint, 2023, pp. 447-450.

⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2005, p.120.

⁵ *Scântea*, 19, nr. 1699, April 1 1950, p. 5.

⁶ Sonja Jilek, *The Danube Limes. A Roman River Frontier* (Warsaw, 2009), 50-61; Douglad A. Howard, *O istorie a Imperiului Otoman*, Iași, ed. Polirom, 2021, pp. 103, 155, 235; Nicolae Iorga, *Chestiunea Dunării*, Vălenii de Munte, Ed. Societății "Neamul Românesc", 1913, pp. 1-260.

The end of World War II did not bring lasting peace. Once the common goal of defeating Nazi Germany was achieved, tensions between former allies escalated rapidly. Stalin's strategic objective was to expand Soviet control as much as possible under the guise of "liberation." Soon, pro-Soviet regimes emerged at an astonishing speed, spreading westward and catching the West unprepared⁷.

Recognizing this, the CIA quickly mobilized and established intelligence networks across Eastern Europe under Soviet domination⁸.

Initially, Soviet-Yugoslav relations were strong. In 1945, a friendship treaty was signed between Tito and Stalin⁹. However, their visions for the post-war world differed significantly: Stalin comes as a liberator, a fighter against fascism, and a representative of communism within the victorious triad, and from this position, he expects obedience and gratitude toward the 'Great Architect'¹⁰ of Communism¹¹, Tito had been fighting against the Nazis since 1941, the end of the war found him in control of a large part of Yugoslav territory¹². To Stalin's surprise, Tito quickly engaged in a very active policy in the region. Between 1945 and 1947, the Yugoslav leader laid claim to Trieste, a demand that unsettled the Italian Communist Party and, indirectly, Stalin himself. During this period, Tito also signed treaties with Albania and Bulgaria and supported the Democratic Army of Greece (ADG), positioning himself as a regional leader.¹³

By February 1948, Stalin was growing impatient. At a Moscow meeting, with Milorad Djilas¹⁴, he harshly criticized Yugoslavia and Bulgaria for supporting Greek communists. He also proposed forming federations (e.g., Bulgaria-Yugoslavia-Albania) to increase Soviet control.

⁷ Paul Johnson, *O istorie a lumii moderne 1920-2000*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2019, pp. 425-431.

⁸ Tim Weiner, *CIA. O istorie secretă*, București, Ed. Litera, 2019, pp. 40-53.

⁹ Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, p. 39.

¹⁰ Anita Pisch, *The Personality Cult Of Stalin In Soviet Posters, 1929-1953. Archetypes, Inventions & Fabrications*, ANU Press, 2014, p. 269.

¹¹ Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 28; Milorad Djilas, *Întâlniri cu Stalin*, Craiova, Ed. Europa, 1993, p. 84.

¹² Charles E. Ziegler, *History of Russia*, Santa Barbara-Denver-Oxford, 2009, 88, Philip Jenkins, *A Global History of Cold War, 1945-1991*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2021, p. 43.

¹³ Philip Jenkins, *op.cit.*, p. 31; Robert Service, *A Penguin History of Modern Russia*, 4th edition, Penguin Random House, 2015, p. 345; Petar Dragisic, in *The Tito-Stalin Split. 70 Years After*, Edited by: Tvrtko Jakovina & Martin Previšić, Zagreb – Ljubljana 2020., pp. 38, 40; Ivo Banac, *op.cit.* p. 35; Coleman Mehta, "The CIA Confronts the Tito-Stalin Split, 1948-1951", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011, p. 109; Jeronim Perović, *op.cit.*, pp. 42-48.

¹⁴ Milorad Djilas, *op.cit.*, pp. 110-117; Ivo Banac, *op.cit.*, p. 40; Jeronim Perović, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-57.

However, to the surprise of many, on March 1, 1948, the Yugoslav Communist Party rejected Stalin's proposal. Stalin reacted very harshly, sending a first letter on March 27 in which he accused the Yugoslav side of dissent, hoping to intimidate and divide the opposition, but on April 13 the Yugoslavians rejected the Soviet accusations¹⁵.

"Dispute escalates on May 4, the Soviets are outraged that the Yugoslavians are not grateful for their liberation, but on May 17, the Yugoslavians violently reject Soviet claims, and the consequence is severe: on June 28, Yugoslavia is expelled from the Cominform¹⁶ at a meeting in Bucharest, accused of dissent/independence from the communist camp¹⁷.

