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The Cairo Affair in Light of British Documents

ABSTRACT: Relying on already available and newly accessible British archival sources, as well as memoirs of some of the participants, the authors reconstruct the events surrounding the so-called Cairo Affair, with special emphasis on the position of some generals and the support they received from military circles in the United Kingdom. The attempted coup, known as the Cairo Affair, and the extent of British involvement in it, have not previously been fully described and analyzed.

KEYWORDS: United Kingdom, Government-in-Exile, Second World War, Dušan Simović, Cairo Affair, Coup, Slobodan Jovanović, Yugoslavia.

A series of events, called ‘the Cairo Affair’ took place in 1942 within the exiled Yugoslav armed forces stationed in Cairo during World War Two. It was one of the very important events, which not only nearly paralyzed the operation of the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile, seated in Lon-

don, but also undermined its international reputation to some extent. Even though many actors in the affair left behind their accounts, touching upon developments within the units of the Royal Yugoslav Army deployed in the Mediterranean (primarily in Egypt), few explained the background and the core causes of that rebellion, or, perhaps, an act of insubordination, which in many aspects had the hallmarks of an attempted coup d'état, and would have surely been classified as one in peacetime. It is only access to British archival records that could provide a broader understanding of the events preceding and surrounding the Cairo Affair, and help identify those specific circles within the British military that were, almost certainly, both instigators and key supporters of General Borivoje Mirković, the leader of that reckless undertaking.

The Cairo Affair, an unconstitutional and anti-state action bearing the features of a coup, unfolded during 1942 in a part of the Royal Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland (mostly in the territory of present-day Egypt). What began as a political crisis that developed all the elements of a mutiny in parts of the military ultimately escalated into an inter-state dispute. In the initial phase of wartime developments, this affair posed the greatest challenge not only to the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile but also to the monarchy itself.

As historical distance increases, we are now able to use testimonies by a handful of contemporaries and participants in those events, as well as British archival material, to reconstruct the pivotal moments in the affair, and identify the lead actors in the rebellion.

The testimonies by contemporaries regarding the Cairo Affair can be broadly classified into two categories. The first category offers civilian views that highlight the illegal and unconstitutional actions by the military ringleaders, or rather, the putschists, in the writings of government members and civil servants, namely, Slobodan Jovanović, Milan Gavrilović, Milan Grol, Branko Čubrilović, Ilija Jukić, Radoje Knežević, Kosta St. Pavlović, and others. The other category are the accounts of military personnel, whose opinions about the *Cairo Affair* differ so widely that they can be divided into two subgroups. Generals Ilić, Mirković, and Simović (whose memoirs remain unpublished) defended their actions as entirely justified, whereas officers such as Borislav Todorović, Dimitrije Putnik, Neđeljko Plećaš, and others expressed more neutral views or supported the Government's posi-

on.¹ Those who have addressed the *Cairo Affair* in scholarly or polemical monographs and articles also tend to pick sides.

Regarding the published literature and critiques on the subject, Ante Smith Pavelić's substantive and thorough research deserves special attention. He was not directly involved in the affair, but he served as a secretary to the subsequent prime minister in the Royal Yugoslav Government-in-Exile, and was in a position to gain relevant indirect knowledge of the events.² Pavelić's is also the only monograph dealing exclusively with the Cairo Affair.

In addition, the Cairo Affair is mentioned in numerous essential collections of archival documents, as well as in more recent historiographical works, where it has been placed in a broader context.³

¹ As noted, a considerably greater number of testimonies regarding the *Cairo Affair* can be linked to direct participants as well as to those who bore witness to its inception, development, and closure (pacification). What these accounts share is the prevailing suggestion that the Affair had a profound role in weakening the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and undermining its reputation. In this context, a book that is particularly relevant is *Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији: разговори и записи*, прир. Слободан Јовановић, Коста Ст. Павловић (Београд, Службени лист СРЈ, Досије, 1993). In addition to the writings of the then prime minister, the following sources are also of considerable importance: Коста Ст. Павловић, *Райни дневник 1941–1945* (Београд: Службени гласник, Откривење, 2011); Милан Гавриловић, *Лондонски дневник* (Београд: Жагор, 2013); Milan Grol, *Londonski dnevnik 1941–1945* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1990); Бранко Чубриловић, *Записи из тужине* (Сарајево: Државна штампарија, 1946); Неђељко Б. Плећаш, *Райне југине* (Београд: ИСИ, 2004); Боривоје Мирковић, *Истина о 27. мају 1941. југине – мемоарски спис*, прир. Петар Боснић (Београд: Браћа Николић, 1996); Борислав Тодоровић, *Последњи райони* (Крагујевац: Нови погледи, 2002); Богољуб С. Илић, *Мемоари армијског генерала 1898–1942* (Београд: СКЗ, 1995); Димитрије Путник, „Радио везе са земљом у прошлом рату”, *Гласник Српског историјско-културног друштва Њеџиш*, 7 (1961): 39–43; Коста Ст. Павловић, „Југословенско-британски односи – Симовићев пад”, *Гласник Српског историјско-културног друштва Њеџиш*, 40 (1978): 34–56; Коста Ст. Павловић, „Три мускетара краља Петра према британским изворима”, *Гласник Српског историјско-културног друштва Њеџиш*, 48 (1982): 3–25; Књија о Дражи, ур. Радоје Кнежевић (Београд: Catena Mundi, 2017)

² Ante Smith Pavelić, *Kairska afera* (Pariz: Savremenikove sveske 2, 1961)

³ Certainly, standing out is the collection of documents *Jugoslovenske vlade u izbjeglištvu 1941–1943*, ur. Bogdan Krizman (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, Zagreb: Globus, 1981), and *Jugoslovenske vlade u izbjeglištvu 1943–1945*, ur. Branko Petranović (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, Zagreb: Globus, 1981). Other works to consider include Veselin Đuretić, *Vlada na bespuću. Internacionalizacija jugoslovenskih protivrečnosti na političkoj pozornici Drugog svetskog rata* (Beograd: ISI, Narodna knjiga, 1982); Милан Терзић, *Борба за информације*

The archival material available on this subject is rather fragmented and unconsolidated. Noteworthy in this regard is the rich, albeit incomplete and scattered, *Government-in-Exile of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Collection* (Archives of Yugoslavia, Collection 103),⁴ as well as the Military Archives (*The Government-in-Exile Collection*), and the National Archives of the United Kingdom (*The National Archives – TNA*), whose documents will be discussed in detail in this paper. Likewise, *Official Gazettes* (especially issues 4–11, 1942/1943) provide valuable insight into the beginning, development, and resolution of the Cairo Affair.

