

THE SECRET SERVICES

At its inauguration on 15 May 1989, the Presidency of Yugoslavia was confirmed in a somewhat reduced composition. Following the Slovene example, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia opted for direct elections to choose their member of the Yugoslav Presidency. In the remaining republics and provinces the members were selected in the usual manner, through elections in the republic assemblies; in other words the candidates were decided in advance by the political establishment. The elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia were delayed so that until July the Presidency operated with only six members.

Among the things we decided on at the first regular session were the additional duties for the members of the Presidency. One of the special federal bodies was something called the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order. And a rather mysterious body it was; little was known about its workings. It was connected with the secret services, and with the possible use of repression; in short, it was something which, particularly from the Slovene perspective, seemed potentially threatening and a danger to the process of democratisation as well as the

process of consolidating the political sovereignty of the individual republics. There were a number of interesting and important questions surrounding this Council: who controlled it, who could influence its operations and what, in fact, was its scope, which is to say, what kind of potential threat did it pose?

The Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order was supposed to include three members of the Presidency, one of whom acted as the chairman. As a rule, or rather by expectation, this should have been the Vice-President of the Presidency, who at the time was the Serbian representative Jović. The other members of the Council were the federal Prime Minister Ante Marković, defence minister General Kadijević, interior minister General Gračanin, foreign minister Lončar, and the heads of the secret services – the State Security Service (SDV), the Military Counter-Intelligence Service (KOS) and the so-called Research and Documentation Service (SID), an intelligence service which operated within the foreign ministry.

Before the session of the Presidency I had given some thought about what to do with this Council. Traditionally, it was not expected for the President of the Presidency to work with it. But I was interested in what happened in this Council so I prepared a little surprise for the Presidency session, thinking, "I'll just try, see if it works." It was supposed to be a routine item, the routine appointment of three members, but I made the argument that the Presidency was not complete. There were two members missing and they would be joining later, so in my view it would not be right to make a final decision on who was to be appointed to the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order. I proposed that until such time as the Presidency was complete, and hence a complete decision could be made, that I personally would head the Council. It was unexpected and I clearly surprised them. By closing the session rather quickly I managed to push the resolution through the Presidency. My interest was not in heading the Council myself and assuming that obligation too. I just thought it was a good opportunity to see, in the three months until we came round to selecting the chairman and members of the Council again, just exactly what the Council did, how it functioned and who was on it. The manoeuvre worked. I learned later from various things that were said, in the Yugoslav military and security structures, that it had indeed been a big surprise and in a way

they thought I had made a good move and surprised the Serbs. In fact, that happened a number of times.

Sometimes, by the standards of the federal bureaucracy, which was full of intrigue and experienced, manipulative bureaucrats, I gave an outward impression of a certain naivety. On the other hand I made moves that surprised them, so that in the end they would be asking themselves what exactly was going on. Was there someone behind me, or what? Some quite wild speculation was bandied around, things that someone would throw up or just want to check out: that I had the CIA behind me, or the Vatican, or the Freemasons or some such nonsense. But the whole success, the weakness as well as the strength of my work, lay in my independence, complete individuality and my own judgement. Many times I made decisions that were unexpected because I did not operate according to their patterns; I did not come from their structures. Often I was unpredictable for them.

During this time nothing of any great note happened in meetings of the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order. We had a constitutive session, a formal session where I could see who had come and what sort of people they were. Clearly there was great interest and uncertainty on the other side as well. I wondered what all these generals and security and intelligence people thought of me. I had come from nowhere and suddenly I was commander-in-chief and head of state – a state in which they had worked many years, had known a previous elite, previous Presidents; many of them had even worked with Tito. In a way they had retained their manner of thinking and behaving from that time. Many times a kind of mutual mistrust could be felt, a sizing up of one another. We did not know who we were dealing with. I did not know where I was with these generals and the various services, and they were not entirely clear what I was all about, what my attitudes were to Yugoslav politics, to the politics of the republics and to international issues.