Tito publicly announced the Cominform resolution and the Yugoslav response, which stunned both Yugoslavia and Moscow. Stalin, full of anger and pride, exclaimed—according to Khrushchev—that “it would be enough for me to raise a finger and Tito would be gone. He would fall.”¹⁸ The expulsion was followed by the suspension of economic aid to Yugoslavia, simultaneous with the orchestration of a coup. According to Paul Johnston, the coup orchestrated against the Yugoslavians was premeditated: “his real bet was in Yugoslavia, where he had broken it with Marshal Tito and expelled him from Cominform (...) this event occurred four days after Russia had blocked the roads to Berlin.”¹⁹

Tito quashed the attempted coup and requested economic aid from the United States²⁰, while domestically he initiated a massive purge of Stalin's supporters, along with political trials and purges of “Titoists” throughout all the communist countries of Eastern Europe²¹.

¹⁵ Ivo Goldstein, in *The Tito-Stalin Split. 70 Years After*, Edited by: Tvrtko Jakovina & Martin Previšić, Zagreb – Ljubljana 2020, pp. 24-26.

¹⁶ The meeting was at Bucharest, Ivo Goldstein, *op.cit.*, p. 27; Ivo Banac, *op.cit.*, p.125; Sabiha Hasan, “Yugoslavia's foreign policy under Tito (1945-80)— 1”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1981, pp. 89-90

¹⁷ Philip Jenkins, *op.cit.*, p. 43; Robert Service, *op.cit.*, p. 346; Jeronim Perović, *op.cit.*, p. 39; Paul Johnson, *op.cit.*, pp. 437-439, *Dicționar de relații internaționale. Secolul XX*, Maurice Vaisse (coord.), Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2008, p. 338.

¹⁸ Ivo Goldstein, *op.cit.*, p. 27; Jeronim Perović, *op.cit.*, p. 60; Thomas Parish, *Enciclopedia Războiului Rece*, București, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, 2002, p. 283.

¹⁹ Paul Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 431.

²⁰ Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, pp. 122-125; Vassil Zarev, “An Unconventional Method of Containment – US Foreign Policy towards Communist Yugoslavia from 1948-1956”, *Prandium - The Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2018, pp. 3-4, <http://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/prandium/article/view/16211/> (accesat în 10.02.205)

²¹ Philip Jenkins, *op.cit.*, p. 126; Ales Gabric, in *The Tito-Stalin Split. 70 Years After*, Edited by: Tvrtko Jakovina & Martin Previšić, Zagreb – Ljubljana, 2020, pp. 87-98; David G. Tompkins, in *The Tito-Stalin Split. 70 Years After*, Edited by: Tvrtko Jakovina & Martin Previšić, Zagreb – Ljubljana, 2020, pp. 207-222; Ivo Banac, *op.cit.*, pp. 129-130, 133, 148; Jeronim Perović, *op.cit.*, p. 62; Paul Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 438, *Dicționarul comunismului*, Stephane Courtois (coord.), Iași, Ed. Polirom, 2008, pp. 630-631; *Cartea neagră a comunismului*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2024, pp. 484-492; *Khrushchev Remembers. The last testament*, translated by Strobe Talbott, Boston-Toronto, 1974, p. 182.

The American administration analyzed the Yugoslav request, and, in February 1949, the United States granted the first economic aid to Yugoslavia²². The USSR began concentrating troops in its satellite countries along the border with Yugoslavia, up until 1953, with the climax occurring in 1951 when Yugoslavia believed that a Soviet attack was imminent²³, and so the US included it in the Mutual Assistance Program²⁴.

Since the attack did not occur, Soviet secret services in 1952 prepared a KGB plot²⁵, which was interrupted by Stalin's death²⁶ in March 1953. In retrospect, Khrushchev believed that "if the Soviet Union had shared a common border with Yugoslavia, Stalin would have intervened militarily."²⁷

Between July and September, Soviet-Yugoslav diplomatic relations resumed, but subsequent steps came more slowly: on June 2, 1955, the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, visited Belgrade, an occasion for the two leaders to sign the Belgrade Declaration²⁸. That does not mean that the relations would be cordial: in 1956, the Soviets blamed Tito for supporting the Hungarian Revolution. The relations remained sinusoidal: in 1964, Yugoslavia joined the Non-Aligned Movement, but in 1968, Tito opposed Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia.

The Central Intelligence Agency was brutally caught by the extremely dynamic geopolitical configurations: without a fixed headquarters, in the midst of reorganization and a paradigm shift (former allies had become enemies), with problems and confusions of command and hierarchy²⁹. The CIA considered that Yugoslavia's split would remain unique, but that it would cause some problems for the communist bloc³⁰.