When the April War (the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis forces) broke out on 6 April 1941, the individual acts of heroic resistance against the Germans,⁵ the collapse of the Yugoslav armed forces, and the withdrawal of

(Београд: Службени гласник, ДАС, 2022); Никола Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван оштабине 1941–1948* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2022); Коста Николић, *Владе Краљевине Југославије у Друћом светском рату* (Београд: ИСИ, 2008) and Милан Терзић, „Југословенски ваздухопловци у Каирској афери”, у *Сто година српској ваздухопловства*, књ. 1, ур. Драгана Марковић (Београд: Медија центар Одбрана, 2014), 159–183; Although it does not address the Affair directly, focusing exclusively on the political activity of the Government and its plans for the reorganization of the state, the outstanding work by Mirjana Stefanovski, *Srpska politička emigracija o preuređenju Jugoslavije 1941–1943* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1988), provides insight into a much broader context in which the Affair unfolded. As for the reconstruction of the course of the Affair, it is also useful to consult Nikola Stanković's book, where in the section titled „Kairska afera” (pp. 48–112), the author presents its chronological sequence. Milan Terzić's above mentioned article deserves attention as well, although we cannot fully agree with the views of these two authors, bearing in mind different archival sources that have been used in this paper.

⁴ Among the boxes containing the archival material that included documents of relevance to the Cairo Affair: Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Emigrantska Vlada Kraljevine Jugoslavije (103), F1–14, as well as F7–63 and F–64 were particularly important.

⁵ It is a historical injustice that most of the heroic acts and personal sacrifices made by soldiers and officers during the April War of 1941 remained unrecognized by decorations throughout the war, as well as in socialist Yugoslavia. The only unequivocal act of sacrifice that was decorated by both the King and the new government in Yugoslavia (albeit only in 1973) was the death of Lieutenants Spasić and Mašera, who blew up the destroyer „Zagreb” at the end of the April War in 1941. Aside from a few individual memorials (three monuments in Kumanovo, Šajkaši, and Jagodina - erected by SUBNOR to commemorate individual fighter pilots killed during the April War), the first universal monument to the defenders of the skies over Belgrade from the 6th Fighter Regiment, and to pilots from the 4th and 5th Regiments, was erected only in the 1990s. It was not before 2002 that the then-president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Vojislav Koštunica, posthumously

the King, Government, elements of the military, and representatives of the state administration gave rise to completely new circumstances. Their difficult journey by aircraft, various ships, and the submarine “Nebojsa”, from Montenegro via Corfu, Athens, and Crete to Jerusalem and Alexandria, deserves a separate, more thorough account.⁶

During the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, the Government continued to discharge its duties, holding Cabinet sessions outside Belgrade, while the regional administrations and the City of Belgrade continued to function, even though their performance revealed a lack of communication with the central authority, along with a degree of panic and arbitrary conduct.⁷

Although the Government began to disintegrate along ethnic lines while it was still in the country, it did preserve a semblance of unity. A deputy speaker, Vladko Maček, and ministers Džafer Kulenović and Ivan Andres resigned, explaining that they wished to stay with the people they represented.⁸ Prior to his departure, Maček appointed Juraj Krnjević, secretary-general of

decorated them and the crew of the monitor „Drava” (which had also been decorated by the King in London). For more detail, see: Милош Жикић, „Страдали виши официри југословенске краљевске војске у Априлском рату 1941. године”, *Годишњак за истраживање јеноцида*, 9 (2017): 9–39.

⁶ In addition to several contemporaries' accounts, the most detailed testimony about the retreat was provided by Miloš Trifunović, and it was recorded by Kosta St. Pavlović in his diary: Павлович, *Рајини дневник 1941–1945*, 206–207. See also: Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван отаџбине 1941–1948*, 11–22; Ратомир Миликић, „Међународни положај Владе Краљевине Југославије у емиграцији”, *Сеобе од анђице до данас: Зборник радова*, ур. Снежана Вукадиновић, Светозар Бошков, Ифигенија Радловић (Нови Сад: Филозофски факултет, 2019), 59–71.

⁷ General Pandurović testifies about Ban Marko Natlačen's actions, demands for the withdrawal of the army from Slovenian territories, and a certain degree of panic and defeatism in Ljubljana. – Миле Бјелајац, *Генерал Драгиша Пандуровић – животи и сведочења* (Београд: ИНИС, 2007), 127–138.

⁸ Differences were recorded in their further political engagement. Since Maček was regarded as the political leader of the Croats, but avoided publicly supporting the Ustaša regime in the NDH (though not the new state itself), he was arrested during the war and taken to a camp in Nova Gradiška, from where, after several months, he was transferred to his estate in Kupinec, where he was kept under house arrest. After the war, he emigrated to France and then to the United States. Ivan Andres was arrested several times by Ustaša authorities in the NDH, and later also by the communist authorities in the FNRY. On the other hand, Kulenović supported Pavelić and his Ustaša regime and became *dopoglavnik* (a deputy to Poglavnik Pavelić) and the leader of all Muslims in the NDH. After the war, he fled to Syria.

the Croatian Peasant Party, as his representative in the Government. Minister Marko Daković was killed in a plane crash in Greece (in which an eminent Serbian historian, Vladimir Ćorović, also perished.) Juraj Krnjević and Franče Snoj joined the Government.⁹ Accompanying the Government in its withdrawal was also the Ban of Croatia (the head of the regional government administration of the region of Croatia), Ivan Šubašić.¹⁰

The Government was transferred to an airfield under British control in Argion, Greece, and from there to Athens.¹¹ A smaller group of politicians managed to escape aboard the “Nebojsa” submarine. At the Government session held in Athens on 17 April, a decision was made that the best response to the general situation would be to withdraw to Crete, and from there to Alexandria, and then by rail to Jerusalem.

During the next session, held in Jerusalem on 29 April, the cabinet discussed the foreign policy situation and the state of the diplomatic network. Even prior to that date, intensive talks had been conducted with the Allies, primarily the British, both in Athens and Cairo, on coordinating future actions and rescuing refugees who had reached Turkey from the southern parts of the Kingdom, or who had found themselves in Greece.¹² The consensus was that all military

⁹ *Зайисници са седница Министарској савјета Краљевине Југославије 1941–1945*, ур. Комнен Пијевац, Душан Јончић (Београд: Службени лист, Архив СЦГ, 2004), VII–IX.