At one point they contrived a special session, a special test. They wanted to find out what I was like in a crisis situation, what sort of reflexes I had. One day in July I received a message in my bureau that a session of the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order had been called in two hours' time. There was supposed to be some emergency situation. Apparently it had been demanded by the state

security service at the interior ministry. The Council's secretary was a Mr Maslić from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who generally behaved with propriety but was always very reserved. He did not know what else to tell me about what we were supposed to discuss at the session. But I agreed and in two hours the Council was in session. I felt a little uneasy because I was unsure exactly what was happening and because I was insufficiently familiar with their structures. They explained the problem. The head of the state security service did most of the talking. Our security bodies were said to have captured two terrorists in some action or other who were obviously members of a secret Hezbollah organisation, the shadowy Islamic extremist set-up which was quite active at the time, especially against Western European countries and the USA. They were said to have been found in possession of explosives. What it all boiled down to was: if we detain the terrorists and bring charges against them, we risk having Hezbollah carry out actions against us, our citizens, against Yugoslavia and against our embassies worldwide. But if we were to let them go, our stance in the fight against terrorism would be called into question (this was the point I raised), and so would our relations with the USA, which had placed a high priority on combating such secret, terrorist organisations. If news were to leak out it could cause serious problems in our relations with the United States. The debate was actually quite amusing. They just wanted me to reveal my position, to test me out. But I wanted to hear their opinions, their ideas on how Hezbollah would react, how the Americans would react, what we could possibly do. And to top it off they added the Soviet intelligence service, saying that the tip-off had come from them. I managed to conclude the whole thing by advocating the quite principled but nevertheless flexible stance that Yugoslavia could not support terrorism; Yugoslavia opposed it. I gave the relevant services the task of handling the whole affair with caution initially, so as not to jeopardise the interests of Yugoslavia and its citizens. In short, they were not to run the risk of provoking terrorist actions against us. I bounced the ball back into the intelligence services' court: "The supreme political position of the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order and the President is that we do not support terrorism and that, like the Western democracies, we are fighting against it. Your task is to implement this position in a manner which does not jeopardise the interests of Yugoslavia."

But there was no further need to discuss the matter. They informed me later only that everything had been sorted out satisfactorily. They were quite clearly testing my reactions in such situations. I myself took the opportunity to send a clear message that in no way was I willing to support certain activities which at the time Yugoslavia or its various secret services were suspected of being involved in, such as cooperating with a variety of secret, even terrorist, organisations. It was rumoured that the terrorist Carlos the Jackal had spent some time in Yugoslavia, and that members of certain Arab organisations had been trained in Yugoslavia. The weekly political magazine *Mladina*, and others too, often wrote about such things but in my work at the Presidency I never came across any information to that effect.

As President of the Presidency I received various reports from the secret services, but they never contained anything particularly shocking. Obviously in this phase of the development of the Yugoslav crisis the state security service was also experiencing changes. The state security services in the republics were becoming increasingly loyal to their own republic leaderships, and were already carefully filtering the information they passed on to the federal service. On the other hand the Military Counter-Intelligence Service (KOS) was operating with considerable independence. In the republics it functioned as a kind of corrective or a parallel service, which was subordinate to the central military structures, not those of the republics. Given the relations between the various services, it was inevitable that all kinds of situations would arise. In past decades they probably worked very closely together, and numerous personal ties between them had survived. Apart from the contact I had through the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order, which was more formal and superficial, I made no special effort to delve into the workings of these services. It seemed somewhat unreal to me. Mostly I had to make sure that these various services did not undermine my work. I never counted on their help, given our alienation and ignorance of one another. I even treated the information I received with a certain scepticism. I never knew whether it was information or misinformation. The decisions I made were based on my own consideration. It seemed to me that if I were to start getting heavily involved with the secret services and their information then I would

begin sinking into some sort of quagmire from which there would be no escape. It would probably be far more difficult to get my bearings and to judge what was true and what was not, what was right and what was wrong. I was generally very circumspect in my work. I assumed that they could listen in to the places I worked and lived in. I also assumed that they were tapping my telephone conversations. There was supposed to be a system of mutual control on special telephone connections so that members of the military and civil security services were keeping tabs on each other. But I felt it was unwise to rely on it. Sometimes I even had some fun with the system. For instance, when I spoke to my chief of bureau or with someone else at my residence in Dedinje, I might say something out loud on purpose so that it would be heard and recorded. They occasionally carried out anti-bugging checks in the offices, but for me at least that did not change anything. The people who carried out the inspections were the same people who could be doing the bugging. Once, when they carried out one of these checks in my office, the secretary said that there must be something wrong, that they must have found something. Or so she thought from the reactions of the inspection team, but later they covered it up, saying there was nothing. Officially they had not found anything.