Under these circumstances, the geopolitical role of the Danube increased significantly, so much so that the Soviets paid great attention to the area, sending troops and military equipment

²² Ivo Banac, *op.cit.*, p. 112; Sabiha Hasan, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-96; Christopher Andrew și Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB. The inside story*, Harper Perennial, 1990, pp. 411-412; Oleg V. Hlevniuk, *Stalin*, București, Ed. Litera, 2019, pp. 316-317.

²³ There were a sovietic plan of invading Yugoslavia which involved Hungarian and Romanian troops. Ivo Banac, *op.cit.*, p.131. The plan is abandoned in 1952.

²⁴ Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-137, 143; Vassil Zarev, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

²⁵ *Los Angeles Time*, June 12 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-06-12-mn-2405-story.html> (accesat pe 07.02.2025); Roy Medvedev, *On Stalin and Stalinism*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 145.

²⁶ Sabiha Hasan, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

²⁷ *Khrushchev Remembers. The last testament*, p. 181.

²⁸ Charles E. Ziegler, *op.cit.*, 97; Robert Service, *op.cit.*, p. 373; Sabiha Hasan, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-100.

²⁹ Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, p.106; Tim Weiner, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-53.

³⁰ Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

there. Wherever the Soviet troops were stationed, the CIA—the American intelligence service—was present as well, with the mission of gathering as much data as possible about the Soviet troops, their locations, logistics, fortifications, cooperation with other armies, etc. In addition to military information, the CIA reports also contained information about the economy and society of the riparian countries.

The first information related to Soviet troops emerged in October–November 1946, when Soviet troops were recorded in the Carpathian–Danube–Prut area, at Galați, Constanța, Brăila, Fetești, and Tulcea. Interactions between Soviets and Romanians were few, kept to an absolute minimum, “cold and distant,” as noted by the American source.

An extensive first report, 26 pages long, dated March 23, 1948, constituted a military analysis of the Danube line that included 104 points, 10 chapters, 8 drawings, with the note that the sketches had legends in Greek and English (most likely the sources of the information were members of the Greek community)³¹.

The Danube was analyzed from every possible perspective (*General Information on Danube River, Banks of the River, Analysis of Attached Plan A, Danube Naval Fleet, Russian Danube Fleet, Submarines, Crews, Danube Mercantile Fleet, Transportation, Oil*), with military aspects predominating, as can be seen. The geography of the Danube was presented (the depth in various sectors, sandbanks, forested areas, industrial zones, etc.), followed by an assessment of the Danube’s protection (main barracks, artillery points, naval shipyards, ports, vessels equipped with armaments, etc.). The Danube was already fortified, and in sensitive border areas, the Romanian population was relocated. Massive changes also took place regarding the fleet: part of it became Soviet, Romanian pilots were replaced by Soviet ones, Romanian vessels were renamed, and all the vessels on the Danube were confiscated by the Soviets and renamed. The goods were brought to Galați, then to Reni, but to increase transportation speed, a new railway line was constructed between Galați and Reni with Soviet gauge. The report was supplemented with 6 sketches of segments of the Danube, indicating various points, with descriptions of what they represented within the report.

Yugoslav-Soviet relations deteriorated rapidly, and on June 28, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform. Soviet troops from Romania and Hungary were already moving towards the

³¹ CIA Residence for the Mediterranean and Black Sea is established in Athens, Tim Weiner, *op.cit.*, pp. 60-61.

Yugoslav border³². The Americans quickly repositioned themselves in the new context, and on July 9, 1948, a report entitled “*Future Danube Navigation and Control*” appeared. It was a 40-page synthesis, including a three-page analysis and 11 appendices: *International Control of Danube, Physical Condition of Danube, Shipping Companies, Shipping Activities, Ports, Danube Bridges, Canals, Reparations and Restitutions, Iron Gate, Danubian TVA, Public Statements of Soviet Danube*. The Danube became an important point in Cold War geopolitics.

“From the end of World War II, the Soviet Union(USSR) had obtained military, political, and economic control over the Danube from Vienna to the Black Sea. The USSR was now in a position to remove any obstacle that might arise from the international rivalry that had previously delayed the unified development of the Danube and its resources. We can expect that the importance of the Danube would gradually increase for the Soviets, both strategically and economically.”