¹⁰ Croatia’s Ban Ivan Šubašić is a figure that by all means merits more detailed research. Official postwar historiography celebrated him as the person who was key to the “peaceful transfer of power” and who carried out the transition of authority from the Kingdom to the new communist structures in the country (DFJ), including to Josip Broz Tito himself. According to the latest historiographical research (A. Timofeev, as well as C. Catherwood), Šubašić was a double agent who since his stay in the United States after 1942 had worked both for the Soviet NKVD and for the American OSS. For the Soviets he was “Seres,” and for the Americans, his codename was „Pastir”. – Кристофер Катервуд, *Черчил и Тито* (Београд: Службени гласник, 2024), 167–188; Алексеј Тимофеев, *Црвени и бели* (Београд: Укронија, 2014), 259–260; In the same book, Timofeev has offered information indicating that, aside from Šubašić, the Serbian politician in Croatia, Sava Kosanović, had also worked for the NKVD.

¹¹ Ratomir Milikić, „Dodele odlikovanja Kraljevine Jugoslavije u emigraciji 1941–1945”, *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2017): 86–90.

¹² In Greece, more than 1,400 Yugoslav citizens were captured without a chance to escape (most of them perished in the sinking of a ship), among them a significant number of high-ranking officers.

units of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which had managed to withdraw from the country and from Greece should be stationed in what is now Egypt and Israel.¹³

During its term (27 March 1941 – 6 January 1942), Dušan Simović's cabinet held 54 sessions - only four of which took place in Belgrade, nine while retreating through the country, one in Athens, 17 in Jerusalem, and the majority, 23, in London.¹⁴

The Government's relations with the Allies varied from one country to another. While its relations with other governments-in-exile were conducted on an equal basis, its relationships with the major Allied powers (the United Kingdom, the United States, and the USSR) were quite different.¹⁵

Among all these states, the most complex relationship, at least until the war was nearing its end, was with the United Kingdom. The evacuation of the Yugoslav Government and part of the troops was organized in coordination with the British General Staff and with the assistance of British expeditionary forces stationed in Greece. Upon setting foot on the territory under the direct political and military control of the United Kingdom (first Egypt, then Palestine), the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia found itself in a precarious position, completely under British influence.

Although the Government had access to a certain amount of foreign currency and gold reserves and covered in full the costs of its operations and residence outside the borders of the Kingdom, it nevertheless lost a considerable degree of autonomy in shaping its political agenda. At the same time, from the earliest days in exile, the Government was torn by deep internal divisions along national ethnic lines.¹⁶ Exploiting existing divisions, the United Kingdom would frequently impose itself as an arbiter, supporting various sides in the fragile government-in-exile, thus deepening the existing rifts further.

¹³ The Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland personnel totaled 980 individuals in May 1942, including 247 officers, 227 non-commissioned officers, 479 soldiers, as well as 25 musicians and two military clerks. This number gradually increased by the enlistment, mostly of the Slovenes who had been captured while serving in the Italian army. Kosta St. Pavlović, *Ratni dnevnik*, p. 125.

¹⁴ *Zapisnici sa sednica Ministarskog*, 14-15, 18.

¹⁵ Ratomir Milikić, „Međunarodni položaj”, 59.

¹⁶ Kosta Nikolić, *Vlade Kraljevine*, 18-25. Mirjana Stefanovski, *Srpska politička emigracija*, 116-138.

The dawn of the crisis that undermined the state and the military alike coincided with the decline in influence and eventual downfall of General Dušan Simović, as the prime minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁷ His political position was shaken in the autumn of 1941, which overlapped with the relocation of the greater part of the Government from Jerusalem to London. It also overlapped with reports about Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović's actions in initiating the first organized resistance against the occupying forces within the country, and the frightful report from the Serbian Orthodox Church that the Serbian population in the new Axis - appointed Independent State of Croatia (NDH) had been the victims of horrific atrocities. At that moment, General Simović, who perceived himself as the principal figure of the 27 March Coup - following the coming of age of the young King Peter on 6 September - wanted to retain the principal levers of power in his own hands at all costs. In order to achieve that, he divided the Ministry of the Army, Air Force, and Navy into two separate entities (assigning the newly created department to himself, while keeping the prime minister post as well), and simultaneously appointed himself as a deputy to Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces (King Peter II).

The way Simović was managing the Council of Ministers produced increasing resistance among the ministers, as he had acted more like a military commander than as the head of the supreme political and state institution. In addition, Serbian ministers began to criticize him openly for excessive bias in favor of Croatian members in the Government. Then came a personal conflict between Simović and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Momčilo Ninčić, and then with Milan Grol, culminating in a break up of relations with all the Serbian ministers.¹⁸ Moreover, due to his conduct, General Simović fell out of favor with Queen Mother Maria first, and then with King Peter II himself. During these difficult months at the end of 1941, even General Simović's allies in the 27 March Coup, the three Knežević brothers, who held the most prominent posts, including that of Minister of the Royal Court, a senior diplomat, and a key military advisor to the young king, turned their backs on

¹⁷ About the weakening of the Prime Minister's political position and his fall from royal favor, there is a detailed account in: Павловић, „Југословенско-британски односи – Симовићев пад”, 34–50.

¹⁸ Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији, 155–161.

him, along with several officers holding the rank of major within the King's inner circle.

Simović failed to recognize in time that his position was under threat, convinced that his perceived historical role placed him on an equal footing with other generals heading Allied governments in London, such as General Charles de Gaulle¹⁹ and the Polish General Władysław E. Sikorski.²⁰ He clearly lacked the political instinct and political self-preservation skills, failing to make any adjustments to his conduct. In December 1941, he lost his last stronghold in cabinet, as even the ministers representing Croatian and Slovenian political parties abandoned him. What prevented King Peter from dismissing General Simović right away was the strong support the general continued to enjoy from the British, but it wasn't enough to protect his position for much longer.²¹ In late 1941, at a government session, Simović declared that his downfall would signify the end of the country, arguing that without him there would have been no Yugoslavia. He even threatened Slobodan Jovanović, insisting that the Yugoslav military units in the Middle East would refuse to follow the orders of a government not headed by himself.²²

That political crisis, behind which, to all appearances, was the King himself, ended when all ministers submitted their resignations to the monarch on 8 January 1942. Simović attempted to challenge this decision, but it was a *fait accompli* he could not reverse.²³ It is noteworthy that during that

¹⁹ Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle (1890–1970) was a French general, leader of *France libre*, and later President of France, as well as Prime Minister of France in two terms. – Author's note

²⁰ Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski (1881 – July 1943) was a Polish general, prime minister in exile, commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces, and a key figure of the Polish resistance and state during the Second World War. Died in a plane crash near Gibraltar. – Author's note

²¹ „...the new government, as was later stated by Mr. Rendel, the British envoy at our court, was not going to be recognised by the British government. They deliberated for two days. At last, they recognised us.” – Милан Гавриловић, *Народни џуџ* (Нови Сад: Балканија, 2015), 457–462.