I soon felt the presence of the secret services. Quite on their own they would hatch plots and instigate affairs and incidents of one sort or another. They worked very closely with the media. Later I discovered that even in Slovenia there were quite a number of reporters who collaborated with the secret services. Of course, this is how it was in Belgrade too. They struck their first blow immediately after my election as President of the Presidency, and from a wholly unexpected angle. One of the Belgrade magazines implied that I was a homosexual. I was really shocked. It was the last thing in the world I would have thought of. It was so far from me, so incongruous with me, that it seemed completely absurd. But the people who came up with the idea had obviously thought it through. It was preparation in case there would be a need to settle a score with me at some vital moment, when it would be very appropriate if they could not only denounce me as a traitor but also label me with something personal that people there would dislike. The first allusions in the Belgrade magazine were the work of a woman reporter who I discovered later was linked to the military counter-

intelligence service. But these insinuations only appeared in Belgrade, and in the Ljubljana magazine *Mladina*. Several times I wondered how to confront it, how to fight against it. Whatever I did would make it worse, and then there would be even more talk and they would have achieved their aim. A number of times I consulted with Silva Bauman-Čenčič, my chief of bureau, about what to do. One of the things I did was invite to Belgrade my long-time partner. We went strolling up and down Knez Mihajlo Street. That really did attract attention and comment. There was a lot of speculation, even in the press, as to who she was. Of course, it couldn't stop the people who had begun the rumour because they knew anyway that what they had started was not true, and they were not interested in the facts. I spoke about it several times with an official from my protection service in Ljubljana. He said that they would take the matter in hand and find out where it was coming from. But nothing happened. When the rumours started up again in *Mladina* I was furious. I'd had enough of this. I told the protection service official that I was going to sue *Mladina*. We would clear this up in public. He was visibly upset. He asked me to wait, saying they really would sort it out. And then the next time I saw him he gave me some names of journalists who were allegedly involved in it. And strangely enough it stopped immediately. There was nothing more written about it, no more insinuations. What this meant was that the protection service had known before what was happening and who was behind it. It was not until they saw that I was going to take serious steps that they stopped it. Interestingly, one of the senior officers of the Slovene security service visited me at home around this time. He was with me for about half an hour. These rumours were one of the subjects we talked about, although he didn't say anything in particular. But as he was leaving he handed me a sheet of paper. On it was written that an official of the service which was in charge of my protection and which operated within the state security service had met with a JNA officer, who I later learned was a leading military intelligence officer. I considered what this might mean. There were several possible conclusions to be drawn: a leading officer of the Slovene state security service, in my home, in the residence of the head of state, does not dare to speak out loud because he is obviously scared of being bugged; in this way he is warning me that a subordinate official of the protection

service is in contact with one of the leading figures in the military counter-intelligence service, that it is therefore probably something more than normal contact and that I should take this as a warning. It really was a quagmire into which a person could sink just like that. Yet it was also another piece in the mosaic of my presidential year. I told myself that it would be best if I relied solely on myself from now on. What protected me most was the individual way in which I worked, which was difficult to predict. Even if they did bug me talking to someone, it did not help them much. My conversations are often 'brain-storming'. I try out several possibilities with the people I'm talking to, and then I often opt for something completely different from what could be concluded from the conversation. But this episode does illustrate the price I had to pay for my extraordinary foray into politics at the highest level. Insinuations of this sort are unpleasant. In time, though, you harden to them and they do not affect you much any more. But the worst thing is that it affects your family, who are totally unprepared for it.