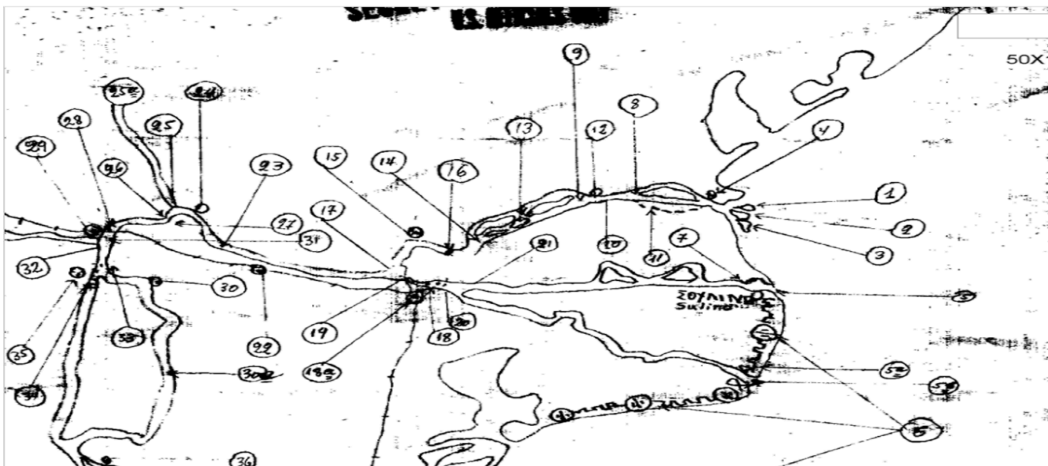


Photo 1: Maritime Danube

³² Report of 7th of July 1948

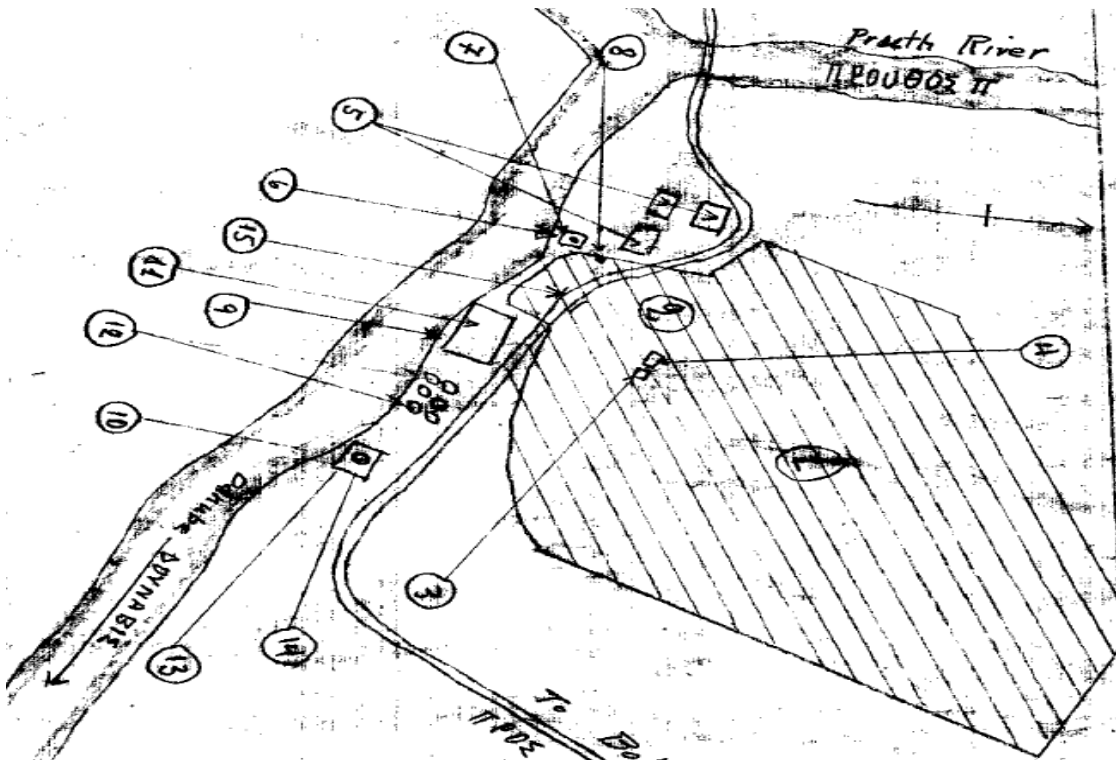


Photo 2: City of Reni

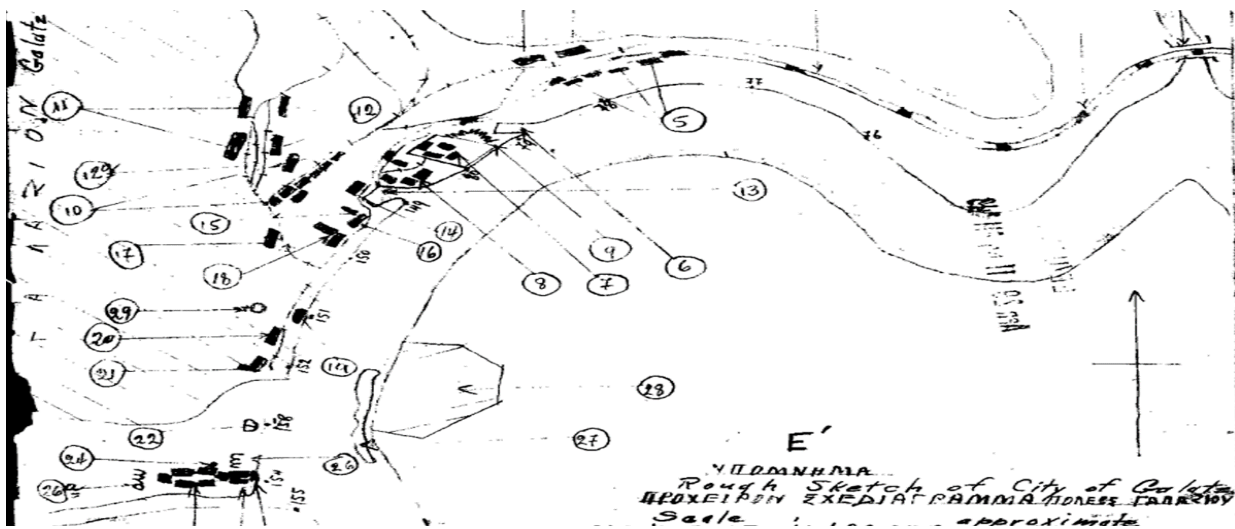


Photo 3: Danube at the the city of Galați

“Control of the Danube was a necessity to ensure military control over southeastern Europe, but from a logistical standpoint, the Danube was both an advantage and a responsibility. While the river could be used as an important route for military

transport and wartime supply, both commercial and military traffic during wartime was vulnerable due to the threat of aurally dropped mines. (...) The Danube is also a natural barrier, separating the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece), northern Italy, and most of Austrian territory from the USSR and the rest of the satellite countries. Thus, in the event of a defensive war, the Danube would constitute an advantage for the USSR, with Soviet forces being able to retreat beyond the river. Maintaining and sustaining the supply line along the Danube was essential to support the Soviet forces in the Adriatic and Mediterranean. These routes depended on bridges over the river—many of which had been destroyed during the war and would be vulnerable to another aerial attack. Although pontoon bridges could solve military transport issues, the destruction of bridges would block the entire economy of southeastern Europe.”

In an analysis dated March 31, 1949, the US had just approved aid for Yugoslavia. The CIA provided a brief analysis of the situation at the time, noting that Tito’s request should not be seen as dissent; it was too risky for him, and he could not afford to get too close to the West. The war was “improbable,”³³ but in the event of war, Yugoslavia would be swept away by the USSR, according to American analysts. Moreover, they continued, “in a war between Western democracies and the USSR, Europe would soon be occupied by the Soviets and their allies.”