²² *Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији*, 160; Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван ошацибине 1941–1948*, 58–59.

²³ Slobodan Jovanović found that the primary reason for Simović's dismissal was not the way he had been running the political government, but rather a crisis in the Serbo-Croatian relationship, which arose due to reports of horrific massacres of Serbs in the Ustašaled NDH. Jovanović explains that such a crisis would have brought down even a much

period Simović was also on poor terms with General Borivoje Mirković, commander of all Yugoslav air units in the Middle East. The strained relationship between the two men, who were the closest allies in the 27 March Coup would, in due course, generate considerable problems for the King and for the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia alike.

At first glance, General Simović withdrew from the political stage without resistance, but the situation changed quickly. A new government was formed by the academician Slobodan Jovanović,²⁴ a clear choice supported by all political actors in the cabinet. The newly appointed minister of armed forces was a newly promoted general, Dragoljub Mihailović,²⁵ whose representative was none other than Professor Jovanović himself. Simović's downfall, even in the eyes of British observers, constituted a rare moment of unanimity in the functioning of the Government - regardless of national or political affiliation, the ministers united in the effort to remove the rather autocratic and "perfidious" General Simović from the premiership.²⁶

Slobodan Jovanović himself stated that the Cairo Affair was not provoked by Simović's fall, but merely accelerated by it. He pointed to a deep rift that opened during the final months of his cabinet, primarily between older and younger coup-plotting officers.²⁷ With Simović's departure, Army Gene-

more experienced politician had he found himself at the head of the government at that moment. *Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији*, 159–161. It is worth noting that, according to British reports, Jovanović was a joint proposal of both the Serbian and Croatian members of the government. – Author's note

²⁴ It is worth noting that, according to British reports, Jovanović was a joint proposal by both the Serbian and Croatian actors in the government. – The National Archives – London (TNA), Foreign Office (FO), 536/5, 3143/42, Confidential, 3 May 1942

²⁵ Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović began organizing a resistance movement in the country in May 1941, refusing to acquiesce in the capitulation of the Yugoslav army. Soon, having headquartered at Ravna Gora, he organized the largest resistance movement in Serbia - the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (known by the local acronym JBYO /JVuO). Together with the Partisans, who decided to resist the occupier only at the beginning of summer 1941, after the German attack on the USSR, an uprising began in Serbia that summer, spreading throughout the occupied country. In the autumn of 1941, the uprising was crushed, and a civil war between the two resistance movements began. The Partisans mostly left Serbia and Montenegro, where the base of JVuO was located. In January 1942, Mihailović was promoted to his first general rank and became the minister of war.

²⁶ TNA, FO, 536/5, 3151/2/42, Rendel letter to FO, 3 January 1942

²⁷ *Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији*, 162.

ral Bogoljub Ilić ceased to serve as the minister of armed forces and as the chief-of-staff at the Supreme Command of the Middle East forces.²⁸ According to the seniority system, the next in line (among the eight generals who had avoided capture and were available to the Government) should have been General Borivoje Mirković. Even though he was in deep disagreement with Simović, he was even in deeper disagreement with younger officers. As a result, the Government appointed Lieutenant Colonel Miodrag Lozić,²⁹ who was stationed in the Middle East, as a temporary commander of the troops.

General Ilić was unwilling to accept the Government's decision and delayed handing over his duties, requesting repeated confirmations of written orders and instructions, buying time. Fundamentally, he challenged the decision on the grounds that he could not relinquish command to a mere lieutenant colonel.³⁰ The takeover was obstructed for another few weeks, and General Ilić was ultimately retired in February, though not before he had, entirely on his own initiative, and against the decisions made by the Government and the King, handed over the post not to Lozić, but to General Bora Mirković.³¹ This

²⁸ „General Simović spoke of him as one of his greatest supporters during the government crisis from December 1941 to January 1942, and it appears that he telegraphed General Simović assuring him of his lasting support and loyalty. Therefore, it would be difficult in any case for the new government to resume his appointment. Moreover, the new government had already decided to express support for General Mihailović by appointing him the minister of war. The appointment of General Ilić to that office was not confirmed by the new government, which also decided - although it is not entirely clear whether this was done immediately or later - to suspend his appointment as supreme commander. General Ilić expressed strong discontent over the move, and persistently refused to recognize the authority of the new government, but eventually resigned...”. TNA, FO, 536/5, 3143/42, Comments on Rendel Yugoslav Personalities Report No. 29, 3 May 1942

²⁹ Until the April War, Lieutenant Colonel Lozić was the closest associate of both General Mirković and General Simović, and one of the best-informed people in the Air Force command during the preparations and execution of the coup on 27 March 1941.

³⁰ At this point, it is important to highlight information shared by A. S. Pavelić, based on the documentary materials available to him with respect to the operation of Prime Minister S. Jovanović's cabinet: a British major responsible for delivering encrypted communications between Cairo and London refused to forward Jovanović's order to Ilić to relinquish command, explaining that “this concerns the internal politics of Yugoslavia,” and on 28 January 1942, he made it clear that the British army supported the coup plotters. – Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 34.

³¹ In British correspondence between the Foreign Office, SOE, and military circles, the following is stated: „Regarding the stages of Ilić's dismissal, are you sure that the overview

was carried out with the support of the British military and civil authorities in Egypt. Those same authorities resorted to full obstruction of the transmission of orders from the Government, and demonstrated, with every action of theirs, support for the coup plotters, General Mirković in particular.³² One of the chief protectors of Mirković and his fellow conspirators was the former British air attaché in Belgrade, Major Thomas Mapplebeck,³³ who managed to secure the backing of the highest British military authorities in Egypt, as well as of the SOE headquarters in Cairo.³⁴

Mirković drew in several hundred officers, non-commissioned officers, and some soldiers, most of whom came from units that had been directly subordinated to him - primarily the Air Force and, to a lesser extent, the Navy. Among them, in the innermost circle of rebels, were younger and highly energetic officers with political ambitions, much like Mirković himself, but also Colonel Žarko Popović, the chief military intelligence officer. Through their actions, they sought to completely undermine the democratic Government and the democratic character of the state, privately lamenting the fact that the coup plotters had, following the events of March 27, returned power to the political parties in the country.³⁵

of the situation you have provided in your letter is accurate? I recall that Ninčić, when he saw the Secretary of State and me on 12 January 1942, right after the formation of the new government, said that it would not have been possible to continue the process of appointing General Ilić as supreme commander irrespectively of his appointment as minister of the military, because he was too closely identified with Simović and it was quite certain that he would not be willing to continue as supreme commander from the moment his most important office ended. It is true, however, that the Yugoslav government spent the last ten days trying to convince Ilić to step down peacefully, and it seems to me that Lozić was not formally appointed as Ilić's replacement, at least not before 20 January. Ilić refused to accept any of those orders but ultimately retired 'for health reasons,' and only then did Mirković named himself the successor. On the other hand, he was completely 'unleashed' only when Mirković did so." – TNA, FO, 536/5, 3143/42, Comments on Rendel Yugoslav Personalities Report No. 29, 3 May 1942

³² Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 43–44.

³³ Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван отаџбине 1941–1948*, 72.

³⁴ TNA, FO, 536/4, Attitude of British G.H.Q... In regard to the „Egyptian Crisis”, 1 September 1941.

³⁵ To this day, no one has managed to identify all the rebels, only some of the most influential among them. Several hundred officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers joined the rebellion, either deliberately, or simply following their commander, General Bora Mirković.

Under the pretext that they could not allow insubordination behind the frontlines in Africa, the British military authorities unilaterally placed all Yugoslav troops under their own command, without the consent of the Royal Government, and appointed British General Robert Stone³⁶ as the commander of the Yugoslav forces. This measure likewise served as a smokescreen, since General Bora Mirković was in fact allowed considerable latitude for his unlawful activities. Particularly painful fact for the British command and the rebels alike was that almost the entire main military formation of the Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland - the Guards Battalion - refused to accept either rebel or British command. The Guards Battalion remained loyal to the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in London.³⁷ Most of the pilots and other military personnel shared the same allegiance, as they had been exposed to pressure by not only the rebels, but also the British military authorities, to join General Mirković.³⁸

At the request of the British authorities, the Yugoslav Government appointed the King's personal envoy to assume command of the troops. This was Colonel Miodrag Rakić, the King's adjutant, a highly regarded military

They were mostly from the Air Force, but also some naval personnel led by the commander of the only saved submarine "Nebojša" joined in. It is known that 291 officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers settled in the rebel camp at the end of April 1942, and by September their number had decreased by about fifty. Kosta Pavlović provides a report dated 24 July 1942, stating that among the rebels there were a total of 227 persons, of whom 114 were officers. See more: Павловић, *Рајини дневник*, 139–140.

N. Stanković quotes British statistics - 102 officers and 199 non-commissioned officers, soldiers, and clerks were interned in May 1942. – Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван оштацбине 1941–1948*, 88; Since the British authorities deliberately prevented information from the Government in London, and twice to three times as many loyal officers and soldiers from reaching the rebels, the group initially remained compact. Yet, in the following weeks and months, the number of rebels began to decrease significantly. Some tried to repent publicly and return to the fold of the legal Government, but were subjected to violence and harassment by their fellow rebels for any such attempt. Still, „the hardcore rebels” were few, perhaps a few dozen, or even fewer, and they were without exception Mirković's closest associates.

³⁶ Robert Graham William Hawkins Stone (1890–1974) – Author's note

³⁷ Interestingly enough, serving at the Guard Battalion were the sons of several ministers and also the son of General Simović and the nephew of General Bora Mirković, all of whom remained loyal to the Government.

³⁸ See more: Павловић, *Рајини дневник*, 167–170.

figure who had stayed clear of the disputes among the participants of the coup carried out by *Yugoslav army officers on March 27, 1941*.

The British command and General Stone accepted the arrangement that granted Rakić command of the Yugoslav troops, but the obstruction continued. Upon entering the headquarters of the Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland, Colonel Rakić could only conclude that the rebel officers, with effective help of British troops, had removed most of the archives and the safe from the premises, leaving the building in a state of disarray.³⁹ Nevertheless, Colonel Rakić issued a call for the renegade officers to return under unified command, assuring them that their insubordination would be forgotten.

At that point, General Bora Mirković began to declare his loyalty to King Peter II, though not to the Yugoslav Government, which, he claimed, was also opposed by the British. The British authorities continued to provide him practical support, fostering among the rebels a mistaken belief that he was in the right. At the same time, General Simović sent a letter to Winston Churchill, expressing support for the actions of General Mirković and his group of officers, and asserting that only his return to the helm of the Yugoslav Government could stabilize the situation.⁴⁰ This gave the rebellion a political dimension, and it was no longer a mere military mutiny.

Another problem arose over the contacts the rebels had established with the occupied homeland. Those connections had been made with the express or at least tacit approval of the British, who had organized the infiltration of two Yugoslav missions into the occupied territory: the Semiz–Bakić mission and the Naumović–Vemić mission. They carried General Simović's letters to Dimitrije Ljotić, and General Mirković's to Ljotić and Milan Aćimović. The missions were authorized by General Ilić, contrary to the instructions issued by the Government and Slobodan Jovanović, and organized by General Mirković, in the days after they had already been dismissed from their top-ranking military positions.⁴¹

Also tied to the Cairo Affair and the contacts with the rebel generals was a mission that arrived from the homeland, disguised as a trade de-

³⁹ At the Yugoslav Government's insistence with the British, the archives and the safe were finally returned, but only after several weeks. –Ibid, 171–172.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO, 536/4

⁴¹ Терзић, *Борба за информације*, 82–90; Terzić, „Југословенски ваздухопловци у Каирској афери”, 179–183.

legation. The mission headed by the Leskovac industrialist Đorđe Blažić (a reserve lieutenant colonel), who arrived in Turkey from occupied Yugoslavia, was intended, among other objectives, to convey Milan Nedić's proposals to the leaders of the rebellion, as well as alleged greetings from Draža Mihailović - claims that were later proven to be false and clearly fabricated. Mihailović himself used radio communication to report that Blažić was Nedić's agent.⁴²

The deep internal disputes and increasing discord between Serbian and Croatian ministers aside, the Royal Yugoslav Government in London, along with the King himself, remained firm in opposing the actions of General Mirković.⁴³ Their determination was reinforced by the fact that the majority of the Guards Battalion consisted of Slovenian soldiers who had previously been part of Italian and German forces and, upon capture, had decided to join the Allies rather than be sent to prison camps. The Croatian politicians within the Government were equally wary of the military rebellion, and a not insignificant number of Croatian officers and soldiers stationed in the Middle East remained loyal to the King and the Government.⁴⁴

During the crisis and immediately afterward, the Government decided to retire six out of the eight generals who had evaded German captivity and were available to it.⁴⁵ Some of them played an active role in the rebellion - the Mirković brothers, Borivoje and Dragomir, in particular - while General Simović supported the rebel officers from London, attempting to exploit the mutiny through his contacts with the British political leadership in order to

⁴² Терзић, *Борба за информације*, 91–94.