The second half of 1949 was dominated, in the CIA analyses, by the implications of the successful Soviet nuclear test in August, through which the USSR demonstrated that it possessed the atomic bomb³⁴.

The American fears were not unfounded; Soviet troops began moving toward the Yugoslav border, but for the moment, the Yugoslav authorities tried to dismiss it: in a partially declassified report from June 30, 1950, Tito commented that the movements of Soviet troops from Iași and Galați

³³ 20th of June 1949, see also the comments of Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

towards the Romanian-Yugoslav border—as well as those from Sofia—had a populist role, intended to divert attention from Korea³⁵.

A report from July 8 provided an analysis of all of Yugoslavia's neighbors, with a focus on Romania, and the presence of Soviet troops in these countries. Whether demonstrative or not, Soviet troops arrived in massive numbers, initially establishing themselves in border towns³⁶, from where they were sent to Bucharest or the western border. Moreover, the completion of the floating bridge between Calafat and Vidin increased the maneuverability of Soviet troops towards the Yugoslav border³⁷. As the Americans stated in an extensive report dated December 14, 1950, the Soviet troops accompanied by tanks, passed roughly every 5 days from Reni to Galați, and then towards Bucharest and Timișoara. They were supplemented by Soviet aircraft, both single- and double-engine, which flew towards Bucharest in groups of 30 units. Not even the Danube was neglected.