⁴³ At the time of the *Cairo Affair*, British diplomacy was pushing for an agreement (a Declaration) to be reached between the Serbs and Croats in the Government, but the issue was nevertheless „set aside” in July 1942. – Dragovan Šepić, *Vlada Ivana Šubašića* (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 75–76.

⁴⁴ Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији, 166; Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван оцаџбине 1941–1948*, 87.

⁴⁵ The following generals were retired: Bogoljub Ilić, Dušan Simović, the brothers Borivoje, nicknamed Bora, and Dragomir Mirković, Velimir Ranosović (later reinstated), and Milorad Radović, while Generals Milo Đukanović (who died in a shipwreck off the coast of South America in June 1942) and Petar Živković were left aside. See more in: *Mile Bjelajac, Generali i admirali Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918–1941* (Beograd: INIS, Dobra, 2004), 73–74; *Službene novine*, 16 January 1942; *Službene novine*, 31 January 1942; *Službene novine*, 30 April 1942; Павловић, *Ратни дневник*, 82.

facilitate his comeback as head of government.⁴⁶ General Ilić initially aided the rebels and, to a certain extent, expressed solidarity with them, but he subsequently withdrew, and clashed with Bora Mirković. Generals Velimir Ranošević and Milorad Radović were retired from their military-diplomatic posts in London due to their cooperation with General Simović.⁴⁷

For the greater part of the nine-month rebellion, the insurgents were situated in a separate camp under full British protection, and for most of the time they had access to and controlled the facilities of the Yugoslav Army Headquarters while the majority units, which remained loyal to the Government and the King, were rather disfavored by their British hosts. The same applied to the units stationed in Malta and across the Middle East, particularly in Cairo and its surroundings. During the advance of Rommel's Afrika Korps, the British military authorities, without any consultation with the Government in London, first isolated the Yugoslav Guards Battalion and then dispatched it to Tobruk. Only at the insistence of Slobodan Jovanović and the Government was the Guards Battalion sent back to the vicinity of Cairo.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ A British report compiled at the height of the crisis suggests that Simović, Ilić, and Mirković were motivated solely by political aims and the hope of establishing a military government. „It appears, however, that General Simović has not relinquished his ambitions at all. At the time of his fall from power, he told His Majesty's minister that Generals Ilić and Mirković were firmly on his side, and that he had no doubts as to the support of important and influential senior officers of the Yugoslav Air Force and the land forces in the Middle East. It remains unclear to what extent the subsequent refusal of those officers to obey the orders of the new Yugoslav Government was intended to restore General Simović to power, but the general impression within Yugoslav circles in London was that it was one of the principal objectives of the dissident movement in Egypt. At the same time, there is no doubt that General Simović sought to garner support for his personal goal from a very diverse group of people in England, and spoke with considerable bitterness to a number of Englishmen against those he regarded as his enemies, which didn't explicitly exclude King Peter himself. If these reports are accurate, it is possible that he is playing a dangerous game. King Peter's own position is not necessarily secure either, and General Simović - despite his evident limitations and failures - may still play a significant role in Yugoslav affairs” – TNA, FO, 536/5, 3143/42, Comments on Rendel Yugoslav Personalities Report No. 29, 3 May 1942

⁴⁷ Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 53.

⁴⁸ Another problem was the use of Yugoslav military personnel that formed the nucleus of the new Yugoslav forces outside the Fatherland: aside from the fact that this was a gross violation of the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its elected state bodies, a practical issue also arose. Most of the personnel in this unit were former Slovenian priso-

The British military command also regarded Colonel Rakić with a dose of suspicion for his refusal to join the insurgents, making his work nearly impossible and trying to render his position meaningless.⁴⁹ The crisis persisted beyond the summer of 1942, but from September onward, steps toward a negotiated settlement began.⁵⁰ At the suggestion of the British Foreign Office and Ambassador George Rendel, the agreement was that the most resolute leaders of the rebellion, primarily the Mirković brothers, should be interned in Uganda (there were around ten individuals in this group), but that they should also be allowed to join the British Army (that's how Bora Mirković became a British general.)⁵¹ The other rebels repented, and returned to the Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland, and their actions were "consigned to oblivion."⁵² The British military set a condition that, in the spirit of "compromise," Colonel Rakić also be removed from his post as commander of all troops, and Colonel Dimitrije Putnik (son of the renowned Serbian military leader, Field Marshal Radomir Putnik)⁵³ was appointed in his stead. The mutiny was thereby brought to an end in October 1942, without casualties, but it left grave consequences for the position of the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile, as well as for the situation in the occupied country, where Nedić's quisling press repeatedly published malicious articles on the Cairo Affair, giving the matter considerable attention. In the wake of these developments, King Peter II, too, started to yield to British political influence, particularly Winston Churchill's, a shift that would have unforeseeable consequences in the coming period,

ners from Italian and German units. The possibility that they might come into conflict with and be captured by their former units implied an automatic death sentence. This was also established as a condition upon their joining the Yugoslav ranks – that they would not fight against their former units. See also *Jugoslavenske vlade u izbjeglištvu 1941–1943*, 289–290.

⁴⁹ This was particularly evident in the demand that the rebel officers be rehabilitated and, under no circumstances, removed from Egypt, which referred to General Mirković in particular. Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван оцајине 1941–1948*, 78–79.

⁵⁰ A. S. Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 105–108.

⁵¹ General Borivoje Mirković was transferred to the British Royal Air Force, where he was also promoted to the rank of Honorary Major General. He was living and serving in British Uganda during WW2, and later in Great Britain with his brother, general Dragomir Mirković.

⁵² *Jugoslavenske vlade u izbjeglištvu 1941 – 1943*, 393–396, 429–431.

⁵³ Слободан Јовановић у емиграцији, 166; Станковић, *Југословенска војска ван оцајине 1941–1948*, 111.

especially in 1944, and with respect to the pressures surrounding the formation of Ivan Šubašić's cabinet.

Churchill himself commented on the Cairo Affair, indirectly siding with the insurgent generals. This occurred on 24 June 1942 in Washington, during a meeting between King Peter II and U.S. President Roosevelt, which was also attended by the British Prime Minister. At that time, Churchill proposed that the Yugoslav King should pay a personal visit to Cairo to meet with the rebellious officers, whom he suggested should be granted amnesty, adding: „You are beginning to tire your friends.”⁵⁴ Under Churchill's renewed insistence King Peter and the Government did travel to Cairo in 1943.

From the writings of Slobodan Jovanović, it is not difficult to discern the background and causes of this rebellion. His account was based on his own observations, as well as on documents and reports he had received in his capacity as head of the government in exile during that period. It took decades for British archival collections to become accessible, some only in the last few years (the most recent in 2021). We had much to learn from a confidential memorandum the British Embassy sent to the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in September 1942, when the Cairo Affair had yet to be resolved.⁵⁵

The document was actually a catalogue of everything the British military and police forces did during the crisis, or rather the actions they had taken that were completely at odds with the position of the Foreign Office and the principle of respecting the legal institutions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The correspondence reveals that the military forces in Egypt, without any communication or approval from the Foreign Office - or even from Churchill himself - acted independently and supported „the dissidents in the Yugoslav Royal Army,” as cited in the document. Further, they encouraged their complete disobedience towards the Yugoslav Government.⁵⁶ The most flagrant forms of British support are listed in the memorandum - from encouraging the rebels, to preventing loyal officers from fulfilling the designated duties, to seizing command buildings, intimidating and abducting those who rejoined the loyal Yugoslav forces.

⁵⁴ Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 95.

⁵⁵ TNA, FO, 536/4, Attitude of British G.H.Q... In regard to the „Egyptian Crisis”, 1 September 1941.

⁵⁶ Colonel Putnik testified to that, too. – Путник, „ Радио везе са земљом у прошлом рату”, 40.

It is underlined that, in March and April 1942, after their direct lobbying efforts among the command and personnel of the Yugoslav Guards Battalion Outside the Fatherland had failed, the British military authorities on their own initiative deployed the battalion to Tobruk against Italian forces. It was only after an intervention by the Foreign Office that the battalion was withdrawn to the rear. This sudden redeployment was clearly aimed, according to the British military leadership in Cairo, at intimidating the loyalists unwilling to renounce the Yugoslav Government, while also building an opportunity to weaken them on the ground. The memorandum further identifies problems arising from the fact that, in the spring and summer of 1942, the British military administration made it possible for the rebels to use radio links and transmitters, after which the collaborationist media in occupied Serbia gave extensive publicity to the Cairo Affair. The British Air Force is accused in the document of deliberately and knowingly having handed over to the rebels classified documents - produced by the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in London - paying no heed to the potential consequences for the relations between the Yugoslav Government and its (temporary) hosts, or for the general position of the Government for that matter.⁵⁷

Certain U.S. agencies, too, tried to act as intermediaries so that the Cairo Affair could end peacefully. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and (the future) General William Donovan who ran the organization, were spearheading the effort. Donovan wanted to provide a steady delivery of aid to Mihailović in the occupied territory. In the course of March 1942, their policy on the ground was quite pragmatic: Yugoslav Ambassador to the U.S. Konstantin Fотиć, maintained the closest of contacts at the highest levels in Washington, but U.S. diplomats were in contact with General Mirković in Cairo at the same time. On the other hand, they were careful not to support the coup plotters in any way, trying to maintain very close ties with the political leadership of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and to provide them with direct communication with Mihailović, outside of British control.⁵⁸ During his visit to the United States in 1942, King Peter II met with Donovan and OSS officials on several occasions, precisely in order to facilitate a plan for establishing di-

⁵⁷ TNA, FO, 536/4, Attitude of British G.H.Q... In regard to the „Egyptian Crisis”, 1 September 1941.

⁵⁸ Pavelić, *Kairska afera*, 78–85.

rect radio communication with Mihailović in occupied Yugoslavia. An offer came from the United States in May that the Americans could mediate for Mirković to obey the Government's decisions.⁵⁹

The Cairo Affair significantly impaired the position of the Yugoslav government as a member of the Allied coalition. Although this was not an isolated case among the Allies that found themselves outside their borders (the Greek army, for example, had also withdrawn from the occupied territory divided into at least two political factions), the interference of the British military authorities, left an indelible mark. There was now a permanent dent in the authority of the Yugoslav government, and from the end of 1942 onward, King Peter II was exposed and yielded to even stronger British pressures and influence.⁶⁰ It is important to note, however, that the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia demonstrated surprising internal coherence, given the circumstances, despite being torn by conflicts over the Serbian question and the genocide of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

The Cairo Affair was an unfortunate internal conflict within the Yugoslav Army Outside the Fatherland, which broke out at a most inopportune moment. At its core, it was a clash between older and younger officers, but also between those who had developed a special relationship with the British military authorities (the future rebels) and those who had joined the March 27 Coup out of personal patriotic and anti-Axis feelings. Some rebel leaders claimed that a so-called "military clique" had been formed within the army - either rallied around the Knežević brothers or "majors" clique - and that the principle of military discipline (or the principle of civilian control of the military) had been violated.⁶¹ At the same time, the Affair was fundamen-

⁵⁹ Ibid, 89, 93.

⁶⁰ It was precisely during the Cairo Affair that pressures on the King increased - his British hosts decided to impose a Royal Air Force major as his aide-de-camp. The extent of British pressure is best illustrated by the fact that certain influential circles in the United Kingdom started to make semi-public suggestions as to who might assume the post of Chief of Staff of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which constituted the most flagrant violation of the sovereignty of a sovereign state. Павловић, „Три мускетара краља Петра према британским изворима”, 3–4.

⁶¹ A letter by General Ilić to Slobodan Jovanović dated 25 January 1941 as in: Илић, *Меморије армијској генерала*, 256–258.

tally a conflict between the civilian government and a group of generals and senior officers over who should play a dominant role in running the state under wartime conditions.

It is essential to consider who led the rebellion. There is no doubt that the ringleader and true leader of the uprising was General Bora Mirković, as he himself admitted to it in correspondence with Slobodan Jovanović, presenting himself as someone who was “irreplaceable” and claiming that “neither the King, nor the gold, or the Government” would have made it to the “free world, hadn’t there been for him.”⁶² Mirković’s motives were certainly military, but it is likely they were political as well: on the one hand, he wanted to be at the helm of the armed forces of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; on the other hand - and this was as much important to him as it was to his supporters - he wanted to exert primary and direct influence on the young king, supported by the British military authorities.