The USSR and Romania were preparing for war: at Galați, camouflage nets and ropes for pontoons were installed and sent to the Ministry of War; new anti-aircraft weapons were deployed around the Soviet Military Hospital in Galați, anticipating the wounded who would arrive; the airfield at Ianca was cleared and was under extensive reconstruction; at Movila Miresei, a Soviet radio unit with 25 people and a unit with 70 tanks were established; near Tulcea, an airfield was being constructed; a new oil pipeline was put into operation between Moreni and Galați, replacing the one between Ploiești and Galați that had exploded in April; a military mine depot was located at Găești, while mines were sent to the Banat and Drobeta regions; Soviet troops from all over Muntenia were sent to the Banat, others arrived at Giurgiu and then Ruse, and 5,000 Soviet soldiers were stationed in the barracks in Brăila. At the same time, sources in Budapest noted a significant increase in Soviet naval personnel, related to the presence of more Soviet vessels.

This report was supplemented by an earlier one from November 21, 1950, which provided a new analysis of the Danube ports. The main conclusions were that Romania was massively exporting wood to the USSR; the shipyards in Drobeta, Brăila, and Galați were constructing vessels for the Soviets; Galați was the headquarters of the Danube Fleet, but Soviet vessels from the Black

³⁵ Korean War has started on the 25th of June, *Ibidem*, p. 128.

³⁶ The report from 9th of November about localization of troops from Galati with multiple maps.

³⁷ 22nd of September 1950

Sea Fleet were also stationed there; the commerce on the Danube between the West and the Balkan states had been replaced by the export of Soviet goods to the West.

1951 marked the climax of the Yugoslav crisis, is the year in which a Soviet attack was expected at any moment. The attack was considered inevitable, though its timing was unknown, according to the Yugoslav elite!

American reports seem to confirm this picture of an imminent war: a report dated January 31, 1951, announced new ship constructions at Sovromtransport Galați, as well as transports of oxygen tubes necessary for ship construction and repairs; another report dated March 1, 1951, specified that around Galați there were between 2,000–3,000 Soviet soldiers, and that the Galați airfield housed 20 Romanian aircraft. The pilots were being trained by the Soviets at night!

Soviet troops now covered the entire southern half of the country: in Bucharest, they were in Filipescu Park and in the Delavrancea and Jianu neighborhoods; 40 aircraft were stationed at the Pipera airfield; anti-aircraft units were located at Otopeni, Pucheni, Cămpina, Brazi, Ploiești; and a tank unit was positioned at Ploiești. In Sibiu and Orașul Stalin, evacuations were carried out in anticipation of the deployment of Soviet troops, causing tensions with the local population. In Galați, only Soviet troops were present, apart from the Police and the Securitate³⁸! Other troops continued to arrive near Galați, and Soviet tanks were stationed in the surrounding areas. The port of Constanța was occupied by the Soviets. Entry was permitted only with special authorization.³⁹

On June 18, 1951 (“Black Pentecost”), deportations from the Banat and Mehedinți began to 18 locations in the Bărăgan. A total of 44,000 people were targeted to be transported in 6,211 trucks on a field⁴⁰. Evidently, their echoes appeared in the American reports: on July 3, 1951, these mass evacuations at the Yugoslav border were estimated by the US Legation to involve between 50–75,000 people. Diplomatic protests from Yugoslavia were also mentioned. On June 28, the Yugoslav side submitted a strongly worded note of protest to our representative in Belgrade, characterizing the Romanian actions directed against the Serbian minority as “an escalation of aggression” committed by the Romanian state. The American interpretation was that these

³⁸ 27th of April 1951

³⁹ 16th of June 1951

⁴⁰ *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România, Raport final*, București, Ed. Humanitas, 2006, pp. 203, 293

deportations were intended to thwart potential pro-Yugoslav actions, already existing in Bulgaria, rather than being the officially declared purpose of supplementing the labor force in the Bărăgan. To divert attention, Romania and Bulgaria responded on June 29 with a note of protest denouncing the Yugoslav provocations manifested in numerous violations of both land, river, and air borders. Bulgaria even reported 18 new violations of the common border. The American interpretation was that this was intended to distract from the deportations in Romania.⁴¹

The movements of the Soviet troops⁴² continued frenetically: airfields at Ianca, Topraisar (which is actually Tuzla), and Fetești were modernized; over 60 Soviet aircraft were in Romania; 300 Soviet paratroopers were training in Galați, jumping on Fridays and Sundays; military maneuvers were taking place in Moldova, Banat, and Făgăraș; infrastructure was not neglected, as roads from Brăila to Buzău, Brăila to Viziru, and Brăila to Galați were being paved—these being the roads from the border to Bucharest. Simultaneously, the construction of the strategic road from Galați to Orașul Stalin along the route Oituz, Brețcu, Sf. Gheorghe began, as did the construction of the Fetești airfield.⁴³

According to a report from early 1952⁴⁴, throughout the previous year, Soviet troops estimated at 4 divisions entered Romania, positioned as follows: one in Moldova, one around Bucharest, and two at the border with Yugoslavia; according to the same report, engineering troops were in Slatina, and at Calafat there was a pontoon bridge to connect with troops in Bulgaria. The report also mentioned that in Moldova, Soviet military maneuvers were taking place; the Bucharest–Buzău road was paved, then extended to Galați and further towards Reni and Akkerman; old German fortifications between Mamaia and Mangalia were being repaired along the Danube; fortifications along the Danube were being repaired and anti-aircraft batteries installed!

Another report, dated July 21, 1952, presented the Danube line through Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, along with the associated military equipment, bridges, ferries, pontoons, railways, vessels in navigation, borders, and border guards. The summary was completed

⁴¹ In this period Jugoslavia and Romania are accusing each other about violations of borders, *România. Relațiile de vecinătate în timpul Războiului Rece. Seria I. Relațiile României cu Iugoslavia*, C. Hlihor (coord.), București, Ed. Academiei Tehnice Militare 2015, pp. 39-40

⁴² 21st of August 1951

⁴³ 11 of October 1951

⁴⁴ 18th of January 1952

with 7 drawings of sections of the Danube showing depth, navigable channel, sandbanks, and military points.

And yet, there is no war! The Danube line appears as though the USSR could attack at any moment! Soviet troops continued⁴⁵ to arrive at Brăila and Galați. Some were sent west to the Romanian-Yugoslav and Hungarian-Yugoslav borders, and the Galați airfield became a supply base. Other troops, both Soviet and Romanian, were located in Craiova, Caracal, and Iași, and near Craiova, an airfield was established⁴⁶. The troops along the Danube—Bucharest, Constanța, Galați, and Brăila—were mobilized in military preparations.⁴⁷

As it was anticipated that more Soviet troops would continue to arrive in Galați, on June 10, all foreigners in Galați were notified that they had two weeks to leave Romania⁴⁸. Approximately 100 families complied, including one woman with an American passport. They were allowed to take one 25-kg bag each, but were not permitted to take any money, regardless of the currency. Other families refused and were sent to forced labor in Năsăud and Făgăraș. The American source believes these expulsions occurred in other cities as well.

In the Yugoslav press, the story of the year was the defection of two Romanian pilots in Belgrade—Captain Ioan Gheorghiu and Lieutenant Constantin Boris—on July 5. The press, both in Belgrade and Zagreb, was full of various accounts of the two, interviews, and position statements, which were summarized in an American report in December⁴⁹. The most important conclusions drawn from the pilots' accounts were: both the Soviets and the Romanians were intensively photographing Yugoslav territory, with operations centered at Lugoj airfield (there are examples of specialized Soviet Il-2 aircraft with missions in this regard); for this purpose, a development workshop was set up at the airbase. In addition to photographing, a component of their missions was to intimidate and scare the civilian population; Regiment 180 was relocated from Roșiori de Vede to Lugoj and had 4–6 missions in this regard. Similar missions were operated from other airfields: Caransebeș, Deveselu, Craiova—constructed in April 1951—and Deva. Few Romanian pilots participated in these missions, as the Soviets had lost confidence after another group of

⁴⁵ 19th of March 1952

⁴⁶ 21st of April 1952

⁴⁷ 27th of August 1952

⁴⁸ 19th of December 1952

⁴⁹ 4th of December 1952

Romanian aviators defected in March. At the border with Yugoslavia, a structure was formed consisting of Romanian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian troops, directly under Soviet command. To prevent any illegal border crossings, in July, over 600 Romanian soldiers installed barbed wire and minefields along the Yugoslav border.⁵⁰

The Romanian Army was geographically arranged to assist the Soviet Army: according to a report from January 21, 1953, on the distribution of heavy artillery divisions in Romania, the 13th Heavy Artillery Division was located in Tecuci, while the 1st AG Regiment in Craiova was attached to the 1st Army Corps from Craiova; the 7th AG Regiment from Cluj was attached to the 2nd Army Corps from Timișoara; the 2nd AG Regiment from Bucharest was attached to the 3rd Army Corps from Brăila. The distribution followed the Danube line: Galați, Brăila, Bucharest, Craiova, Timișoara.