The second rebel leader was General Dušan Simović, who hoped for a political comeback as head of government. However, being in London, thousands of kilometers away from the insurgent army, what he could do was only to support the rebels through his communication with the British authorities. Most of the generals of the Yugoslav Army, led by General Ilija Ilić, found themselves in a difficult position. They expressed solidarity with the rebels, primarily because they wished to preserve the existing situation within the army, insisting that they could not accept bypassing senior officers in the chain of command. In principle, they were not in favor of the conspirators, but what came to the fore was that they were ill-prepared for the time and the war realities which they were experiencing. Indeed, what World War II revealed across European fronts and resistance movements, including the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, was that rank no longer played the key role. The American military shared the same view, and it came as a surprise to many in the Yugoslav Army to see that, when Yugoslav bomber crews were to be formed under the U.S. Air Force (composed precisely of pilots and aircrew who remained loyal to the Government), not the highest-ranking officers were appointed as crew commanders, but those with the most experience.

⁶² Ibid, 259–262.

* * *

In addition to weakening the international and, to some extent, military position of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Cairo Affair was the prelude to a shift in British policy toward resistance movements in occupied Yugoslavia, as well as toward the postwar future of the Yugoslav monarchy itself. Support for Tito and the Partisan movement was born within the same British military and intelligence circles in Cairo that had played an active role in the Affair, signaling a new and fundamentally different chapter in relations between the two countries, to be opened early in 1943.

SUMMARY

The historical events of World War II are fairly well known, but few have been as profoundly disregarded in historiography as the Cairo Affair. The event, involving unconstitutional actions with the elements of a coup, took place in 1942, in a part of the Yugoslav Army outside the Fatherland, largely in Egypt. The affair began with a political crisis and the fall of Simović, later exhibiting all the elements of a rebellion within parts of the military, and ultimately evolving into an inter-state dispute. In the early stages of the war, it was the greatest challenge both the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in exile, and the Crown itself faced.

Although some of the stakeholders touched on the events in the Royal Yugoslav Army in their memoirs, largely those in Egypt, only few delved with the background and the core of the rebellion. For decades, the prevailing theory was that what happened in Egypt was a dispute between two generations responsible for the coup d'état of March 27 (generals and the so-called "majors' league") or, perhaps, between the Mirković brothers and the Knežević brothers, with the latter ultimately prevailing. The situation, however, was quite different.

That entire affair, a rebellion in a part of the military, which was deeply unfortunate and fundamentally harmful for the government-in-exile of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, did not unfold exactly as described by Slobodan Jovanović and diplomat Kosta St. Pavlović. They accurately observed (as major actors in the affair) that the aims of the groups involved were quite inconsistent, linked only by basic principles, but each with its own particular inter-

ests and ambitions. Among the rebels, some were likely driven by a desire to preserve the acquired order of things rather than to preserve their own positions (Ilić), while others sought absolute political or actual power (Simović and Mirković, respectively).

Yet it is only access to the British archival materials that can provide a comprehensive understanding of the events in the run-up to and during the *Cairo Affair*, and, even more so, reveal precisely those circles in the British military that, in light of this research of the British archives, were the initiators, and the main supporters of General Borivoje Mirković, who spearheaded the reckless venture that had considerable consequences for the position of the Yugoslav government in the United Kingdom.

The newly available material helps identify the members of the British military who were the principal protectors and mentors of the coupists. They were led by Tom Mapplebeck, the former British air attaché in Belgrade, who operated in Cairo, enjoying the full support of the British military leadership.

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Резиме

КАИРСКА АФЕРА У СВЕТЛУ БРИТАНСКИХ ДОКУМЕНАТА

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АПСТРАКТ: Ослањајући се на већ доступне и новоотворене британске архивске изворе, као и на мемоаре појединих учесника, аутори реконструишу догађаје у вези са такозваном Каирском афером, са посебним освртом на положај појединих генерала и подршку коју су добијали из војних кругова у Уједињеном Краљевству. Покушај државног удара, познат као Каирска афера, као и обим британског учешћа у њему, до сада нису били у потпуности описани и анализирани.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Каирска афера, Пуч, Влада у емиграцији, Други светски рат, Душан Симовић, Слободан Јовановић, Велика Британија, СОЕ, Југославија.

Многи догађаји из историје Другог светског рата су мање или више познати, али ретко који од њих је толико заобиђен у историографији као што је то случај са *Каирском афером*. Тај догађај представља противуставно и противдржавно деловање са одликама пуча који се одиграо током 1942. године у делу Југословенске војске ван Отаџбине (претежно на простору данашњег Египта). Афера је отпочела као политичка криза и пад Душана Симовића, потом је имала све елементе побуне дела војних ефектива, да би на крају прерасла у међудржавни спор. У првој етапи ратних дешавања она је била највећи изазов како за Владу Краљевине Југославије у емиграцији, тако и за саму круну. Иако су поједини актери оставили своја мемоарске записе у којима су се дотицали дешавања у јединицама Војске Краљевине Југославије претежно у Египту, мало ко од њих је успео да проникне у позадину и суштину те побуне. Општа теза која је деценијама била присутна јесте да је у питању био спор старијих и млађих пучиста од 27. марта (ђенерала и мајорске лиге) или пак браће Мирковић са браћом Кнежевић, где су ови потоњи извојевали превласт.

Ситуација је била сасвим другачија. Цео тај, за Владу Краљевине Југославије у емиграцији веома несрећан и суштински поражавајући случај побуне дела војних ефектива, није се у потпуности одигравао ни на начин на који су га у својим списима представљали Слободан Јовановић и дипломата Коста Ст. Павловић. Они сасвим исправно уочавају (а једни су од најважнијих актера) да су у питању некохерентне групе, које спајају само основна начела, а све имају своје појединачне интересе и жеље. Код дела побуњеника вероватно је преовладала жеља неких за очување стеченог поретка пре него положаја (Илић), код других жеља за апсолутном политичком (Симовић) или стварном влашћу (Мирковић). Међутим, тек увидом у британску архивску грађу, можемо да стекнемо свеобухватнији увид у дешавања која су претходила Каирској афери и збивала се током ње, али и да идентификујемо управо структуре у Војсци Велике Британије, које су без сваке сумње били и иницијатори и главни ослонац ђенерала Боривоја Мирковића, који је предводио ову неодговорну авантуру са великим последицама по положај Владе Краљевине Југославије у Великој Британији. Из те новодоступне архивске грађе могу се у британској војсци идентификовати главни заштитници и ментори побуњеника. Њих је предводио Том Маплбек, некадашњи ваздухопловни британски аташе у Београду, који је деловао у Каиру, уживајући пуну подршку британског војног врха.