Galați remained a nodal point for both military and American activities: one report on the location of Soviet troops noted that the air forces had their command on Traian Street, the tanks on Brăila Street, and the infantry and artillery on Tecuci Street⁵¹; Soviet tanks were seen passing through Galați⁵²—70 Soviet tanks observed in Galați⁵³—and a bridge was built over the Siret between Galați and Brăila⁵⁴, along with relocations of both Romanian and Soviet troops⁵⁵.

Stalin's death, in March, put all Soviet projects on hold, and the uncertainty regarding the new Soviet leadership prolonged this stand-by period.

The American reports continued to focus on the Soviet troops stationed along the Danube: in the two areas with heavy Soviet presence, three Soviet high schools were established—in Galați, Timișoara, and Constanța. The entire staff was Soviet. The curriculum was Soviet. Previously, kindergartens and elementary schools for Soviet soldiers had been set up (in Brașov, Brăila, Sibiu, Oradea, Iași, Craiova, and Babadag). In these schools, non-Soviet students were also accepted if their parents could prove they were 100% pro-Soviet⁵⁶. The geographical positioning of the Soviet

⁵⁰ Romanian authorities are complaining about Yugoslavian violations of border, Laura Herța, *Construcția amenințării titoiste și impunerea modelului sovietic. Conflictul româno-sovietic prin lentila socio-constructivistă (1948-1954)*, Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016, pp. 148-152.

⁵¹ 24th of December 24 1952

⁵² 23rd of January 1953

⁵³ 20th of April 1953

⁵⁴ 17th of July 1953

⁵⁵ 17th of March 1953

⁵⁶ 27th of May 1954

and Romanian troops in Galați was noted: the Soviet troops were concentrated in the north, near the airfield, while the Romanian ones were in the south, in the Țiglina area⁵⁷.

The Danube continued to be featured in the American news and analyses: a report dated March 4, 1955, mentioned a Soviet military base near Sulina with 600 personnel. The port of Galați was described, with its fence, gate, and the area where wood was loaded. The report from August 31, 1955, focused on the presentation of maritime ports, with special observations regarding military bases between Galați and Brăila as well as the types of commercial vessels frequenting these ports (the report was accompanied by 13 drawings of these vessels). The report from November 4, 1955, was based on the presentation of Danube's ports, focusing on Galați and Sulina, and two weeks later, on November 18, 1955, further observations were made regarding Galați, Reni—military vessels entering, their armaments, the armaments of the ports—while the report from December 5, 1955, was based on port activity in Galați (vessels entering, armaments, etc.).

The latest news about Soviet troops concerned their withdrawal, accompanied by other measures: the Romanian Army was reduced by 55,000 people—the largest reduction among the satellite countries—one reason being that Romania had the largest forces relative to its size and role. Soviet troops were to withdraw completely from the country in the fall, some of them had already been relocated to the USSR: those from Constanța, Focșani, Galați, Brăila, and Timișoara. In contrast, the schedules of Soviet air forces at Ianca, Boboc, and Urziceni were not changed⁵⁸.

In addition to the movement of Soviet troops, their armaments, and logistics—as well as the situation of Danube ports and the vessels frequenting them—a third major aspect related to the Danube was Sovromtransport. Throughout this period, information was plentiful, demonstrating its importance to the Americans. The first information dates back to April 11, 1947, and included the entire organizational chart of the new company (with six Soviets and three Romanians in leadership); further information concerned the vessels being constructed (November 3, 1950; January 31, 1951; December 15, 1952), sabotage (February 8, 1952; March 15, 1952), and military vessels built for both Romanians and Soviets (June 26, 1952).

⁵⁷ 4th of March 1955

⁵⁸ 27th of August 1958

Conclusions:

- The Danube's role was very important for the communist camp, which is why it became a target for the CIA.
- After 1948, in the context of the intensifying Tito-Stalin conflict, attention on the Danube increased exponentially, the river becoming a potential border (initially, Yugoslavia was dubbed "a rat hole under observation"⁵⁹," but interest in it grew exponentially).
- Soviet troops were concentrated in two zones: along the Danube and at the border with Yugoslavia.
- The Danube became a border, with the Yugoslavians being accused of violations of the common border, while the Soviets and their satellites relentlessly provoked the Yugoslavians.
- New Soviet military bases—both port and air—were established.
- The peak of the observations focused on the period 1950–1955.
- Starting in 1955, reports about the Danube became general, as part of broader analyses of the communist bloc.

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⁵⁹ Coleman Mehta, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

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